

Timothy Joyce  
Mediamark Research Inc  
New York, USA

# 7.3 Places of reading

It has long been usual in the United States for magazine audience studies to establish the places where magazine reading occurs. This information is used by advertisers and agencies in varying ways. For example, some agencies regard out-of-home readers as having less value than in-home readers, and discount them accordingly: often by giving them a weight of one-half.

By contrast, place of reading is, it would seem, generally not established in the readership surveys of other countries. In the descriptions of these surveys which appeared in the Proceedings of the New Orleans symposium, only one survey — the NOP survey in the Netherlands — was mentioned as including a place of reading question.

The object of this paper is to review, based on current Mediamark Research Inc. (MRI) data, the general information available about the different places where magazine reading can occur, and the value of this information.

The MRI survey supplies more information about places of reading than other surveys have done in two respects. First, these places are reported in more detail than hitherto (eg whether a magazine was read in someone else's home, in a beauty parlour, on a plane, and so on). Second, this information can be linked to other qualitative measures which are also included in the survey — specifically, measures of exposure, attitude, and response. These measures provide clues as to the values of different places of reading.

### Where are magazines read?

In the Fall 1982 MRI study, the audiences of 153 magazines were reported, either individually or as members of groups or networks, or both. The average number of these magazines read by US adults was 5.6, in terms of average issue audiences estimated by the reading method (1). **Table 1** shows how these audiences were made up of readers in the four main types of place. As in several of the tables which follow, aggregate audiences are shown in terms of gross rating points, ie the sum of the coverage percentages among all US adults aged 18 or over.

In this and in other tables, it will be noticed that audiences by place add to slightly more than the total audience since magazines may be read in more than one place: for example, a magazine may be read both at a newsstand or store *and* at home, after purchase; or it may be read both during travel to or from work *and* at

home or at work. (These happen to be the most common types of reading in more than one place).

**TABLE 1**  
**Places of reading**

|              | Gross<br>rating points | %     |
|--------------|------------------------|-------|
| In home      | 326                    | 58.0  |
| Other home   | 62                     | 11.1  |
| At work      | 66                     | 11.7  |
| Public place | 131                    | 23.3  |
| Total        | 561                    | 100.0 |

In almost six out of ten cases, magazines are read in the reader's own home. In a little over ten percent of cases they are read in someone else's home; in a similar proportion of cases they are read at the reader's place of work; and in almost a quarter of cases they are read in other places, which are conventionally known as public places.

These are worth looking at in a little more detail:

**TABLE 2**  
**Public places**

|                           | Gross<br>rating points | %     |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| Doctor's/dentist's office | 40                     | 30.6  |
| Beauty/barber shop        | 21                     | 16.0  |
| Library/club/school       | 17                     | 13.2  |
| Store/newsstand           | 30                     | 22.9  |
| Business reception room   | 7                      | 5.1   |
| On airplane               | 7                      | 5.0   |
| Travel to/from work       | 1                      | 1.1   |
| Other travel              | 1                      | 1.1   |
| Somewhere else            | 12                     | 9.3   |
| Total                     | 131                    | 100.0 |

These percentages relate to the proportion of all reading in *public places*. It will be seen that there are four types of public place which are considerably more important than any of the others: doctor's and dentist's offices,

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beauty and barber shops, libraries, clubs and schools, and (which may surprise some people) stores and newsstands. But it is common experience to stand in a long supermarket line and watch shoppers reading the magazines in the racks at the checkout! Two other places with some significance are business reception rooms, and airplanes. Other travel is of little significance — even travel to or from work — essentially because so many Americans travel to work by car, and radio, not the print medium, is obviously the preferred means of reaching them in that situation.

How are the magazine copies obtained which are read in these various places? MRI establishes whether the reader was himself or herself the subscriber or purchaser, or whether another member of the household was (other primary). The balance of readers, who were reading a copy which did not belong to the household, are the secondary readers. It should be pointed out that, as has been the case with almost all previous primary audience measurement in the US, the primary audience estimates are conformed to known circulations by a ratio estimating procedure.

