

Dazed and Confused - Titles

Confusing Readers

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me here today to speak to you about title confusion. We recognize there are many theories regarding title confusion, and one of them relates to cultural differences.

For instance, there was an obvious cultural difference in my understanding when told to submit a picture and a resume for this conference. Well, if you look at the event

program, you will see that I did send a resume, with everyone else sending what I would call a speaker's "bio". So, now that you have seen my employment history, and I did bring along references, which, as I indicated, are available upon request, if you know of any positions for Research Director....

So, let's first review how the audiences of various media are collected by taking a look at

Print versus Broadcast:

TELEVISION -

While TV actively collects program viewing through panel based people meters, this is a passive form of collection. These devices measure second-by-second household set usage and viewing which is recorded separately by each household member and/or visitor via hand held devices. The meter reads the time the telecast is tuned in for, and is assuming that the person is seeing the entire telecast. Absences from the room or lapses from full attention are not automatically

recorded by the viewer. No one is required to answer any direct questions; the meter collects behavioral data.

INTERNET -

Again, as a passive measure, on line traffic is collected through panel based meters similar to television to track page views, time spent on the sites, sites visited, unique visits, etc.; all actions done by the software observing the respondent during time of online activity. However, the current measurements do not tell us who actually is using the PC to access

the Internet, and comparisons between the findings of various syndicated audience tallying surveys show serious discrepancies, which calls into question how representative the panels actually are.

MAGAZINES/NEWSPAPERS -

Here we move away from a passive, behavioral measure, whether through in person interviews or self reported questionnaires, readership is collected by relying on the respondents' recollection of magazine titles'

read starting with a screening question

followed by a reading question.

The two methods used to gather average

issue audiences are:

RECENT READING - whereby the

respondent is asked to recall readership of

magazines based on a six month screen and

past publication period, and frequency of

reading where, answers are based on how

many of the past 4 issues of a magazine are

read to distinguish between casual and loyal

readers as well as determine weighting factors associated with the frequency.

Currently there are no issue specific measurement tools.

Both methods usually follow a screening question.

Screens Drive reads.

Confusion in magazine readership starts with the screening question. When asking to

choose a title from a deck of **240 PLUS**

LOGO CARDS (MRI) shown one at a time with

the question "what magazine have you read or

looked into in the last 6 months?" the screened-in results are always higher than the actual read - which is based on reading the last issue during the magazine's publication period.

Unknown numbers of respondents are likely to confuse their past exposures to old magazine issues with current ones, and probably can't properly distinguish between repeat and original contacts with the current issues. This produces an overstatement of average issue audience claims.

Think among yourselves how many specifics you can recall having participated in during the past 6 months that are MORE IMPORTANT to you than identifying a magazine reading experience - When was the last time you had your car serviced? When did you see your physician last? When was the last time you looked at your "honey do" list? - you know, honey do this, honey do that....? When was the last time you had great sex? Probably not since you looked at your honey do list....

Errors can be attributed to faulty memory/forgetfulness or outright lying.

Vague quantifiers in the questions posed to the respondent results in different interpretations by the respondent, such as the use of the term "few" as in "over the past few years" without giving definitive time frames means different times to different people and leads to telescoping, where respondent is asked to remember most recent reading incidence - usually bringing the recent

reading incidence closer than what actually happened.

There is error related to desire by respondent to impress the interviewer or misinterpretations of the questions. This is similar to social desirability - which is a false claim such as reading only highbrow titles or never admitting to reading sex-oriented publications.

Couple these recall overstatements with the confusion of titles read, and you have a process that is subject to errors based on -

perhaps among other things - both response bias and cultural differences.

The use of six-month screens is an antidote to telescoping, which is why the "reading" question is narrowed down to a shorter time frame - usually the last publication interval.

Cultural barriers can also result in response error -

We all see the world differently. Terms are defined differently depending upon the country; for example, the question "how many children do you have?" yielded different

results when posed by researchers in Mexico.

There was no problem with this question in

Mexico City, but the villagers in the Yucatan

interpreted the "ninos" in "Cuando ninos

tienen Ustedes?" to include all children,

whether living, dead or from unsuccessful

pregnancies. The resulting count would have

been very wrong had not the problem of

mutual meaning been discovered.

Just look at the list from U.S. Census Bureau

on the various race classifications. The old

version was simple - White, Black/African

American, American Indian, Alaskan Native,
Asian and Hispanic.

In Hispanic households, where we can see 3
generations living in the same household,
where maybe none are speaking Spanish -
what are they? What are the Hispanics from
Spain classified - White? Are Caribbean
Hispanics Black? The Guatemalan Hispanics
Indian?

Marriage and migration leads to even trickier
situations.

Japanese born Fujimori was President of Peru 10 years ago and there was a large Japanese population in that country. After his presidency ended, the Japanese resettled to Los Angeles as Spanish speaking Japanese people. Will they be classified in the next census as Asian or Hispanic?

Even with television the Nielsen local market people meters that collect demographic information in their classification of households (viewing) by race run into the same problem.

It boils down to us trying to enforce a certain cultural mindset that continues to shift.

Finally - title confusion -

Home, House, House & Garden, Huh?

House & Garden is a magazine that's been published under Conde Nast since 1901.

Historically, since MRI has been measuring magazine audiences, House & Garden traditionally reported an unusually high reader per copy with a median household income at the level of the total U.S.

population. We felt that because there was the similarly named House & Garden and a bigger, more mass magazine, Better Homes & Gardens, that there-in lie title confusion. We know that in 1988 when the logo was changed from House & Garden to HG, the reader per copy was lowered and the income was raised for the next 5 years until it was decided to cease publication. Then when House & Garden re-launched in 1999 it returned as a high reader per copy title with a median household income on par, once again, with the total U.S.

average - a return to the contradiction of the perceived reader we believed to be the case with this magazine. 1999's re-launch reported income was about the same as 1993 when it was last reported in MRI before going on hiatus. We expected a higher quality demographic profile than the research was showing, and high-end advertisers began to shun the magazine since they were not looking to advertise their upscale products to the "masses" unable to afford them.

