

Rolf Speetzen
Axel Springer Verlag AG,
Hamburg, West Germany

1.3 German readership research from New Orleans to Montreal: small steps or a giant stride?

I have been asked to give an outline of what has happened in German readership research since New Orleans, but a number of other speakers from Germany are reporting in detail on their own activities.

Our methodological experiments were put in train more to protect the 'weak and floating media currency' than because of any sense of unease after New Orleans. The main experiments, financed by our national media research association, were well under way when we met two years ago, and Eva-Maria Hess gave us there the results of the first stage. She is showing here the results of the main stages of the AG.MA experiments on horizontal and vertical questioning and 12-point versus 7-point frequency scales. The extreme importance of this piece of research was demonstrated by the AG.MA in changing the questionnaire to a new format early this year: we shall soon see what effect this can have on the coverage data, and will know more by June of 1984.

Other things have happened since. Allensbach is permanently experimenting in media research, and Jochen Hansen will talk about the advantages of panels, while Friedrich Tennstädt will continue where he left off in New Orleans, and demonstrate the effect of using different numbers of qualifying and non-qualifying categories: he is also presenting findings on the effect on AIR levels of having different numbers of magazines included in the questionnaire.

Quite a number of experiments and methodological researches have been conducted by other people over the last two or three years. My own company has evolved a new media selection model, which will be presented here by Wilfried Wenzel, while I shall be discussing our analysis of the relationship between the contents of magazines and the emotional world of their readers, and a paper contributed by Georg Gramse examines the validity of advertising contact research as an addition to media contact research. Although a number of questions were asked at New Orleans about the Affinity Index, unfortunately nobody from Gruner + Jahr was present to answer them: this time round we have Michael Walter reporting on this, which has penetrated into a number of surveys — even those of competing companies (we used it in our Matching Mind with Matter survey, and I believe it has been adopted in Belgium as well).

After a rather quiet decade, involving only minor changes, the MA is now active again, the reasons for

experimenting being found more in the need to simplify the questionnaire to cope with the increasing number of media covered than for any academic reasons. At present the MA covers 94 magazines, 100-150 daily newspapers, 10 TV stations, 13 radio stations and the cinema — a considerable volume which leaves little room for further media to join in. In consequence, MA has had to look for new ways to integrate others, and Friedrich Wendt will tell us what fascinating ideas and models were applied. The AG.MA started this with a 'partnership' model, with as its first partner KONPRESS, the association of the religious press. A study of 43 religious magazines was carried out analogously to the MA, and the results were matched with the MA data and published in the annual report. Though it may not be easy, it is possible to extend the MA to take in further media by using this model, thus ensuring a continuation of the standard of coverage in Germany.

Three more approaches merit attention here. Because our national media survey is limited to media data only (with just a few additional criteria), all the major publishing houses have invested in media/market research for consumer target groups. These surveys cover a wide range of fast-moving consumer goods, durables, psychographic criteria, and information on purchasing decisions: the media data they contain are normally adjusted to the MA data, the MA thus remaining the readership yardstick. But all these surveys will be made redundant when Germany's first Verbraucher Analyse (ie, consumer analysis) appears next month. To save vast research expenditures, the VA was set up jointly by our company and our competitor Heinrich Bauer Verlag: since then, all the major publishers have joined the venture, thus ensuring a syndicated service for the future. In this, however, no exciting methodological approaches were involved.

I mention the VA because in the past the great number of media/market surveys has caused confusion within the advertising industry: in future we will have one survey covering market data combined with the readership data of the official MA. This is a kind of partnership model, too, and the publishing houses now have the opportunity to use their budget savings on more important and sensible surveys in the future.

A situation similar to this could be found in the large number of different studies of the criteria for exposure qualification: the different methods used in the different

1.3

German readership research from New Orleans to Montreal: small steps or a giant stride?

surveys of the various publishing houses has produced different criteria for the contact definition which distinguish between the so-called 'good' or 'bad' exposures. The advertising industry has now set in motion studies towards a synthesis of the different findings.

However, we German researchers are such perfectionists that we strive for 100 per cent in all that we do, and this can be seen in our plans for a most difficult and most comprehensive piece of media research, in which for the first time ever the relevance of such media research concepts as qualifying and non-qualifying contacts is to be measured by campaign effectiveness criteria. Whether we can afford the time and money to achieve such perfection remains to be seen: however, if we do succeed, the world will gasp with admiration at such a marvel.

A very important methodological experiment in measuring the readership of daily newspapers was presented by Eva-Maria Hess and Otmar Ernst at an ESOMAR seminar in Stockholm last year. Its prime concern was to check the measurement of the readership of *Bild* and the regional daily newspapers: its starting point was uncertainty whether *Bild* was measured correctly in the standard MA, since the results from parallel regional analyses within the areas of the larger regional dailies showed in most cases lower scores for *Bild* than did MA.

Under test were the MA model itself and the techniques usually employed in regional daily newspaper surveys, as well as an improved regional model modified in accordance with hypotheses supported by other analysis. In all three models the answers to the questionnaire were validated by

presentation of the three latest copies of *Bild* and of the largest regional subscription paper in the individual survey areas.

Here are the results:

(1) Validated by presentation of copies of the newspapers themselves, the MA model produces largely 'correct' figures for *Bild*: there is even a tendency towards underestimation of that paper, while the regional dailies are overestimated.

(2) The model used in the usual regional surveys leads to a greater underestimation of *Bild*, but handicaps the regional dailies too.

(3) A methodologically improved and more 'neutral' model for regional surveys, resulting from the experiments, results in scores which show both for *Bild* and for the regional daily newspapers a largely balanced agreement between 'reported' and 'proved' average issue readership.

(4) Regional surveys produce equal (that is, 'equivalent') figures to the MA only if they are in accordance with the MA standard in sample design, response rate and the timing of interviews over days: if this is not the case, *Bild* will be underestimated.

To extend the current findings, reference was made to other similar experiments. What all survey results have in common is that newsstand newspapers, and especially *Bild*, are extremely sensitive to such modifications. But the results of a regional survey in the Hanover area, conducted in line with the findings of the experiments, show definitely that it is possible to reach the MA standard in surveys of this kind.

So far the German research leap. It may appear that some researchers had a very good look before leaping, to be sure of not breaking their necks.