

3.3 Programme journals — a validation study

There are in Britain two weekly programme journals, the *Radio Times*, published by the BBC, and the *TV Times*, published by the independent television contractors. Despite their contrasting titles, both magazines are TV programme journals, though the *Radio Times* does include some radio programme pages.

The two magazines are the largest in Britain, each with sales well in excess of 3 million copies and adult readership in excess of 9 million. Readership and circulation fluctuate both cyclically and seasonally, but the relationship between the two magazines has remained stable, and part of the explanation lies in the fact that there is a very high duplication between the two.

Whereas the *Radio Times* has always had slightly the higher circulation, *TV Times* has slightly more readers per copy - and these too are stable relationships which have existed ever since the *TV Times* was launched in 1968. For the year 1980, *TV Times* had 2.96 readers per copy, the *Radio Times* 2.75 readers per copy.

TABLE 1
Readership and circulation - 1980

	<i>Radio Times</i>	<i>TV Times</i>
Circulation	3.5 million	3.2 million
Readership	9.6 million	9.5 million
Readers per copy	2.75	2.96

Sources: ABC 1980, JICNARS Jan - Dec 1980

TABLE 2
Readers per copy - 1975 - 1980

	<i>Radio Times</i>	<i>TV Times</i>	Difference
1975	2.72	2.96	0.24
1976	2.69	2.88	0.19
1977	2.89	3.10	0.21
1978	2.81	3.01	0.20
1979	2.66	2.90	0.24
1980	2.75	2.96	0.21

Sources: JICNARS, ABC

If one were to assume that all readership of programme journals took place in the home of the purchaser, then we would expect an upper limit of 1.0 housewife readers per copy and 1.0 male head of household readers per copy. In fact for 1980 the *Radio Times* had 1.22 housewife readers per copy and the *TV Times* 1.33. Male head of household readers come out very close to the 1.0 'upper limit' for both journals. *TV Times* generates slightly more readers per copy among 'other men' and 'other women'.

TABLE 3
Readers per copy - 1980

	<i>Radio Times</i>	<i>TV Times</i>
Housewives	1.22	1.33
Other Women	0.25	0.27
Male heads of household	0.99	1.01
Other Men	0.29	0.34

Sources: JICNARS Jan - Dec 1980, ABC 1980.

Several hypotheses could be advanced for these findings:

(1) The NRS figures are true figures, and the higher than expected readerships are caused by pass-along readership and readership outside the home. Under this hypothesis *TV Times* generates more readership than *Radio Times* because of more pass-along readers and/or more reading outside the home.

(2) *TV Times* higher readers per copy among 'other men' and 'other women' is due to the fact that *TV Times* solus reading households are larger than *Radio Times*.

(3) *TV Times* higher readers per copy among 'other men' and 'other women' occurs because it is more thoroughly read by the members of purchasing families than is the *Radio Times*.

(4) Replication is the cause of the higher than expected readership, with replication having a greater inflationary effect on the *TV Times*, possibly because of more feature material in that magazine.

(5) The inflated reader-per-copy figures are due to faulty memory causing net overclaims, and for some reason *TV Times* consistently benefits more from this hypothesised phenomenon than does the *Radio Times*.

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In 1980 BBC Publications commissioned Research Services to investigate these reader-per-copy differences. Professor Harry Henry was consultant to the project. The approach adopted was to anatomise programme journal reading within the household, to find out whether the programme journals entered the home and if so, how; whether they were read by all members of the household; and whether respondents had read programme journals outside the home.

The technique used was to construct a good quality probability sample of households in Great Britain. (In fact it was confined to four ITV regions, and larger households were deliberately over-sampled).

Within households containing three or more adults (15+), two adults were randomly selected for interview. In smaller households all adults were eligible for interview. Both interviews within the household were conducted on the same day, but with only one respondent present at a time wherever possible.

The relevant part of the interview included the following areas of questioning:

(1) a screening interview in which informants were shown the current and previous issues of both programme journals and asked:

"Please take a look at these four issues of *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, and tell me for each, whether you have seen it before. If you are not certain, have a look through to make sure".

If either respondent recalled seeing any of the four issues, both respondents were subjected to the remainder of the survey.

(2) For each of the four issues read, respondents were asked:

"You say you have seen this issue of Can you tell me, have you seen this issue at your own home?"

If no:

"Where have you seen it?

At other people's home

Waiting room

Elsewhere."

If yes:

"Please tell me from this card, how the copy of this particular issue got into your home?

