

QUANTIFYING THE QUALITIES: SHOULD WE MEASURE CONTACTS OR RELATIONSHIPS OR BOTH?

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The genesis of this paper comes from consideration of two separate projects conducted in Britain by RSL in late 1992. One was the second stage of qualitative work on behalf of the NRS quality of reading working party (on which the NPA, PPA, IPA and AMIP are represented) and comprised 50 semi-structured qualitative interviews. The other was Quality of Reading, a quantified survey of 2,544 adults, conducted for The Reader's Digest Association.

The first of these is described elsewhere in the symposium proceedings: the second needs explaining a little further. Reader's Digest has traditionally made much of "qualitative" measures - that is, research which helps to define the nature of the contact between reader and magazine, in terms which go further than the industry's basic questions on recency and frequency, and which also takes us some way towards evaluating the relationship which exists between reader and magazine. This and our previous British projects of a similar kind (1981, 1987) were, however, quantitative in methodology, not "qualitative" in the sense of group discussions or depth interviews. Our aim is to provide information which supplements what is available from other sources (eg. NRS, TGI) and which is helpful to agencies, media independents and advertisers in their choice of media, not only through questions about the nature and amount of reading but also by drawing a portrait of the publication and depicting the satisfactions, standards and values which the reader attributes to it. The research evaluated more than 30 magazines and newspaper supplements in this manner.

The CAPI interview technique was crucial to the success of the project, in particular in lessening the risk of interviewer error in certain questions. 6 EML-style cards were used, each listing 6 titles, and 4 rotation orders were employed.

After the NRS recency and frequency questions and 2 questions on regular reading in the past, the survey asked about the number of separate reading occasions, the total time spent reading, the amount (proportion) read, source of copy, and place of reading, for up to 6 titles of which the respondent was an 'almost always' or 'average issue' reader. These questions all referred to usual, typical behaviour.

There followed 18 statements (14 positive, 4 negative) and a question on confidence in editorial content, articles and features.

These were asked about up to 6 publications, priority being given to those read almost always or recently, but with provision for others to be asked about also, if they had been read in the last 12 months.

Respondents could say a statement applied to as many or as few publications as they wished.

Reading occasions, time spent, and amount read.

For some magazines there are very logical relationships between "standard" quality of contact measurements:

Table 1

Publication	Time Spent Reading	No. of Occasions
READER'S DIGEST	76 mins	5.4
Prima	67 mins	5.1
Good Housekeeping	59 mins	4.7

And most women's weeklies have time figures of 48-58 minutes accumulated over 2.9-3.5 occasions.

But **Take A Break** achieves a mean reading time of 83 minutes and 5.0 reading occasions, and an astonishing 67% read (or look at) the whole issue from cover to cover: other women's weeklies have figures in the 37-51% range. However, this magazine contains many time-consuming puzzles: in the latest issue these are spread through the book, on 16 of the 56 pages, so the numbers become far more explicable and likely.

TV listings magazines are looked at 9-12 times on average, but 5% of mentions were for over 30 occasions and a further 9% for 20-30. (Pre codes were **not** disclosed.) Total time spent reading varied from 48 to 54 minutes for the 4 weeklies concerned.

One way of looking at the answers to the various "standard" measures of quality of reading is to restrict ones examination to the frequent (almost always) readers.

In these examples it is probably easier to take the actual numbers involved:

Reader's Digest	Amount Read:					
	All	3/4	1/2	1/4	Very little, just glance	
Occasions:						
*7+	36	18	4	1	-	
4 - 6	23	18	15	8	1	
1-3	12	10	12	9	6	
	71	46	31	18	7	Total=173
Mean	9.1	8.4	4.3	3.7	2.1	

Occasions:	Time Spent Reading:			
	2 hrs+	1 -under 2 hrs	Under 1 Hour	
*7+	36	12	8	
6	15	7	5	
4-5	6	19	12	
1 - 3	6	13	29	
	63	51	54	Total=168
Mean	10.3	6.3	4.3	

Time Spent Reading:	Amount Read:					
	All	3/4	1/2	1/4	Very little, just glance	
2 Hours+	38	20	4	3	-	
1 to under 2 hrs	21	11	13	6	1	
Under 1 hour	13	13	15	9	7	
	72	44	32	18	8	Total=174
Mean (mins)	114	98	65	60	22	

* coded answers go up to 'over 30' occasions.

