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3.4 Recent reading and recognition experiments for Sunday newspapers and their supplements

INTRODUCTION

During 1981, two leading British Sunday newspapers launched colour supplements distributed without charge with the parent newspapers. The *Sunday Express* introduced the *Sunday Express Magazine* in April; the *News of the World* launched its supplement in September with the title of 'Sunday' — a reference to the newspaper's daily stable-mate, the *Sun*.

It was hypothesized that a new supplement, especially if the link with the title of the parent newspaper was not close, might be at a disadvantage in the early days of its readership measurement through unfamiliarity with its masthead. The opportunity provided by the launch of these two supplements was taken to test this hypothesis in a series of three studies, which compared readership estimates obtained by the standard National Readership Survey method for the supplements and their parent newspapers with estimates obtained from recognition of the issues of each published on the Sunday before the interview.

The results showed no difference in levels of readership between the two methods in the tests conducted six and seven months after the launch dates of the two supplements. In the test conducted in the second month of publication of *Sunday* the estimates derived from recognition claims were somewhat greater than those obtained from the standard NRS recent reading method.

The following conclusions may be drawn from this study:

- 1 That the readership estimates obtained by the NRS method for established Sunday newspapers and their supplements, are fully supported by independent recognition claims.
- 2 That there is likely to be some under-estimation of readership by the NRS method early in the life of a new title compared with levels obtained by recognition claims.
- 3 That some recognition claims are lost if they are based only on informants who pass through a filter rather than on all informants.
- 4 The validating evidence of the study can be safely extended to daily newspapers, but not necessarily to magazines with longer publication intervals and active lives, nor to those with lower proportions of regular readers.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Readership of the test publications was first estimated by the standard NRS method in all three tests. On the completion of the NRS interview all informants were given the issue of the test supplement and asked whether they had read or looked through that particular issue of (title). The procedure was then repeated for the corresponding issue of the parent newspaper. Apparent conflicts between the information obtained in the standard NRS interview and the recognition test were then investigated.

The three tests were undertaken for *Sunday* in October 1981, its second month of publication; for the *Sunday Express Magazine* in November 1981, its seventh full month of publication; and again for *Sunday* in February 1982, its sixth month of publication. For administrative reasons the November test did not start at the beginning of the month; in all three studies the test could not be undertaken at every interview.

Table 1 shows the main results of the November and February tests, undertaken seven and six months respectively after the launch of the *Sunday Express Magazine* and *Sunday*.

For both the supplements and parent newspapers the two measures gave virtually identical readership estimates. But it will be seen that about 8% of all claims of each type were made by informants who did not make a claim of the opposite type. It is of course to be expected that some claims to have read any issue of a publication in the past seven days will not be supported by a recognition claim for the current issue. The explanations of these apparent discrepancies were approximately equally divided between the re-reading of older issues within the past seven days and that the publication was normally read but had not in fact been seen on this occasion. These 'over-claims' were precisely offset by 'under-claims' — informants who went on to claim recognition of the current issue.

The 'under-claims' mainly result from the filter question. It will also be seen that the number of recognition claims would have been 5½% less if the test issues had been shown only to informants who passed through the filter, which in the NRS method is provided by the frequency scale. Hence recognition methods which introduce a filter should be expected to result in under-estimates of readership, even for leading

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TABLE 1
NRS readership and recognition claims

	November 1981		February 1982		
	<i>Sunday Express</i>	<i>Sunday Express Magazine</i>	<i>News of the World</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>All titles</i>
Unweighted samples	1456 %	1456 %	2308 %	2308 %	%
NRS AIR	19.0	18.3	27.4	25.0	89.7
Recognition claims	19.4	18.6	27.1	24.9	90.0
AIR <i>and</i> recognised	17.6	16.6	25.8	22.8	82.8
AIR <i>not</i> recognised	1.4	1.7	1.6	2.2	6.9
Recognised and:					
non-zero frequency	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.6	2.1
zero frequency	1.2	1.6	0.8	1.5	5.1

TABLE 2
NRS readership and recognition claims

	October 1981		February 1982	
	<i>News of the World</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>News of the World</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Unweighted samples	2349 %	2349 %	2308 %	2308 %
NRS AIR	27.7	24.3	27.4	25.0
Recognition claims	26.4	25.2	27.1	24.9
AIR <i>and</i> recognised	25.3	21.9	25.8	22.8
AIR <i>not</i> recognised	2.4	2.4	1.6	2.2
Recognised and:				
non-zero frequency	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.6
zero frequency	0.8	2.7	0.8	1.5

newspapers; as part of the recent reading model the filter is required to avoid over-claims

Table 2 shows the results of the October and February tests, undertaken in the second and sixth months following the launch of the *News of the World* supplement, *Sunday*.