Delivered to your home

Bought from newsagent - personally

by other household member

Bought by other person, not household member."

(3) For each of the current issues read, respondents were asked:

"Where is that copy now?

General living room

Kitchen

A bedroom

Other place in home

Somewhere else, not in informants home

Don't know."

Other questions followed in which RSL investigated the relationship between viewing television and reading programme journals, but that part of the research does not concern us here.

The fieldwork was done during the week 29 March -4 April 1981. Successful interviews were carried out in 843 households. These yielded 221 households at which at least one issue of one of the programme journals had been read, and these in turn yielded 406 interviews.

The rationale for this survey design rests on the twin facts that:

(1) Counted in weeks, programme journals have a short life. After the period of their currency, the programme information is dead, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that a two-week old copy of the *Radio Times* will be picking up negligible numbers of new readers.

TABLE 4

Adults per household	1	2	3	4	5+	Total
All weighted informants	300	1161	355	230	121	2167
hence household distribution	300	580	118	57	22	1077
Informants in primary RT households	57	200	64	50	22	393
hence RT household distribution	57	100	21	13	4	195
hence adults per household						2.02
Informants in primary TVT households	57	156	68	48	21	350
hence TVT household distribution	57	78	23	12	4	174
hence adults per household						2.01

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(2) On the other hand, counted in days, programme journals have a long life, being read on up to nine days by many readers. It was therefore reasonable to assume a high level of accuracy in informants' recall of reading in response to the use of complete issues as prompts.

What does the research show?

Household size

An analysis of primary reader households by size is shown in **Table 4**.

Thus primary reading TVT and RT households are virtually the same size on average and do not account for the difference in readers per copy between the two magazines.

We can go on to identify five categories of informant:

(1) potential primary readers - informants in primary reading households

(2) primary non-readers - members of (1) who have not read the household copy

(3) primary readers - members of (1) who have read the household copy

(4) secondary readers - informants not in (1) who have seen a pass-on or other copy elsewhere

(5) other non-readers - the rest

Total readership may be expressed as
(1) minus (2) plus (4)

The analysis looks like this

	Total
All screened informants	2167
<i>Radio Times</i> readers	
Potential primary (1)	393
less (2)	39
plus (4)	53
	407
<i>TV Times</i> readers	
Potential primary (1)	350
less (2)	40
plus (4)	82
	392

These data may be expressed as readers per copy:

<i>Radio Times</i> readers per copy	
Potential primary	2.02
Primary non readers	-0.20
Secondary readers	+0.27
	2.09

TVT readers per copy

Potential primary	2.01
Primary non readers	-0.23
Secondary readers	+ .47
	2.25

These analyses indicate marginally higher readers per copy for the *Radio Times* (1.82 against 1.78) by adults in primary households, but substantially higher secondary readers per copy for the *TV Times* (0.47 against 0.27).

The net effect of this is to confirm the NRS finding of more readers per copy for the *TV Times* than for the *Radio Times*. However this analysis fails to account for the full level of NRS readers per copy: 2.96 for the *TV Times* and 2.75 for the *Radio Times*. An indication that the remaining readers per copy (approximately 0.7) for each publication is accounted for by replication can be seen by examining the readers of the previous and current issue of both journals.

	<i>Radio Times</i>	<i>TV Times</i>
Weighted informants	2167	2167
	%	%
Previous and current issues	16.0	14.0
Previous issue only	3.0	4.1
Current issue only	1.9	1.7
Further readership to be expected from current issue	1.1	2.4
Thus maximum possible readership within reading period	22.0	22.2
and minimum readership within reading period	20.9	19.8

The maxima are in fact close enough to the NRS figures which for the period in question were 22.3% for the *Radio Times* and 22.2% for the *TV Times*, to suggest that all elements of NRS readership claim have been accounted for.

In conclusion, the technique of validation used here is ideally suited to programme journals, but could be applied to other publications where the issue life can be assumed to be limited. Obvious examples are daily and Sunday newspapers.

The findings confirm that *TV Times* did indeed have more readers per copy than *Radio Times*; that this is entirely due to more pass-on readers; but that the *Radio Times* actually has slightly more primary readers per copy than the *TV Times*.

Finally both publications' NRS readership estimates contain a modest element of inflation due to replication,

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and this effect is slightly higher for *TV Times* than for *Radio Times*. Lest media planners regard this as licence to downweight the readerships of programme journals, I

would suggest that there is at least as much model-bias overstatement in the readership figures of other weeklies and monthlies, and probably more.