Even if some people find it difficult to answer these questions their answers have a logic to them.

One can, of course, with the full range of data at our disposal, do what we did do - inspect all cells (in the case of time spent reading, from 'over 3 hours' down to 'under 10 minutes', from 'over 30' down to '1' occasion) to look for 'maverick' readers. Even if all average issue readers are taken into account - and some of them may not have regular/typical/usual habits - there are few eccentricities or apparent inconsistencies. Of 363 Digest readers, only 1 claimed 7-9 reading occasions and under 10 minutes total reading, and only 1 claimed over 3 hours reading over a total of 2 occasions (which is at least a possibility). 1 respondent read for 31-59 minutes, apparently spread over 20-30 occasions.

Lastly, it may be useful to relate source of copy to time spent reading.

**Table 3 : Time spent reading
(by average issue readers)**

Reader's Digest	Total	Subscribers	Other primary	Total primary	Given copy	Lent/see copy
(Mean) Minutes	76	93	79	90	79	41

Magazine Image

The Reader's Digest image among its average issue readers is invariably better among the "heavier" readers. Some examples of this are:

Table 4:

	Occasion Read			Time Spent		Amount Read	
	Total	4+	1 - 3	1 Hour+	Under 1 Hr.	3/4+	1/2-
	363	194	138	193	159	192	159
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
In depth articles on serious subjects	65	73	54	77	51	74	54
Have learned a lot from it	56	63	44	65	44	69	41
Worth reading thoroughly	55	68	37	69	35	76	32
Helps me relax or unwind	49	64	32	63	33	65	33
I often keep it	46	58	31	55	33	60	30
Would always make time to read it	41	55	23	54	25	60	19
One of my favourite magazine	31	42	18	42	19	45	17
Complete confidence in editorial	23	30	15	27	19	32	13
and...							
I only read it when I've nothing better to do	33	25	43	24	44	22	46

Since the object of this paper is to look at the relationships between **measurements** rather than those between **magazines**, I have chosen to concentrate on our own figures. Needless to say, those for other publications are freely available.

One should add that there is considerable duplication between the 3 "heavy" categories:

146 of the **4 + occasions** readers (evenly split between 7+ and 4-6) read all or 3/4 of the average issue:

150 of them generally spend 1 hour or more with the magazine:

and 146 of the **1 hour +** readers read all or 3/4 of an issue.

Table 5

Reader's Digest image among its average issue readers

	Total	AIR and..	
		Read almost always	Read 3/4 or more
Base	363	174	192
	%	%	%
Confidence in editorial	67	76	76
In-depth articles	65	74	74
You can believe...	58	64	64
I've learned a lot...	56	66	69
Worht reading thoroughly	55	67	76
Helps me relax/unwind	49	63	65
It's for people like me	46	59	57
I often keep it	46	60	60
I read it for information/ideas	43	48	51
I always make time to read it	41	56	60
Gives me a lot to talk about	34	41	46
One of my favourite mag's	31	44	45
Many of my friends read it	25	34	31
It's part of my life	20	35	32
important to read every issue	17	29	28

In this table, 121 readers fall into both categories - an 'almost always' reading frequency and typically reading or looking at ¾ or more of the pages in an issue.

The image of the Digest is almost the same in both cases, and it's probably not surprising that, where the "read ¾ or more" readers rate the magazine more highly, the characteristics concerned are "worth reading **thoroughly**", "would always **make time** to read it", and "gives me a lot to **talk about**".

The ratings by 147 Digest **primary** readers are virtually the same as those of the 174 "almost always" readers in which they are included, except that they are more inclined (70 compared with 67%) to find the magazine worth reading thoroughly.

We would obviously like to see more agreement with statements such as "important to read every issue", "part of my life" and "one of my favourite magazines", but all newspaper supplements bar the Observer have lower figures (among their readers) than ours on the first 2 of these, while on 'favourite' we are ahead of all supplements and all TV listings magazines.

