

5.1 A reader is a reader – or is she?

INTRODUCTION

Magazines are a *mobile* medium. Readers can be exposed to magazine advertising anywhere and everywhere.

Magazines enter homes by a subscription, purchased by a household member, or lent by a friend, relative or neighbour. Magazines are picked up and read in someone else's home, in waiting rooms of doctors' or dentists' offices, in beauty parlours or barber shops. Magazines are read at work, on the way to and from work, while sitting in a business reception room. Magazines are read standing in checkout lines of food stores. Magazines are read during travel – on a plane, a train or in a subway car.

How do these readers differ? In research terms, what can be learned from qualitative measures such as place of reading, source of copy, time spent and page exposure?

Before looking at the 'reader', we should understand what total audience is.

THE DEFINITION OF TOTAL AUDIENCE

Magazine total audience is customarily defined as all who read or look into the average issue of a magazine, regardless of how they obtained their copy or where they read it. This includes *all* readers, whether they are in home, or out of home; primary or secondary; regular or less frequent; 'on sex' or 'off sex' readers.

D B Lucas and S H Britt, in *Measuring Advertising Effectiveness*, published in 1963, state that "A magazine audience is the number of people who look into a typical or average issue. Although such a dignified definition of mere inlookers may seem superficial, this definition is favoured for many reasons and supported by evidence that most people who look into a magazine go through a major part of the entire issue."

Once we have established this total audience, we can categorise magazine readers according to their different behaviour and attitudes toward the magazine concerned. Quoting Lucas and Britt again: "Reading time and behaviour differ after different magazines are entered; just as time and behaviour differ after different buildings are entered; an office building; a theatre; a restaurant; or the home of a friend."

EARLY UNITED STATES STUDIES

Categorising readers and analysing their differences has

been a concern for a long time.

In 1956 the Advertising Research Foundation undertook *A Study of Print Advertising Rating Methods* (PARM). This study, carried out by Alfred Politz Media Studies, investigated the three methods then being used to measure impressions left by the reading of print advertisements.

The aided recall method was used to measure issue readers and the number of readers who after seeing an ad, could recall something about it when only the name of the advertiser or product was shown to them, not the ad itself.

The recognition method also measured issue readers, but then established the number of readers who, after being shown an ad, recognised and remembered having seen it.

The reader interest method did not measure issue audience, but established among subscribers the number of readers whose exposure to an ad left an impression, so that when seeing the ad again they remembered what was of interest to them.

The Aided Recall and Recognition methods were of particular interest, because it was possible to look at advertising scores associated with different types of reading.

This study, using an issue of *Life* magazine, took into account certain factors which were thought to influence the accuracy of measurement. Of these factors, how the issue was obtained and reading time showed differences in advertising ratings.

Those reading *Life* in a primary household (a household where a member purchased or subscribed to the publication) had average ad recognition scores of 20.0, while those living in secondary (or non-primary) households had average scores of 17.3. The average score was 17.9 for those who picked up a copy outside their home. There was also evidence that recall of advertisements was higher for primary readers. The recall scores were 3.2% for primary readers, 2.8% for secondary readers, and 2.5% for out-of-home reading.

Those reading for 46 minutes or more had average recognition scores of 23.3, while those reading for 16-45 minutes and 15 minutes or less had scores of 17.9 and 13.8 respectively. Recall scores were 4.4, 3.2, and 1.9 for the same amount of time spent with the magazine.

Other work done by Politz in 1964, *A Study of Primary and Passalong Readers for Four Major Magazines* for *Reader's Digest* looked into reader activity of primary and passalong readers.

5.1

A reader is a reader – or is she?

In this study, the issue audience of *Life*, *Look*, *McCalls* and *Reader's Digest* was defined by using a through-the-book technique. After respondents were established as readers, they were asked questions on source of copy to determine primary or passalong readership, the number of days on which the issue was read, places of reading, reading time, and their attitudes toward the magazine.

