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5.6 Some measurement of reading quality

INTRODUCTION

Users of the data from readership surveys (ie, the media planners who work on audience figures and the clients to whom they present media schedules) have often questioned what exactly the audience figures mean to them in terms of opportunities-to see. It appears logical that not everybody who is classified as a reader in the survey actually reads the magazine from cover to cover.

Especially since computers have taken the drudge out of media planning, by grinding out figures in real time, the users' wish to refine the knowledge of what type of exposures (or at least of readers) are being bought with their advertising money, has come up more and more frequently.

In the 60s and early 70s, in Italy (and elsewhere) several publications were conducting individual *ad hoc* studies which included some indicators of quality of reading, such as intensity of reading, number of times (or days) the publication was picked up, time spent reading, interest in editorial contents, etc.

A few studies went as far as trying to evaluate ad exposure by page traffic measurements, but this approach was not widespread in Italy, partly for cost reasons and partly because of doubts as to the extent to which people could actually remember the pages seen and were able to report them.

Other studies, like 'reading and noting' scores were offered, that had more to do with advertising effectiveness (it is well known that scores measuring individual ads are influenced by the basic interest in the product category, familiarity or notoriety of the brand, cumulation of previous campaigns and especially the ad's visual and message which is one of the strongest factors in score variations). These studies, however, also made it possible to develop 'norms' for evaluating the space bought in publications according to size and colour of ad, positioning in the front or back section of the issue, thickness of the issue, proportion of advertising pages to total pages, left page/right page, etc.

The publishers' consortium that funds ISPI, wanting to meet the users' wish to identify the value of readers, examined in the late 60s several possibilities. Feeling that the through-the-book technique was not suitable to large samples and also for cost reasons, intermediate indicators were looked for and experiments and analyses were conducted in Italy in the years 1968 to 1976 on the ISPI magazine readership survey, partly inspired by the British 1971 Readers Categorisation study that had tried to find, by studying 14 possible 'predictors', indirect measures of the quality of reading.

The experiments run in Italy on which I am briefly reporting, cover four areas, ie: intensity of reading (number of pages) - 1968; place of reading (1971); source of copy (1971); number of reading days (1976).

INTENSITY OF READING

An experimental study was set up in the 1968 ISPI survey to try to find whether readers could be discriminated by intensity of reading and/or by degree of satisfaction with the publication.

Three additional questions were added to the winter wave (1390 interviews):

Question 7a: a pictorial scale with six positions on the number of pages 'usually read or leafed through'. The pictures were marked from A (one or two pages) to F (all or nearly all). Question 7b: degree of satisfaction with the publication (very much, fairly, not much, none). Question 7c: degree of disappointment should the magazine cease publication.

Questions 7b and 7c were introduced to try to understand whether (and to what extent) the classification of readers by source of copy helped to discriminate between different interest levels for the editorial content and, thus, different reading behaviour.

The analysis was conducted for two 'family magazines' (*Famiglia Cristiana* and *Domenica del Corriere*) and for 'other weeklies'. **Table 1** and **Table 2** of **Appendix A** show the data broken down by frequency of reading, and source of copy ('provenance'), that is two variables that were already being measured in the questionnaire.

In summary form, the *Indexes of reading intensity* found are shown in **Figure 1**.

The analysis of indexes of *reading intensity* showed the existence of different degrees of correlation which varied between the two family magazines and between them and the 'other weeklies'

The data confirmed what had been assumed, that is a connection between number of pages read and frequency of reading or source of copy. The extent of decrease in intensity between regular and occasional readers (or between readers of copies bought personally and readers of copies borrowed or found) didn't seem so dramatic: 'occasionals' or 'borrowers' had an intensity varying between 75 and and 85% of the intensity of

'regulars' or 'personal puchasers'.*

The intensity of reading value, on average, was considered acceptable, being very similar to that obtained on personal purchasers or regular readers in page or spread traffic studies.

These data were not published by the ISPI Technical Committee but reported at one of the seminars which were organised to present the ISPI survey results.

However, I remember that a media planner friend got hold of these figures privately, and set up an experimental computer run for evaluation schedules using intensity weights for the various groups of readers; but the Christie diagram he got didn't look much different from the one obtained using no weight, the reason probably being also that the size of the group of 'occasional' was too small to influence results. The rank order of various titles remained basically the same and in the various schedules tested there was only one ad less for a publication that had a lot of out-of-home readers.

This aspect of reading intensity, anyway, was not pursued further.

For 'satisfaction', since most of the answers concentrated on the positive side of the verbal scale, and a negligible share of respondents (readers) used the negative items, the idea of using this measure in further analysis was abandoned.

