

1.5(b) Changes in the Dutch National Readership Survey (2)

INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE READERSHIP SURVEY BY BETTER SAMPLING METHODS

It should be noted that the Netherlands is a small and compact country with small but not insignificant differences between regions and provinces as well as urban and rural areas. It is difficult to assess the influences of these differences on demography, though I am inclined to think that homogeneity prevails. Nevertheless some 800 communities exist, in a number of cases communities which are administrative units comprising several towns or villages.

Good sampling frames are difficult to obtain, because government, provinces and local authorities are not always too cooperative in the matter of giving service for market research purposes. The latest census dates back to 1971, and also available as a sampling frame is a listing of dwellings (the National Dwellings Register) as well as the Postcode System (Zip Codes system).

Up to the present the usual sampling procedure has consisted of dividing all communities in so called self-selective communities (which had to be sampled anyway, being the bigger communities) and non-self-selective communities. In the self-selective communities four directed addresses were prescribed.

Moreover the basic sampling unit was the household, while for reasons of economy in a number of cases a second person in the household was interviewed. The latter procedure can be queried because of the fact that with more persons in the household reading habits might not be fully independent of copy source.

What we need is the following:

- (1) a better sampling frame, which in itself is outside the reach of the National Readership Foundation;
- (2) abandoning the cluster method in the bigger communities, particularly as the cluster itself is based on a random-route procedure starting from a prescribed and obligatory sampling point;
- (3) abandoning the system of interviewing more than one person per household, because of interdependency between members of a household so far as media habits are concerned;
- (4) diminishing non-response (hidden or visible) resulting from sampling procedures (as opposed to other factors generating non-response).

All factors affect costs. Some of these

'improvements' tend to increase costs substantially, and while all improvements tend to improve sample procedures and thus diminish sampling bias, and diminishing sampling biases results in better measurements, we have to ask how far better measurements are worth the increased costs. This is a burning question, as improved quality of measurement is difficult to balance against increased costs.

Finally the general question remains whether it is possible to increase efficiency by means of stratified sampling methods, and on this the Board of Management has decided to consult a distinguished mathematical statistician for advice.

QUALITATIVE MEASUREMENTS

From the market as well as from the Technical Committee (which in fact reflects the market) the urgency for so-called qualitative indicators, has been stressed.

I say 'so-called' because we are talking about quantities which have to do with the communication capacity of different media types for different audiences and for different types of communication. I include this last for completeness because so far as I am concerned media in themselves are not neutral as to their contents.

At present we have the following indicators with a bearing on the quality of different media for different purposes:

(a) Reading frequency

How many out of 12 issues are read or looked at.

(b) Reading intensity

How much is read on a verbal scale ranging from all or practically all to hardly anything at all

(c) Copy source or provenance in 14 categories,

which can be broadly combined into

bought either by subscription or single copy sale

reading circle

reading without buying, present, waiting room, etc.

(d) Reading place, in 9 categories broadly combined

into

at home

somewhere else

The general theory is that all these indicators have something to do with the quality of the medium contact, and some of the hypotheses have the beginnings of probability. We know that reading frequency and

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reading intensity are intercorrelated in such a way that the higher the reading frequency the higher the reading intensity. Less proven is that reading in home is worth more than reading elsewhere (for instance at the dentist's). And another theory is that the primary reader, the reader who pays for the copy is a better reader than the secondary reader.

Until the contrary has been proven, I think that copy source is the weakest of all indicators, but I am prepared to review my standpoint against evidence. Experimental work in our office, in which we used sum scores based on the above indicators, suggests that it is at least probable that these indicators really measure something with a bearing on the problem in question. But we need experimental work in order to determine the meaning of such indicators as can be collected in large-scale measurements. Experimental work on copy source and place-of-reading is the most urgent need, at least in our situation since we have already done work on reading frequency and reading intensity.

TV MEASUREMENTS

We have some TV measurements in the present system. We have in the Netherlands state controlled commercial TV advertising based on a block system, comparable to that in West Germany. Individual spots are concentrated in blocks which are transmitted at more or less fixed times round the newscasts. Two stations exist, Netherlands I and Netherlands II, and each evening there are in total 6 blocks of advertising space, split between the two stations.

We know from experimental work that people do not differentiate between Netherlands I and II in a verbal interview, and that they do not differentiate between blocks. Therefore the 'TV evening' has been chosen as the unit of measurement of that medium, which places TV on a par with daily newspapers.

Furthermore the TV question is rather loose in itself ("did you view TV advertising yesterday evening?") — in short, we do not differentiate between transmitters, blocks and the number of blocks. But the TV people measure TV by two complementary methods, — by metering, and by means of a diary in a viewers' panel.

In order to facilitate accurate media planning, we need to sharpen up TV measurements. We are considering the French or the German methods, as well as other methods. We have a number of alternatives, which will have to be ranked according to their technical and economic aspects. Technical aspects are single source measurements, or the merging of different surveys. Other aspects are the possibilities of measurements in a consumer panel, ad-hoc research by

means of a diary tacked to the main survey, improvement of the present methods in order to deal with transmitter and block identification, and so on.

It seems to us that all solutions are feasible, though with advantages and disadvantages which will have to be weighed against costs, as the attached price-tags will have completely different amounts.

FROM AVERAGE ISSUE REACH TO AVERAGE ADVERTISING REACH

In fact, in readership research we measure media contacts of a further unspecified nature. In practically all methods apart from TTB we measure 'claimed' media contacts. A respondent counts towards the AIR when he or she claims to have made contact with a medium and a very superficial contact is accepted; read, glanced at, paged through — any of them will do. Strictly speaking a person who picks up a magazine or a newspaper in a supermarket and looks at the cover, or looks at the contents as printed on the cover, counts for AIR.

If the reading intensity question works as I think it works, the superficial contact will be qualified by the answer: I read hardly anything at all. The next logical step in readership research is to try to measure contact with advertising pages.

From an *a priori* point of view, however, I hold the theory that a sharp division between advertising pages and editorial pages is more a producer's categorisation than a consumer's categorisation. But theories of this kind (as all theories) have to be verified and accepted, modified or rejected. It was for this reason that VNU did a study which was published at ESOMAR Hamburg in 1974 in which we calculated the average Advertising Page Confrontation Probability for a number of titles, by means of a diary measurement. In total 17 titles were measured, including women's weeklies, opinion weeklies, and TV magazines, as well as TV advertising classified by transmitters and blocks: details may be found in the ESOMAR publication.

From a media planning standpoint, the page confrontation probability, which is an average, and which in specific cases is influenced by the marketing mix of the products concerned and by the quality of the advertisement, can and could be used as a qualitative medium weight. In our country the study has not been very extensively used. I am inclined to say that the publisher, when he determines advertising rates, intuitively takes into account the quality of his readership, which is reflected in media planning in the costs per thousand.

How can it be that with such disappointing results I still would advise the carrying out of such a study? It has

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something to do with satisfying the requirements of the market place. Advertisers and advertising agencies need 'qualitative' material. Measuring advertising reach is a very logical continuation of measuring average issue reach. It is the aggregation of the complex way in which

a reader handles a medium. Since it is a structural phenomenon, which changes but slowly over time, it need not be measured every year or every two years, and the measurement settles arguments about the relative merits of different media.