SURVEY MORE TITLES: SHORTENING THE INTERVIEW

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Introduction

The AEPM Survey studies magazines readership in France. Fieldwork is face to face at respondent's home. Every year since 1999, we interview 20,000 people using CAPI Double Screen, a system involving one computer for the interviewer and another for the interviewee. The display of the second screen is piloted by the interviewer's CAPI, providing respondents with synchronised visual aids such as magazine logos, response scales, and so on.

The questionnaire starts in the normal way with a filter question on past 12 month readership. The question is asked title by title and the magazines logos appear on the interviewee's screen one by one.
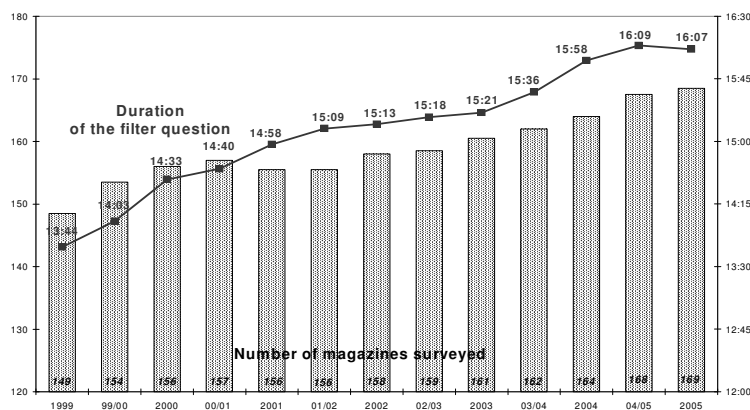
Over the years, the number of titles studied has increased constantly, reaching almost 170 in 2005. Filter question duration grew proportionally, until it exceeded 16 minutes for a 40 minutes total interview duration. Alongside this, with interviewers trying to save time, to the extent of disregarding interview instructions, the situation was getting difficult.

If this were not enough, agencies were clamouring for introducing new categories in the survey: smaller-circulation magazines, free magazines, even brand magazines (custom publishing). It was becoming vital to increase the list of titles without penalising interview duration. The goal was to save time where we were probably spending too much – the filter question – letting interviewees concentrate on the essential of the readership questionnaire.

We also wanted to avoid solutions that meant sharing the list of titles, since this would require merging or injecting data. We thought it wiser that published readership data should be the same as collected data. Ipsos suggested showing several logos together on the same screen while asking the filter question title by title. Since the titles would be shown in groups, we hoped readership levels would remain generally stable.

We called this method Simultaneous Presentation of Logos, or SPL.

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Refining the Method

Since switching to CAPI Double Screen in 1999, the AEPM Survey protocol has been extremely standardised, with both interviewer and interviewee being highly assisted.

The double screen has numerous advantages (respondent attention, multiplication of visual stimuli, homogeneity of interview conditions, etc.) but this method remains for the researchers, a very exigent way of collecting data: questionnaire flow must seem obvious and fluid to both parties (interviewers and interviewees) while at the same time it's almost entirely computer-driven. Perfecting the questionnaires meant paying a lot of attention to the system's ergonomics and the "interviewer-questionnaire-interviewee" interactions.

This is especially true for the filter question, which is long, repetitive and, as we know, a crucial factor in press-readership measurement. And it is precisely the filter question (and this alone) that the SPL method intends to change.

A quick calculation tells us that AEPM asks 20,000 people the filter question for some 200 titles every year, generating almost 4,000,000 identical sequences with a "yes" or "no" answer. It was thus essential that any new filter question "mechanism" produced by the SPL method would be perfectly well-oiled before rolling it out quantitatively in the field.

The Qualitative Tests:

We set up a pilot phase followed by qualitative tests from January to March 2005. Various versions and options were tested on 50 interviewees, the interviews were observed, and respondents re-interviewed in-depth.

There were several objectives to this fine-tuning phase:
- Reducing filter question duration, while maintaining interviewee attention;
- Increasing the number of logos per screen while ensuring parity of titles;
- Paying greater attention to reducing the risk of confusion;
- Ensuring homogeneous interview conditions, irrespective of interviewer and interviewee;
- But not deteriorating the fundamentals of the AEPM Method and preventing any disconnect with magazine readership levels.

On completing the tests, we decided upon the following principles:
- **Keeping a "title by title" filter question:**

    Although the magazines were shown on the same screen at the same time, they were still studied individually as in the previous method. The interviewers mention each one in a direct filter question by means of a "yes"/"no" answer :
    "Have you personally read, glanced through or consulted…"
    - L'OFFICIEL DES SPECTACLES?
    - CINE LIVE?
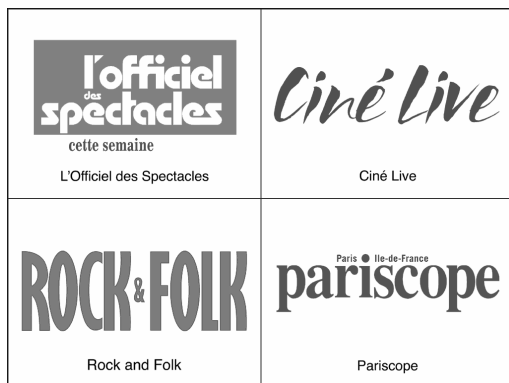
Mentioning each title gives the magazines equal treatment and guarantees minimal time on each, without departing from the previous method's principles.

On starting the interview, respondents are told they must not reply before the interviewer has mentioned the title. Prompts at standard frequencies help to keep interviewee's attention.