The sources of magazine copies for in-home and out-of-home readers, in the aggregate, are as follows:

**TABLE 3**  
**Source of copy**

|                      | <i>In-home</i><br>% | <i>Out-of-home</i><br>% |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Subscriber/purchaser | 34.8                | 5.8                     |
| Other primary        | 22.1                | 4.1                     |
| Total primary        | 56.9                | 9.9                     |
| Secondary            | 43.1                | 90.1                    |
| Total                | 100.0               | 100.0                   |

Only about ten percent of the magazine readings out-of-home are primary; for the most part these audiences are secondary, or 'passerby', to use a graphic term (the term 'passalong' can be somewhat misleading in these situations). There is not much variation between the different out-of-home situations in this respect, except that people reading during travel are somewhat more likely to own the copies they read than people in other places are, and as many as 21% of those reading in a store or newsstand are in fact primary (ie they actually buy the magazine after having read it to some extent, and probably then read it somewhere else as well).

Of the in-home readers, 57% are primary and 43% are secondary. The latter group are passalong readers in

a meaningful sense, ie the magazine copies have, by definition, been passed on to the home by friends, neighbours, relatives etc., or maybe brought home from work or from a public place.

The amount of passalong reading in-home may surprise some people. It is obviously a major contributor to magazine readers-per-copy.

### What is read where?

Before going any further, it should be obvious that information about places of reading has considerable potential value to the magazine publisher for understanding the audience he has, and the way in which his readers-per-copy are generated. Many magazines make a special effort to get distribution in public places such as beauty parlours, airplanes etc. The results of these efforts can be tracked by a survey such as MRI.

In addition, by partitioning the in-home audience into primary versus passalong, the publisher can judge the degree to which the editorial package contributes to home-to-home passalong or not. There is a bit of a paradox here: it seems that for optimal passalong, a magazine should be thought to have *considerable* value, but not *too much* value, or it would be retained without being passed on.

For the media planner, study of the place of reading data provides considerable insights into the different kinds of appeal of different magazines. I list as examples the top ten magazines for each of four different places of reading, in terms of the percentage reading the magazine in the place concerned among all readers (taken for convenience from the Spring 1982 report). First, those reading at work:

**TABLE 4**  
**Percentage of reading at work**

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Industry Week        | 67% |
| Wall Street Journal  | 50% |
| Dun's Business Month | 50% |
| Barron's             | 39% |
| Business Week        | 38% |
| Genesis              | 33% |
| Fortune              | 33% |
| Forbes               | 32% |
| Gallery              | 32% |
| Chic                 | 29% |

In seven out of ten cases the magazines concerned are business or financial books; the remaining three are

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among the more 'raunchy' of the 'skin' books!

**TABLE 5**  
Percentage of reading  
at doctor's/dentist's

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Baby Talk             | 28% |
| American Baby         | 26% |
| Health                | 26% |
| Parents               | 18% |
| Life                  | 18% |
| Saturday Evening Post | 18% |
| Newsweek              | 13% |
| New Yorker            | 12% |
| House Beautiful       | 12% |
| Town & Country        | 12% |

The baby books, *Health* and *Parents*, reasonably enough, lead the field as shown in **Table 5**. They are followed by *Life* and *Saturday Evening Post*, which are both relatively new monthly revivals of the very large circulation weeklies which typified the general magazine field twenty or thirty years ago, and other titles which clearly have appeal in the waiting room situation.

**TABLE 6**  
Percentage of reading  
at beauty/barber shop

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| Harper's Bazaar | 19% |
| Town & Country  | 17% |
| Vogue           | 16% |
| Mademoiselle    | 15% |
| House Beautiful | 15% |
| Glamour         | 14% |
| House & Garden  | 9%  |
| Cosmopolitan    | 8%  |
| GQ              | 8%  |
| Travel/Holiday  | 8%  |

In **Table 6**, the fashion and glamour magazines, plus a few others, lead the way.