Table 6:**Reader's Digest image among different "user groups"**

	AIR and SUBSCRIBE and READ ALMOST ALWAYS	(Frequency of Readers)			(Source of Copy)			
		Almost always	Quite often	Only occasionally	Subscribe	Regular order/buy	Given copy	Left copy/seen
Base:	119 %	174 %	63 %	126 %	144 %	53 %	82 %	84 %
I would always MAKE TIME to read it	57	56	44	18	53	49	37	19
It's one of my FAVOURITE magazines	45	44	33	13	42	38	26	14
It's part of my LIFE	37	35	10	4	33	23	11	5
It's important to me to read EVERY ISSUE	33	29	13	2	31	17	6	4
I often KEEP IT	64	60	46	27	63	51	29	29
It helps me RELAX or UNWIND	63	63	48	32	61	49	52	26
It's for PEOPLE LIKE ME	59	59	41	30	57	45	51	23
Many of my FRIENDS read it	34	34	19	16	33	23	26	14
CONFIDENCE in editorial (complete)	32	29	24	14	31	30	17	12
(complete + good deal)	72	76	65	54	72	77	71	48
mean score	3.00	3.02	2.87	2.66	2.98	3.06	2.86	2.56

On the first 4 characteristics there are some very steep slopes, distinguishing between the more and less frequent readers and between subscribers/other primary readers and those receiving pass-on copies.

Interestingly, in the second 4, while the gradients are still there, those readers who are given their copies (perhaps on a regular basis) seem to feel about the Digest in much the same way as the primary readers do - it helps them relax or unwind, it's for people like themselves, and (to some extent) many of their friends read it. Clearly they have some kind of relationship with the magazine.

We look next at the relationships between specific image characteristics.

Table 7:

Reader's Digest Image among it's average readers		
	A: % Saying Reader's Digest has <u>one or both</u> of 2 characteristics	B: % of A Saying it has <u>both</u>
IN DEPTH articles and have LEARNED a lot	73	65
IN DEPTH articles and CONFIDENCE in editorials	80	64
IN DEPTH articles and can BELIEVE what you read	76	63
Can BELIEVE what you read and have CONFIDENCE in editorials	77	63
Have LEARNED a lot and worth reading THOROUGHLY	68	62
IN DEPTH articles and worth reading THOROUGHLY	74	61
Worth reading THOROUGHLY and helps me RELAX/UNWIND	65	60
Worth reading THOROUGHLY and MAKE TIME to read	60	60
Worth reading THOROUGHLY and CONFIDENCE in editorial	77	58
Can BELIEVE what you read and have LEARNED a lot	73	57
Have LEARNED a lot and MAKE TIME to read	62	56
Have LEARNED a lot and CONFIDENCE in editorial	79	56
Can BELIEVE what you read and worth reading THOROUGHLY	73	56
Have LEARNED a lot and for INFORMATION or IDEAS	64	56

The next 4 strongest associations are duplications of "for people like me" with in-depth articles, have learned a lot from it, helps me relax or unwind, and worth reading thoroughly. 6 other combinations have over 50% support from those mentioning one or other of the items concerned.

This leaves 5 characteristics which are not particularly correlated to any of the other 13 positive attributes - gives me a lot to talk about, one of my favourite magazines, many of my friends read it, it's part of my life, and it's important to me to read every issue.

It will be noted that 5 attributes (belief, confidence, in-depth, learned, thoroughly) are all quite strongly related, accounting for 10 of the first 13 combinations.

However, confidence in editorial (in the above and other tables) is based on both "complete" and "good deal" mentions. Complete confidence is most likely to be expressed by those Digest readers who say the magazine is one of their favourites, or that it is part of their lives, or that it's important to them to read every issue.

Table 8:**Reader's Digest and average issue readers of ... other publications asked about**

	4 or 5	0,1,2 or 3
Base:	76	76
	%	%
You can BELIEVE...	57	66
...FRIENDS read it	30	34
...read EVERY ISSUE	13	26
I'd always MAKE TIME	41	55
... a lot to TALK ABOUT	30	45
IN DEPTH articles	63	79
Helps me RELAX /UNWIND	45	61
Worth reading THOROUGHLY	51	68
Part of my LIFE	14	32
One of my FAVOURITE magazines	26	46
I often KEEP IT	38	59
I read it for INFORMATION/IDEAS	38	63
It's for PEOPLE LIKE ME	38	66
I've LEARNED a lot	46	76
CONFIDENCE in editorials	70	62
NOT as good as it used to be	13	14
NOT as popular as it used to be	20	28
DON'T often see PEOPLE READING it	25	43
READ if NOTHING BETTER to do	24	46

In general (but with confidence in editorial a notable exception) those asked about the Digest and a relatively small number of other publications had a better image of the Digest than those who were asked about more (5 or 6, including the Digest) magazines.