This study showed that there was more attention paid to the magazine if it was read by a primary reader. Primary readers spent 50% to 90% more time reading the magazine than passalong readers, and 30% to 70% more days reading an issue (**Table 1**).

Differences were found not only for primary and passalong readers but also for places of reading. In-home readers (whether primary or passalong) spent nearly two-and-a-half times more time reading. The results did show that primary reading was superior to passalong reading, but it also showed the value of passalong reading. For the magazines concerned, passalong reading time was an average of two hours, 12 minutes for *Reader's Digest*, 54 minutes for *Life*, 48 minutes for *Look* and one hour, 18 minutes for *McCalls*. Passalong readers, on average, spent 3.1 days with *Reader's Digest*, 1.5 days each with *Life* and *Look* and 2.1 days with *McCalls*.

Finally, the study showed that the value of primary readers depended on the type of magazine measured. *Reader's Digest*, a monthly, whose format required more reading time and reader involvement showed the most differences between primary and passalong readers. *Life* and *Look*, magazines published more frequently, could be read more quickly and therefore showed less difference

between their primary and passalong audiences. In the cases above passalong made up 30% of *Reader's Digest* audience, 48% of *Life's* and 54% of *Look's*.

TGI

These past studies only measured a few titles. The first large scale qualitative audience study was done by Axiom Market Research Bureau (AMRB) as an addition to its syndicated Target Group Index (TGI) reports. The work done by AMRB was begun in the autumn of 1974, with annual reports in 1975, 1976, 1977, and 1978.

After determining total audience with a recent reading technique, respondents were asked questions about reading days, reading time, page openings, attitude and rating of the publication, interest and confidence in the advertising, and reader responses. In the 1976 TGI report, for example, data were presented for 125 magazines: 47 Men's magazines (with 60% or more male audience), 42 Women's magazines (with 60% or more female audience), and 36 dual audience publications. On average, nearly 90% of the pages were looked at, two-and-a-quarter days were spent reading, and an hour-and-a-half to an hour and 40 minutes were spent reading the average publication (**Table 2**).

When primary audience was compared with secondary audience and in-home audience was compared with out-of-home audience, reading time and reading days differed dramatically, but page openings did not. The following table, **Table 3**, shows the levels obtained for secondary and out-of-home readers, as percentages of the levels obtained for primary and

TABLE 1

	Reading time		Reading days	
	Primary	Passalong	Primary	Passalong
Reader's Digest	3hr 18m	2hr 12m	5.2	3.1
Life	1hr 36m	54m	2.0	1.5
Look	1hr 30m	48m	2.1	1.5
McCalls	2hr 18m	1hr 18m	3.4	2.1

TABLE 2

	Women's reading of women's magazines	Men's reading of men's magazines	Adult reading – dual magazines
Percentage of pages opened	91	88	89
Number of reading days	2.25	2.25	2.25
Amount of time spent reading	1hr 40m	1hr 48m	1hr 30m

5.1

A reader is a reader – or is she?

TABLE 3

	<i>Primary = 100% Secondary scores %</i>	<i>In-home = 100% Out-of-home scores %</i>
Women's readings of women's magazines		
Reading days	62	57
Reading time	59	53
Page openings	93	92
Men's readings of men's magazines		
Reading days	61	63
Reading time	58	57
Page openings	90	91
Women's reading of dual audience publications		
Reading days	62	57
Reading time	59	53
Page openings	92	92
Men's reading of dual audience publications		
Reading days	65	68
Reading time	58	62
Page openings	92	90

in-home readers, respectively.

Qualitative data, along with total audience data, allows planners to consider many factors when placing different types of ads. The advantage primary and in-home readers have is clearly important for media planning for long copy ads, but there is less advantage for 'billboard' ads.

MRI

Mediamark Research Inc (MRI) currently publishes data on total audience, place of reading, reading time, reading days, page openings, reader actions and publication rating. Estimates and percentages used for this paper are based on special tabulations of fieldwork done from April to July 1980.