**Table 7** shows a very different list, headed by *Scientific American* and other publications with relatively heavy text; but interestingly, the tennis magazines make this list, followed by certain sports magazines and news weeklies.

### Who reads where?

There are marked variations in the amount of magazine reading by demographic group. By analysing this by

**TABLE 7**  
Percentage of reading  
at library/school

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Scientific American  | 20% |
| Natural History      | 16% |
| Dun's Business Month | 15% |
| Psychology Today     | 14% |
| Saturday Review      | 11% |
| World Tennis         | 11% |
| Tennis               | 10% |
| The Sporting News    | 10% |
| Forbes               | 9%  |
| U.S. News & W.R.     | 9%  |

place of reading, it is possible to get an understanding of the reasons for this.

As before, the following tables show amount of magazine reading in terms of gross rating points for the MRI — measured titles; and the GRPs by place of reading will add to more than the total GRPs because of reading in more than one place.

**TABLE 8**  
Place of reading by sex  
(Gross rating points)

|        | Total | In-home | Other home | At work | Public Place |
|--------|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------------|
| Adults | 561   | 326     | 62         | 66      | 131          |
| Men    | 526   | 283     | 61         | 73      | 130          |
| Women  | 593   | 363     | 63         | 59      | 132          |

Women read more magazines than men (about 10% more). This is entirely accounted for by reading in-home, given that women spend, on average, more time in their homes than men do. (**Table 8**)

There is a marked association between the level of magazine reading and age, with the youngest group (18-24) reading more than double the number of magazines that the oldest group (65 or over) does. **Table 9** shows that the difference is largely *out-of-home*. Reading in other people's homes and in public places declines very rapidly with advancing age. Reading at work peaks in the 25-34 age group (a higher proportion of the 18-24's are not yet employed); thereafter, reading at work declines quite rapidly. As a detail it might be noted that reading in doctor's/dentist's offices, and in beauty/barber shops, *increases with age*.

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**TABLE 9**  
Place of reading by age  
(Gross rating points)

|            | Total | In-home | Other home | At work | Public place |
|------------|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------------|
| 18-24      | 696   | 352     | 129        | 68      | 184          |
| 25-34      | 670   | 355     | 91         | 102     | 156          |
| 35-44      | 589   | 350     | 41         | 89      | 132          |
| 45-54      | 544   | 339     | 37         | 70      | 122          |
| 55-64      | 466   | 308     | 26         | 40      | 104          |
| 65 or over | 317   | 228     | 22         | 6       | 65           |

**Table 10** shows that attended college and graduated college groups are virtually identical in the degree to which they read magazines and the places where they do so; it should be remembered that the attended college group includes those still at college, who are an exceptionally heavy magazine reading group.

The better educated groups read more in *all* places, especially (in relative terms) at work, where the publications directed at them, and the working environment, clearly stimulate much more reading. There are striking regional differences in (see **Table 11**) levels of magazine reading in the United States, with the Western census region being well in the lead, followed by the North Central states, then the North Eastern states, and then the South.

This variation is found in all the different places of reading, but most striking perhaps is the variation in public place reading. The amount of public place reading of magazines is almost double in the West what it is in

**TABLE 11**  
Place of reading by region  
(Gross rating points)

|               | Total | In-home | Other home | At work | Public place |
|---------------|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------------|
| North East    | 522   | 336     | 49         | 53      | 100          |
| North Central | 606   | 342     | 69         | 74      | 149          |
| South         | 466   | 205     | 53         | 57      | 102          |
| West          | 715   | 382     | 85         | 84      | 195          |

the North-East or South, with the North Central states being in between.

A detailed analysis shows the considerable importance of store/newsstand reading in the West, where magazine centres in supermarkets are well established.

### The values of different places

The MRI survey includes a number of additional 'qualitative' measurements based on questions which are asked about each magazine which the respondent read in the most recent publication interval, and for which he or she is therefore counted as a member of the audience. These are measures of attitude, response and exposure.