In the period immediately following the launch of *Sunday*, readership claims by the NRS method exceeded recognition claims for the parent newspaper for the supplement. It will be seen that 2.7% of all informants claimed recognition of *Sunday* in the October test while also making a zero response to the frequency question. By February this category had diminished to 1.5% of all informants. This suggests that about an additional 1% of informants would have made NRS AIR claims for *Sunday*

if they had been more familiar with the masthead and the title. Hence it appears that in the second month of the launch of the new title the deflationary effect of the NRS method on the AIR estimate amounted to 4% of the actual readership level.

The level of NRS claims for the *News of the World* itself appears to have been somewhat inflated compared with the level of recognition claims. This may, perhaps, be explained by heavy advertising expenditure at the time of the launch or by other factors unknown.

We go on to show in **Table 3** that readership profiles by sex, age and social grade were virtually identical in the two tests conducted six and seven months after the launches of the two new supplements.

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TABLE 3
Readership and recognition profiles

	Sex		Age		Social Grade	
	Men %	Women %	15-44 %	45+ %	ABC1 %	C2DE %
News of the World — February						
NRS AIR	52.0	48.0	56.4	43.6	22.9	77.1
Recognition claims	52.2	47.8	56.8	43.2	22.5	77.5
Sunday — February						
NRS AIR	50.6	49.4	58.3	61.7	24.6	75.4
Recognition claims	50.6	49.4	57.9	62.1	24.4	75.6
Sunday Express — November						
NRS AIR	47.2	52.8	41.5	58.5	53.8	46.2
Recognition claims	47.0	53.0	41.5	58.5	53.0	47.0
S.Express Magazine — November						
NRS AIR	44.6	55.4	42.2	57.8	52.6	47.4
Recognition claims	44.3	55.7	41.9	58.1	55.5	44.5

CONCLUSIONS

1 When once the two supplements had been launched for at least six months, the standard NRS method and the recognition method gave almost the same estimates of total readership and reading profiles. This applied both to the parent newspapers and their supplements. Across the four cases the gross total of NRS readership claims was 89.7%; for issue recognition claims the figure is 90.0%.

Overall about one claim in six was not internally validated. That is to say, a claim to recognise the most recent issue was not supported by a claim to have read any issue in the past seven days, or vice versa. This apparent inconsistency supports rather than questions the accuracy of the two estimates. The recent reading model admits deferred or replicated reading claims, while recognition methods admit parallel events. One-to-one correspondence between the claims of individuals would therefore discredit the independence of the two estimates.

The similarity of the two sets of results therefore supports belief in the accuracy and reliability of estimates obtained by both the standard NRS method and the test method, which of course cannot be conveniently undertaken for dailies or any considerable number of Sunday newspapers.

2 The October test, made in the second month of publication of *Sunday*, the supplement of the *News of the World*, suggests that the standard NRS method under-estimated the readership of *Sunday* in this period

by about 1% of all informants or about 4% of the readership estimate. It also suggests that the standard NRS method may have over-estimated readership of the parent newspaper by about the same amount, possibly as a result of publicity accompanying the launch of the supplement. The results support the hypothesis of under-claiming of readership of new titles but indicate that the effect is marginal.

3 In the two tests when the supplements were established it was found that 5½% of recognition claims were made by informants who would have been filtered out by the frequency scale. This may suggest that for publications which are less well known than leading national newspapers and their supplements the effect of filtering titles before asking recognition questions may be substantial. The scale of this effect would depend on the nature of the filter as well as on the publication.

4 The semi-validation provided by these tests can be safely extended to the case of daily newspapers. It would not be correct to extend it to other categories of magazine. In the first place the NRS model may break down where magazines have a longer issue life and a lower proportion of regular readers: the test does nothing to establish whether parallel and replicated reading are in balance in such circumstances. Secondly, problems of recall are nominal for Sunday newspapers: they can be assumed to increase with the length of the publication interval and the issue life, affecting the reliability of estimates based either on recall or on copy recognition.