Dividing gross total audience by gross circulation for all measured magazines, it emerges that the overall readers per copy for MRI reported titles is 5.0. When readers per copy is looked at in terms of the data in the MRI qualitative audience volume, we can see where this

reading is done and how the 5.0 readers are accumulated (**Table 4**).

5.0 readers per copy is an average in two ways. First, it is an average across magazines, which vary from two to over ten readers per copy. Second, for each individual magazine it is an average across all the magazine's copies, ranging from those subscribed to and read by one or two readers, to those that are left in public places, such as

TABLE 4
The magazine audience

	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>RPC</i>
In home (primary and passalong)	55	2.8
In other home	11	0.5
At work	12	0.6
Public place	22	1.1
	100	5.0

5.1

A reader is a reader – or is she?

beauty shops or doctors' offices, that are read by many. It is perfectly possible for a single copy in a public place to acquire 50 or more readers.

How do these readers differ in their reading of magazines? Again we look at aggregated results (**Table 5**). In-home and out-of-home readers vary considerably in terms of reading time. In-home, 13.9% of the audience reads for 15 minutes or less, while 37.8% of the audience reads for over one hour. Out-of-home, 35.7% of the audience reads for 15 minutes or less, and only 13.8% reads for over one hour.

Reading time decreases the more public the out-of-home reading places are (**Table 6**).

While there are greater differences in terms of reading time, there is less difference in terms of the number of pages opened. For total, in-home and out-of-home reading, the percentage of respondents claiming to see all of the magazine (ie they claimed that they opened ten out of ten pages) are 42.0%, 46.5%, and 36.9%, respectively. Those claiming to read less than half the magazine amount to 31.5% of total readers, 30.3% of in-home readers and 36.4% of out-of-home readers (**Table 7**).

DISCUSSION

For some years, it has been well understood that magazine readers differ very much in terms of their intensity of reading. The classic definition of total audience, for good reason, is an inclusive one. The implication of this is that a magazine's readers may range from the subscriber who reads each issue from cover to cover in her own home, to an occasional reader who picks it out of the rack and pages through it while standing in the supermarket line, without even purchasing it.

It has been natural for many advertisers and their agencies to consider 'discounting' the more casual elements of the audience. In the US, some agencies routinely discount out-of-home reading by one-half. One agency discards out-of-home readers who claimed to read for less than 15 minutes.

Analysis of detailed qualitative data shows a slightly more complex situation than might have been supposed. It is certainly true that the more casual reader, almost by definition, spends less *time* with the magazine. But *exposure* to the advertising – in terms of 'open eyes in front of the open page' – varies much less.

To the extent that it is the job of the medium simply to provide exposure to the advertising, the entire total audience is the appropriate measurement. The ad-

TABLE 5
Time spent reading

	Total %	In-home %	Out-of-home %
Less than 15 minutes	24.0	13.9	35.7
16–30 minutes	23.6	19.3	28.5
31 minutes–1 hour	25.7	29.0	22.0
1 hour+	26.7	37.8	13.8

TABLE 6
Time spent reading

	Place of work %	Someone else's home %	Public places %
Less than 15 minutes	30.8	29.5	41.2
16–30 minutes	28.3	29.1	28.4
31 minutes–1 hour	23.8	25.8	19.3
1 hour+	17.1	15.7	11.1

TABLE 7
Number of pages out of ten opened

	Total %	In-home %	Out-of-home %
Less than 5	31.5	30.3	36.4
5–9	26.5	25.2	26.7
10	42.0	46.5	36.9

vertising page *may* not be opened – just as with the television medium, those in the programme audience *may* not be in the room during the commercial break. But such inevitable losses are not, to any great extent, dependent on the circumstances of reading.

To the extent that it is the job of the medium, in a specific situation, to do more, to supply readers who are spending a considerable time with the magazine, it is reasonable to take such factors as place of reading or reading time into account. It is the job of the planner to be clear, given the specific advertisement and its objectives, which readers should count.