- **Screen composition:**
    The best number proved to be 4 titles per screen. This number ensures both legibility, good identification of the magazines, and real visual balance.
    Titles are grouped by theme (women's magazines, TV, auto, news, etc.). This makes the questionnaire consistent and helps reduce confusion (peoples' eyes often scan all logos before making their choice).

    To avoid odd associations, only logos of magazines belonging to a same group (theme) are shown on a same screen (when the end of the thematic group is reached, a minimum of 3 titles are shown).

The titles are given a <u>screen reading order</u>. Respondents are told this explicitly at the start of the questionnaire, and understand it easily.

- **A complete randomisation system:**
   To counter the effects of order, both groups and titles within each group are rotated at random (*i.e.* between and within screens).

The tests reassured us that the method was both viable and useful.

The new system was liked and understood by both interviewers and interviewees: it seemed to allow substantial time-savings and alleviated the sense of repetition. In addition, the SPL worked without breaking away from some of the AEPM method's basic principles (direct title-by-title filter question, magazines treated equally).

However, although filter duration dropped, display time per title did not, since each logo stayed on the screen during the time of asking 4 questions.

Lastly, showing logos of titles from the same group on a single screen – in other words reducing "display distance" between similar-looking titles – also helped fight against confusion.

The Quantitative Test:

In May-June 2005, we doubled the sample size and tested the SPL methodology against the survey's normal wave. The 3300 interviews were done under the same conditions as the normal survey; *i.e.* by the same interviewers, in the same locations, with the same quota sheets, with interviews done on the same days of the week.

The results agreed with our hypotheses:

Index 100 = *regular survey*	MAY/JUNE 2005		YEARLY CUMES	
	TEST SURVEY (SPL)	REGULAR SURVEY	JULY 04 JUNE 05	JANUARY DECEMBER 04
FILTER QUESTION (12 months readership)	97.0	100	99.1	98.9
RECENCY (AIR)	100.7	100	100.7	103.3
RECENCY (most remote readership)	94.2	100	98.8	98.2
FREQUENCY (regular readers)	100.1	100	100.1	103.1
FREQUENCY (most occasional readers	94.5	100	99.4	99.4

- Filter question duration dropped by about 4½ minutes, hence total interview duration dropped from 40 to under 35 minutes.

- The readership level at the filter question dropped about 3%. But this had no effect on either AIR or number or regular readers. The drop was mainly due to most remote readership (-5.8%) and most occasional readers (-5.5%).

The SPL method was thus adopted, and introduced into the survey in January 2006. We also decided to open the survey to free magazines and others of limited distribution. To allow the latter to be measured with significance, the yearly sample was increased by 20%, going from 20,000 to 24,000 interviews.

In January 2006, ten new magazines were added. The number of titles studied reached 177 magazines. The results of the new survey were published in March 2007.

The New Survey

But, unfortunately, things didn't go exactly as planned… The interview *was* shorter, but not 5 minutes as in the test. It lasted 37½ minutes instead of 40. On the other hand, the list of titles was longer and certain demographics were added.

It was mainly the readership levels which were lower than expected. The 12 month filter plummeted by 5.7% (compared to 3.0% in the test). AIR dropped 3.7% and regular readership by 4.0%, whereas the test gave both of these as stable.

So what happened? Some twenty magazines registered a 10% or greater drop in readership on the filter question. Generally, although not always, the drop also affected the AIR.

By showing magazines with similar titles or logos on the same screen, we stimulated the interviewees to actually choose, while limiting possible confusion. For example:

	SCREEN Δ 06/06	AIR Δ 06/06	
santé Santé Magazine	-15.6%	-16.3%	**Health Magazines.** There are only three health magazines on the list, and they were always shown together. The filter question and the AIR dropped in identical proportions.
TOP Santé Top Santé	-16.1%	-15.6%	
Auto Plus Auto Plus	-11.1%	-6.8%	**Car Magazines.** This group contains 7 other magazines. The new methodology had no effect on readership.
L'Automobile L'Automobile Magazine	-13.7%	-9.4%	
COTÉ OUEST Maisons Côté Ouest	-20.4%	-27.5%	**Home Magazines.** A third magazine (MAISON COTÉ OUEST) joined the survey in January 2006. The large drop in readership was due to the reduced confusion, but probably also by readership declarations for the third title erroneously attributed to the other two titles prior to its introduction.
COTÉ SUD Maisons Côté Sud	-14.1%	-21.5%	
Enfant Enfant Magazine	-30.3%	-24.4%	**Family Magazines.** ENFANT MAGAZINE was a special case, changing its title to ENFANT MAG in July 2006. This would explain why its readership dropped more than its competitors.
famili Famili	-17.4%	-7.9%	
PARENTS Parents	-16.8%	-12.2%	
marie claire Marie Claire	-8,9%	+2,1%	**Women Magazines.** With these two women's magazines, we have an example of drop in filter question which did not spill over onto AIR.
marie france Marie France	-17,2%	-3,7%	
Notre temps Notre Temps	-7,7%	-0,7%	**Senior Magazines.** Only one of these two competing titles suffered from the simultaneous display of logos.
Pleine Vie Pleine Vie	-17,0%	-10,4%	

Conclusions

The sample size of the test did not allow us to analyse the results title by title. During the test, drops in readership size did exist, but to a lesser degree. And in a sense, the greater confidence interval due to smaller sample size obscured the phenomenon too.

Despite these occasional drops, magazine publishers accepted the results of the new survey without dispute. If we exclude magazines which might easily be confused, the drop in 12 month filter was 2.0% and that of AIR was 1.4%. These figures are in line with trends in magazine distribution.

It was obvious that confusion among certain titles was muddying earlier results. The new figures are more credible, and it seems unwise to criticise them.