However, it appears that:

1) Fewer magazines asked about means more mentions for each: negative mentions (see the last 4 items above) also rise when fewer magazines are asked about:

2) If the 0-3 other publications mentions are divided between 2-3 and 0-1, the people asked about Reader's Digest and 2-3 others often take a more favourable view than those comparing the Digest with only one other publication or rating it on its own. They also made more negative comments, in line with point 1).

Actual numbers are rather low (2-3=32, 0-1=44) which is why they are not shown.

This analysis has been restricted to those interviews where respondents were average issue readers of all the magazines asked about and excludes cases where respondents were average issue readers of some and readers in the past 12 months (but not AIR, though they might be quite frequent readers) of others.

These findings also apply to other publications where mentions were sufficient to justify analysis in this detail, eg. Radio Times, You, and the Sunday Express and Sunday Times magazines.

Comparison of magazine images

Nos. of mentions where average issue readers of 2 magazines were asked about both of them.

Table 9:

No. of interviews...	READER'S DIDEST vs Radio Times		READER'S DIGEST vs You Magazine		READER'S DIGEST vs Quality Supp's*	
	RD	RT	RD	You	RD	QS
No. of interviews...	58		48		93	105
No. of mentions (not %)						
You can BELIEVE...	26	25	33	12	51	53
SERIOUS IN DEPTH articles	30	7	29	17	47	60
Its WORTH READING THOROUGHLY	30	17	24	13	46	35
I've LEARNED a lot from it	25	9	28	9	47	34
It helps me RELAX/UNWIND	28	16	20	19	47	28
I often KEEP IT	23	2	19	3	39	17
CONFIDENCE in editorial	34	31	36	23	58	61

* Sunday Times, Telegraph, Independent, Observer combined.

Although bases are rather low they are made up of the most relevant readers (at least according to present industry audience measurement requirements), and the responses capture the views of knowledgeable recent readers about 2 (or more) competing publications at the same point in time.

There is evidence of discrimination, whether or not one agrees with the opinions expressed by these readers.

This is not to say that other image or mood or relationship questions might not be more to the advantage of some of the publications concerned.

The work done by the NRS quality of reading working party and RSL has been useful: progress has been made in spite of "political" problems and the traditional stance taken by some publishers in regard to certain candidate questions. There are some measurements which could be introduced into the NRS without too much adaptation or controversy, though their commercial usefulness (as opposed to the ease of obtaining clear and complete answers from respondents) will need further discussion. Certainly, the context of the NRS - and the considerably greater number of publications it has to measure compared with publishers' or other surveys - must be considered in deciding how much more it can include. No-one wants AIR to be disturbed, but apparent shortcomings in the present frequency question must receive a high priority.

What I have tried to show is that, judged by the relationships between answers to different questions which only a quantified survey can demonstrate, we must take other evidence (than one small-scale qualitative project) into account in assessing the value and practicality of different kinds of "quality" question.

If exact media weights are not the priority objective for any quality of reading add-ons to the NRS to achieve, then perhaps we need to be satisfied with simpler categorisations of answers, eg. mutually-exclusive ranges of answer (such as 31-59 minutes) in a time spent question, as we used in our research.

But above all, if one is to differentiate between publications and their readers, one needs to include a sufficient number of dimensions and to use them in combination: mood needs to be linked to frequency or amount read if one is to understand both. That is why it is most likely that publishers will have to do much of their own research (as if they didn't already need to, for purposes unconnected with selling advertising space) and not expect the NRS or any other multi-client survey to answer all questions of interest. Ignore the bracket in the last sentence and add agencies and media independents to publishers!

As for ourselves, our regular editorial research shows the extent to which every editorial item is read and relates reading to positioning. Perhaps the next stage in our research will be to give wider publicity to these qualities.