Also it must be remembered that in those years, many magazines were conducting (and publishing) their own *ad hoc* surveys (on the influence of contents on the attitudes of readers towards advertising, on consumption habits of readers, etc) and a measure of 'satisfaction' was nearly always included.

SOURCE OF COPY AND PLACE OF READING

For a number of years the questionnaire used in the ISPI magazine survey had contained both a question on provenance and a question on place of reading.

Source of copy was used as a criterion for analysis of audience levels in this report, ie there were three series of tables, for: readers of personally bought copies; readers of copies bought by household member; and, readers of copies not purchased.

This was done to meet the advertisers' idea that the reader of a purchased copy was more 'valuable' than the others.

Regarding *place of reading*, for which information

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* *For* Famiglia Cristiana, *the largest circulation weekly in Italy, bought outside the church at Sunday Mass, readers of 'borrowed' or 'pass-on' copies had an index very close to the personal purchasers.*

was being collected as a simple dichotomy (at home/elsewhere) it was felt that since it was not being used in media planning and might be redundant as a discriminator anyway, it could be eliminated in the data collection stage without appreciable loss of information, at a time when the list of magazines to be studied in the survey was becoming longer.

It was decided to conduct an analysis before doing so.

A simple cross-tabulation of source of copy (provenance) by place of reading was done on the two waves of the 1971 ISPI Magazine Readership survey (about 25,000 interviews), for ten weekly publications on the 'readers in last week'.

Appendix B contains the results by two broad categories of magazines (**Table A**: average of three women weeklies; **Table B**: average of four family and news magazines). A summary is given in **Figure 2**.

The results showed that only 6% of the readers of copies bought personally or by a household member, were reading the magazine out of home; that readers of borrowed or pass-on copies were reading the magazine in their home in 80% of the cases; and that the proportion of 'read outside the home' (dentist, waiting room, etc), while varying with individual publications was rather similar for 'occasional readers'. Interestingly, there were a few magazines with a higher percentage of out-of-home reading among readers of *personally* bought copies, but these were publications that were of main interest for a single individual (such as news magazines).

The 'place of reading' question was thus dropped at the data collection stage.

About the source of copy, the Technical Committee didn't feel very happy with the rather heterogeneous category of 'copy not purchased' which lumped together both pass-on readers reading mainly at home and readers of copies found out of home; but it was decided not to split this group because the statistical base of the analysis would then become too small for the breakdown by demographics.

NUMBER OF READING DAYS

The probability of exposure to an ad increases in relation to the number of times a magazine is read and thus this question has often been brought up by advertisers, in order to try to calculate weights to be used in evaluating magazines.

In the 1976 ISPI survey, after collecting data on the most recent reading within the publication interval, a further question inquired for each day within such interval whether any reading had occurred for such publication. (Such question was intended as a methodological tool, ie

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FIGURE 1
Index of reading intensity

	Famiglia Cristiana	Domenica Corriere	All other weeklies
Frequency of reading			
Regularly	.711	.779	.781
Often	.735	.672	.723
Seldom	.613	.591	.653
Source of copy			
Personally bought	.710	.786	.812
Household member	.654	.736	.712
Borrowed, etc	.713	.605	.699
Average of all 'last period' readers	.686	.710	.738

FIGURE 2

Place of reading

Source of copy	Total	At home	Elsewhere
Women's weeklies			
Personal	41.7	57.1	8.1
Other household member	19.0	25.0	5.5
Gift, found, borrowed, etc	39.3	18.9	86.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0
Base: last period readers	(960)	(628)	(275)
Family and news magazines			
Personal	44.9	62.1	9.7
Other household member	19.1	24.0	8.8
Gift, found, borrowed, etc	36.0	13.9	81.5
	100.0	100.0	100.0
Base: last period readers	(2043)	1469)	(485)

as a technique to check on the reliability of 'last period' readership statements and has been used in Italy mainly for other analyses, ie to study the phenomenon of replicated readership and to compare the readership statements with the theoretical probability of 'reading in the last interval' derived from the 'frequency of reading' question.)

The information thus collected made it possible to calculate the number of reading days for each magazine,

and an analysis was conducted on the first wave of the 1976 ISPI magazine readership survey (7288 interviews) on the number of different days each magazine was read or 'leafed through' (= looked at) in the last issue interval, regardless of whether it was a current or a back copy.

Appendix C shows the average number of reading days calculated for 26 monthlies, from which it is apparent there exists a wide range of variation in the values obtained by individual publications, even within

(relatively homogeneous) categories of magazines, that often reflect the type of editorial contents.