Two attitude questions are asked: overall rating of the magazine, and interest in the advertising which appears in it. Verbal scales which range from 'one of my favourites' to 'poor', and 'considerable interest' to 'not much interest', respectively, are employed. These can be scored, with the most favourable item in the scale receiving a score of 100 and the least favourable a score

**TABLE 10**  
Places of reading by education  
(Gross rating points)

|                              | Total | In-home | Other home | At work | Public Place |
|------------------------------|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------------|
| Did not graduate High School | 372   | 227     | 38         | 31      | 91           |
| Graduated High School        | 570   | 337     | 65         | 69      | 124          |
| Attended College             | 736   | 402     | 93         | 93      | 173          |
| Graduated College            | 722   | 409     | 70         | 96      | 173          |

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of 0, so that the average score for a magazine is like a percentage.

In the aggregate, the scores by place of reading are as follows:

**TABLE 12**  
**Attitudes by place of reading**

|                         | <i>In-home</i> | <i>Other home</i> | <i>At work</i> | <i>Public place</i> |
|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Overall rating          | 69             | 58                | 58             | 57                  |
| Interest in advertising | 53             | 42                | 45             | 43                  |

The two attitude measures show the same relationship with place of reading: the highest scores are given by the in-home readers, with little variation between the different out-of-home locations. However, the advantage in the case of the in-home readers is not that large, and it would be a mistake to say that out-of-home readers value the magazines *substantially* less well than the in-home readers. The variation across individual magazines is large and tends to swamp the variation by place.

Among the different public places, it is notable that those reading magazines while travelling to or from work value them quite as highly as their in-home readers. At the other end of the scale, those reading magazines on a plane value them least highly.

MRI asks that about six specific types of reader action or 'response' which could follow reading each magazine. **Table 13** shows the percentage taking each of these types of action, in the aggregate in the different

**TABLE 13**  
**Actions by place of reading (percentages)**

|                                      | <i>In-home</i> | <i>Other home</i> | <i>At work</i> | <i>Public place</i> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Sent for information about a product | 2.5            | 1.4               | 1.3            | 1.5                 |
| Sent for a product                   | 1.9            | 1.1               | 1.1            | 1.1                 |
| Cut out an ad/ads                    | 2.1            | 1.7               | 2.2            | 1.6                 |
| Cut out an article/articles          | 3.8            | 2.2               | 3.5            | 2.5                 |
| Cut out/used a recipe                | 7.5            | 4.2               | 3.1            | 3.0                 |
| Cut out/used a money-off coupon      | 4.0            | 1.8               | 1.0            | 1.3                 |

places of reading.

All the percentages are relatively small, but it is of some interest that as *many* as 7.5% of adults reading a magazine cut out or use a recipe from it, on average (for women, the figure is 11.8%).

As might be expected, the in-home readers are the most likely to take these actions. Nonetheless, the actions taken by readers in other places account for quite considerable proportions of actions taken.

The qualitative measures which arouse the most interest, and which are probably the most widely used, are the three measures of exposure. Taking each of these in turn, the first is reading time in terms of estimated number of minutes spent reading the magazine on all the occasions it was picked up:

**TABLE 14**  
**Reading time (means)**

| <i>In-home</i> | <i>Other home</i> | <i>At work</i> | <i>Public place</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 73 mins        | 38 mins           | 42 mins        | 32 mins             |

There are appreciable differences in average reading time by place of reading. The average in-home reader spends one hour and 13 minutes reading the magazine. Readers in other people's homes and at work spend about 40 minutes on average reading the magazine: those reading in public places spend a little over half an

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hour doing so, on average.