In our investigation of the cause of this, several factors were looked at. We knew that high quality/high RPC magazines usually have lower in-home RPC than the out of home claimed readership. This was the case for magazines like People, GQ and Vogue. House & Garden, however, reported the same number of in-home RPC as their out-of-home, which was deemed illogical.

In addition to in home versus out of home readership, we examined frequency of reading (core versus casual readers), duplication rates

with similarly named titles, crosstabbing in home and out of home reading with reading frequency, crosstabbing duplication with frequency of reading...the examination went on and on with in house analysis supplemented with outside, independent third party analysis and both arrived at the same dead end result.

There was no variation in the demographic profile. Thus, we could only come to the same conclusion - title confusion.

We knew that reader confusion was also impacted by fragmentation - in 1987 there

were 75 magazines with "House, Home or Garden" in their title listed in the consumer resource publication Standard Rate & Data Service. In 1999 that number grew to 101 and now it has 157 titles listed by one of those names.

The paper - "Dazed and Confused: The Characteristics and Behavior of Title Confused Readers" - by Martin Frankel, Risa Becker, Julian Baim and Mickey Galin of MRI and Scott McDonald of Conde Nast, was written to address the continuing discussions

of title confusion that print audience research seems to carry around like a ball and chain. Compounding this issue was the concern that the confused titles were usually direct competitors and the fear loomed that the audience of one publication increase or decreases were influenced by the same rate of audience increase/decrease of the competitive title.

The authors of this paper claim inspiration from Don McGlathery's 1993 paper: "Does Title Confusion Affect Magazine Audience

Levels?" So early in 2005, MRI conducted a large scale study designed to explore the methodological issues associated with title confusion and determine the impact of potential confusion on the relative audience levels for the confused pairs of magazines. Using an internet based panel and a web-based questionnaire; the study took nine days and had a sample of almost 47,000 respondents age 18 years and older. It should be noted as well that the method used in conducting this study was different in the

collection and sampling process compared to the method MRI employs in collecting their audience estimates in their national study which is based on a national probability area sample and in-person interviews.

To summarize the description of the study, 48 large US magazines were selected to collect the readership behavior with half (24) paired by potentially confused titles (i.e., Men's Health vs. Men's Fitness, Golf Magazine vs. Golf Digest, House & Garden vs. Better Homes & Gardens, Parents vs. Parenting, and

so on). The remaining 24 were used to act as “fillers” for the experimental treatments studied.

Two basic treatments were used based on magazine identification and placement. The magazine identification treatments presented the respondent with either black & white logo images or four recent covers and the logo.

The placement involved having the potentially confused pairings randomly distributed among all screening pages or windows, pairs always appearing on the same screening page, and

pairs on different screening pages. These 6 possible treatment considerations yielded approximately 7500 respondents each.

The screen in process had the 24 potentially confused titles distributed evenly among 8 different screening pages (windows), so that each screening page contained six different magazine titles - logos or covers and logos - with the same screen space allocated to either the black & white logo or the four miniaturized covers and logos.

The particular placement treatment condition was applied to all magazines consistently for each respondent so that some respondents were always exposed to potentially confused pairs on the same page while others were always exposed to potentially confused pairs on different pages and the rest were exposed to a full randomization of titles across pages.

This uniformity within respondent was also applied to the mode of identification seeing either logos or covers and logos consistently across all magazines.

While the paper defined the confused reader as the respondent who first screens-in for a particular title, then indicated readership within the most recent publication period and then screened out for the same publication in subsequent questioning, the authors were inclined to use a definition of claimed read than reader. This is where a person may claim readership of magazines A, B and C and subsequently be classified as a confused reader for magazine B, but not for A or C.

Thus a person may be classified as a non-confused reader for some magazines and a confused reader for others.

WHO ARE THE CONFUSED READERS?

The result of this study was not conclusive, and compared to the previously hypothesized remarks relating to confusion offer nothing new.

In trying to determine the demographic characteristics of the individuals who produce confused reads, it did show that confusion occurs more often among male respondents

than females, all respondents with lower income and education, younger, as well as being associated with cultural factor - not married, non whites and Hispanic.

The readership quality characteristics of the confused reads occur more often among pass-along, secondary readers; out of home reads; the casual, infrequent readers and those who spend less time on average reading a magazine.

CONCLUSIONS

The impact on competitive publications was minimal - meaning, the potentially "understated" readership of one of the pairs of magazines was not a result of "overstating" the readership of the other. Also consider that the method of data collection and sampling for their paper was quite different from the methods that are generally used to produce many of the currently accepted estimates of audience size.

Which leaves us with other considerations - do smaller magazines really benefit from

larger magazines in confusion? Not always.

The confusion doesn't only affect audience size, however, it effects the composition of a magazine as well.

Can confusion be reduced? Probably, but neither MRI nor anyone else seems to be able to do it now. Publishers should try and make their logos as different form their close competitors as possible, but who will make that move first?

Lastly - we cannot tell who exactly is confused and who to cut out of the average

issue audience. Perhaps surveys can be arranged so that titles can be put into category groups at the screen in level to help reduce potential confusion. **The UK Experience** showed reduced confusion if titles were grouped together.

We invite response bias when we ask people what they've done in a certain amount of time passed; to make selections in crowded categories and requiring accuracy in their reading experience.

Still confused.

Maybe more so dazed.

Thanks!