The average values, by publication groups, that were found in Italy, are reported in **Figure 3** and may differ from other countries due to the situation and types of magazines (editorial make-up, thickness, etc) being different.

The general trend is perhaps obvious: TV and radio magazines have a much higher number of reading days (3.3); 'gossip and popular' (a peculiarly Italian phenomenon, often containing serial novels told through a technique of photographic strips with blurbs) also have higher scores; monthlies show in general higher figures.

The variations found within publication groups could often be explained by factors peculiar to the individual publication. For instance, for weeklies, we found values varying:

Women's weeklies	between 1.6 and 2.0
Gossip and popular	between 1.9 and 2.2*
Family and news magazines	between 1.3 and 2.0**
Comic strips	between 1.4 and 1.7

The analysis on number of reading days was done by the Technical Committee mainly to understand the phenomenon since it was felt that it could give some indications; but further consideration led to the conclusion that number of reading days alone, while showing the opportunity for more *page openings*, was still incomplete (for instance, we had no measure of repeated picking up within each day).

The data on reading days were not published in the report; they were only circulated among publishers and discussed at a seminar attended by media planners.

No further action was taken to pursue further experiments.

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* *A value of 1.6 was found for a publication usually publishing thinner issues than the other publications which were placed in this category in the analysis.*

** *The low values refer to two magazines that were on a fast decreasing trend in circulation and audience; and to a political news magazine, probably read for its news value, like a newspaper, within a very short period after purchase.*

FIGURE 3
Average number of reading days
(1976 ISPI survey)

8 women's weeklies	1.794
5 gossip and popular	1.966
10 family and news magazines	1.768
2 TV and radio	3.315
3 comic strips	1.534
11 women's monthlies	2.000
2 men's monthlies	1.810
5 family monthlies	2.177
3 motor monthlies	1.985
5 special interest	1.450

TIME SPENT READING

As a measure of intensity this poses several problems that make it a dubious indicator for evaluating magazines as media weight: different speeds of reading; for instance less literate people read more slowly; thickness of the book: in thinner magazines you can go through *all* the pages in a shorter time; make-up of contents: picture magazines have less text to read, so time spent reading may be shorter, etc.

In all these cases the probability of seeing a page (and thus an ad) is not connected with the time spent reading.

I used to collect 'time spent reading' in the 'Advertising Reading and Noting Scores' service, as a *control*, that is to be sure that the respondent had had enough exposure or 'page openings' to be able to answer about having seen the various ads; since however, the samples for each issue tested were small (200 or so) no analyses were made to try and correlate time with recall or recognition of the single ads.

CONCLUSIONS

I have been concerned here to offer some experiences with a few aspects of the quality of reading problem; since the data reflect behaviour regarding publications which cater to the cultural and lifestyle environment (which may be different from that of other countries), generalisations should be considered with prudence, and perhaps just as indications of broad patterns.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1
Intensity of reading by frequency and source

		Frequency of reading			Source of copy*		
Intensity of reading	Total %	Regular %	Often %	Seldom %	A %	B %	C %
Famiglia Cristiana							
A (1–2 pages)	8	7	3	13	6	10	9
B	10	9	7	17	8	11	11
C	14	14	17	9	14	15	11
D	11	12	10	9	12	14	5
E	17	16	20	22	20	11	16
F (all or nearly all)	40	42	43	30	40	39	48
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base: last period readers	238	185	30	23	122	72	44
Domenica del Corriere							
A (1–2 pages)	6	5	8	3	6	8	5
B	12	7	16	21	2	8	25
C	11	7	10	24	12	5	15
D	13	15	10	14	12	17	12
E	11	9	14	7	12	15	6
F (all or nearly all)	47	57	42	31	56	47	37
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base: last period readers	152	74	49	29	51	40	61
Other weeklies							
A (1–2 pages)	6	5	5	9	4	6	7
B	10	8	10	14	6	9	13
C	12	10	15	15	8	18	13
D	9	8	10	12	9	8	10
E	10	9	11	8	10	11	8
F (all or nearly all)	53	60	49	42	63	48	49
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base: last period readers	1410	721	407	290	524	360	534

* A = readers of personally bought copy (subscription in own name, bought for himself); B = additional readers in the household; C = readers of borrowed copies outside the home, etc.