Another measure of exposure is 'reading days', that is, the number of different days on which the magazine is read in the publication-interval. It should be stated here that the MRI technique does not strictly speaking estimate issue reading days, since it is possible to read more than one issue of a magazine on a given day, with this only being counted once rather than as the number of issues read. In current MRI fieldwork, this point is being addressed by asking how many separate issues were read on the last reading day for each magazine; the product of this number and the MRI reading days estimate will be an estimate of *issue* reading days. This may be some 10 - 15% higher than the current MRI estimate.

This, however, should not greatly affect the comparison between places of reading, which is as follows:

**TABLE 15**  
**Reading days (means)**

| <i>In-home</i> | <i>Other home</i> | <i>At work</i> | <i>Public place</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 3.0            | 1.8               | 2.0            | 1.7                 |

Those reading magazines in-home read on an average of three days in the publication-interval: the averages for other places of reading are considerably less, but multiple reading days are still more common than not, with a mean of 1.7 even for public place readers.

Thirdly, MRI respondents are asked to estimate, for the last issue read or looked into of each magazine read, the proportion of pages opened in that issue considering all the occasions of reading. The comparison is as follows:

**TABLE 16**  
**Page openings (means)**

| <i>In-home</i> | <i>Other home</i> | <i>At work</i> | <i>Public place</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 84%            | 74%               | 76%            | 70%                 |

While those reading at work or in someone else's home open fewer pages than those reading in their own homes, and those reading in public places open fewer still, the differences are really not that great. Even in public places the reader opens, on average, seven out of ten of the pages.

At present in the United States there is renewed interest in the possibility of measuring advertising page exposures (APX), or at least magazine page exposure (MPX), ie the average number of times that the magazine reader opens the average page. The Magazine Publishers' Association quite recently published a report of a study (2) based on yesterday recall questioning by telephone, which estimated an average MPX number of 1.7 for an aggregate of 31 magazines. MRI is currently testing a question asking about the percent of pages opened on just the last reading day (for the last issue read if more than one). This measurement, multiplied by reading days, would give an estimate of MPX for each individual magazine, and this could be cross-tabulated by place of reading.

### Should one discount out-of-home reading?

What are the implications of these relationships between places of reading and the qualitative variables which MRI also measures?

Concentrating on the differences between in-home and out-of-home readers, we can categorise them as follows:

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Strong association      | Reader actions   |
|                         | Reading time     |
| Less strong association | Reading days     |
|                         | Reader attitudes |
| Weak association        | Page openings    |

If the purpose of an advertising campaign is to stimulate direct actions, it is worth knowing the extent to which in-home reading has greater value, on average, in these circumstances.

Some advertisements are 'heavy text' or 'long copy'. If the advertiser's objective is to see that as many as possible of the members of the audience to the magazine do read it thoroughly, then it is worth knowing that in-home readers spend, on average, much more time with the magazine than out-of-home readers.

However, much advertising is designed primarily to be looked at, not read; the object is to register the brand name, to remind, to reinforce. The evidence on the matter is in effect that most magazine advertising exposures are very brief, of the order of one or two seconds only on average (based on filming or videotaping in laboratory situations, including situations in which subscribers are given copies of their magazines

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and asked to read them as they would do normally). In this case the medium makes its contribution if it leads to 'open eyes in front of the open page', and we have seen above that out-of-home readers open the majority of magazine pages, just as in-home readers do.

Unless or until a satisfactory MPX measure can be developed which reports the extent of multiple page openings, it seems that, for the great majority of magazine advertising, it would be wrong to suppose that out-of-home reading is substantially less valuable.

Finally, of course, we have all along been looking at averages. There are out-of-home readers who (for example) spend much more time reading any given magazine than in-home readers. Rather than working

with the place of reading as such, it may be preferable with any discounting or weighting system to work directly with the qualitative variables — whether they be exposure, attitudes or response — which are postulated to be directly rather than indirectly associated with the effectiveness of the medium.

### REFERENCES

- 1 Joyce, T, (1982) *Recent Reading*, Mediamark Research Inc.
- 2 Magazine Publishers Association, (1982) *MPX — A Study of Magazine Page Exposure*.