TABLE 2
Analysis of satisfaction by intensity and source

	Total	Intensity						Source of copy*		
		A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C
Famiglia Cristiana										
Very satisfied	35	11	9	30	33	35	46	37	38	23
Fairly satisfied	56	77	74	55	52	50	52	57	49	66
Not much satisfied	9	11	17	12	15	15	2	6	12	11
Not at all satisfied	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	1	—
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	238	18	23	33	27	40	97	122	72	44
Domenica del Corriere										
Very satisfied	33	33	16	18	35	25	42	47	30	23
Fairly satisfied	54	33	74	47	55	63	52	43	62	59
Not much satisfied	12	33	10	35	0.5	12	6	10	5	18
Not at all satisfied	—	—	—	3	0.5	—	—	—	3	—
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	152	9	19	17	20	16	71	51	40	61
Other weeklies										
Very satisfied	36	17	19	19	31	35	47	44	33	31
Fairly satisfied	47	39	48	60	52	54	42	44	46	50
Not much satisfied	15	33	30	19	16	10	10	10	18	18
Not at all satisfied	2	11	3	1	1	1	1	2	3	1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	1418	81	135	175	134	135	758	534	360	534

* A = readers of personally bought copy (subscription in own name, bought for himself); B = additional readers in the household; C = readers of borrowed copies, outside the home, etc.

APPENDIX B

TABLE 1
Average of three women's weeklies

| | | Place of reading | |
	Total %	At home	Elsewhere
Source of copy			
Free subscription	0.9	1.1	—
Personal paid subscription	3.1	4.7	—
Subscription in the name of a household member	2.6	3.6	0.7
Bought personally for himself	35.1	47.7	7.3
Bought personally for other household members	2.6	3.1	1.3
Bought by other household member	16.4	21.9	4.2
Gift from person not household member	16.3	15.3	18.3
Found at the office, hairdresser, dentist, café, etc	23.0	2.6	68.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Base: 'last period' readers	960	628	275
Percentage	100%	65.4%	28.6%

TABLE 2
Average of four family and news magazines

| | | Place of reading | |
	Total %	At home	Elsewhere
Source of copy			
Free subscription	0.7	0.7	—
Personal paid subscription	6.8	8.5	1.9
Subscription in the name of a household member	5.2	6.7	1.8
Bought personally for himself	32.2	46.2	6.0
Bought personally for other household members	2.1	1.9	2.4
Bought by other household member	17.0	22.1	6.4
Gift from person not household member	12.8	11.7	18.6
Found at the office, hairdresser, dentist, café, etc	23.2	2.2	63.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Base: 'last period' readers	2043	1469	485
Percentage	100%	71.9%	23.7%

Number of reading days

WEEKLIES	Number of days		Number of days
Women's magazines		**Family news magazines**	
Amica	1.906	Domenica del Corriere	1.814
Annabella	2.016	Epoca	1.734
Bella	1.932	Espresso	1.531
Confidenze	1.888	Europeo	1.630
Gioia	1.624	Famiglia Cristiana	2.049
Grazia	1.666	Gente	2.196
Intimità	1.970	Oggi	2.046
Noi Donne	1.351	Panorama	1.987
		Settimanale	1.315
Gossip and popular		Tempo	1.373
Novella 2000	2.062		
Eva Express	1.618	**TV – radio**	
Bolero	1.991	Radiocorriere	3.267
Stop	2.215	Sorrisi Canzoni TV	3.362
ABC	1.946		
Comic strips			
Intrepido	1.562		
Monello	1.351		
Topolino	1.690		

MONTHLIES

Women's monthlies		Family monthlies	
Women's monthlies		**Family monthlies**	
Buona Tavola	1.703	Due Più	1.917
Brava	2.367	Famiglia Mese	2.514
Casaviva	2.196	Messagg. S. Antonio	1.603
Cosmopolitan	1.220	Quattrosoldi	2.020
Gioielli di Rakam	1.951	Readers' Digest	2.832
Madre	2.070		
Mani di Fata	2.132	**Men's monthlies**	
Rakam	2.350	Playboy	1.713
La Mia Casa	1.000	Playmen	1.907
Mille Idee	2.306		
Nuova Cucina	2.706	**Special interest**	
		Photo Italiana	1.271
Motor Monthlies		Qui Touring	1.528
Automobile	1.512	Lo Sport	1.695
Gente Motori	2.729	Storia Illustrata	1.240
Quattroruote	1.713	Linus (comics)	1.518

Average number of reading days per category of magazines

Women weeklies (8)	1.794	Women monthlies (11)	2.000
Gossip and popular (5)	1.966	Men monthlies (2)	1.810
Family and news magazines (10)	1.768	Family monthlies (5)	2.177
TV radio (2)	3.315	Motor monthlies (3)	1.985
Comic strips (3)	1.534	Special interest (5)	1.450