

REACH OF NEWSPAPER SECTIONS: NEW METHODS, NEW FIGURES

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Background

In the Netherlands data have been collected about contact with a publication, AIR, reach and exposure probabilities for about 30 years (from TON'67 to SUMMOScanner). Sometimes researchers tried to cross the border of traditional readership research to get more insight into how people handle printed media and which items of a newspaper or magazine are read or not read. But these studies were complicated and difficult to carry out, and therefore rare.

A new impetus came in the beginning of the nineties because effectiveness and accountability became frequent agenda items. Advertisers and media planners considered figures on *average issue readership* by themselves were no longer adequate for decision making. More often than before they referred to the research situation for television, where (some kind of) *advertising reach* is measured.

Confronted with these arguments, The Media Partnership, Veldkamp and NIPO together developed a model to measure page traffic within print, based on modern CAPI technology and new research insights. After the development stage, the first large-scale quantitative research was carried out in April/May 1996 on reach and advertising effectiveness of newspaper sections. It's called The Newspaper Sections Survey (in Dutch: Het Katernen-onderzoek).

Important questions and topics that had to be answered by this study:

- appreciation of sections by newspaper readers (attitude)
- commitment and involvement with the sections (intention)
- intensity of reading of the different sections (behaviour)
- are sections focussed on target groups better read by these groups (quantity)
- is the advertising response better when they are placed in an appropriate 'Umfeld' or environment (= section) (quality).

For answering the first three questions we needed mainly descriptive statistics which were completely lacking in The Netherlands. Last data on reading behaviour of sections were collected in 1988, but they had a limited range and character (see Veldkamp 1988, 1989).

The model

Based on former experiences and the present wishes a number of requirements for the survey could be framed. Beside standard requirements as representativity and sufficient reliability, it was essential to know more about the relation between domains of interest, product use and the reading of sections. Moreover the impact of the advertisements should be measured in some way, to determine the surplus value of an appropriate 'Umfeld' or environment. And, last but not least, discussions about reach definition should be prevented by showing results under different conditions and definitions.

This set of requirements led to an approach, characterised by an innovative methodology.

Heart of our model is that measurement took place on four hierarchically ordered levels in a 'nearly real life situation'.

The real newspaper in a face to face interviewing situation is used to avoid confusion as much as possible. The interview is carried out on the day of publication, to avoid memory loss.

- The first of the hierarchical levels concerns the measurement of 'open eyes' before open pages,
- the second one if a reader read/noted something at a page (page reach),
- and at the third level is asked if specific advertisements/editorial articles are read/seen/looked at (reach of advertisements/reach of articles).
- Finally, on the fourth level, we traced how the message is assimilated (impact or effectiveness).

Such an elaborated and hierarchical approach would be too complex for 'paper-and-pencil' data collection, but a CAPI-approach delivers a solution.

CAPI, the Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing system, consists in principle of face to face interviewing of respondents with the help of a laptop. The advantages of using a computer for complex questionnaires is evident, and described earlier in research literature. (See for example the heading in the ESOMAR Newsbrief (vol. 5,1, January 1997) 'CAPI methods remain the main area of potential improvement and change in readership measurement'.)

A derived advantage of CAPI, which is especially used in this sections survey, is the possibility to distribute the questionnaire electronically by a telephone-modem connection with the interviewers. By doing so no time gets lost by mailing the interviewers. As soon as the questionnaire is ready, the distribution can take place without further waste of time.

The questionnaire for the section survey is dedicated to the newspaper of the specific day. Immediately after the issue appeared, the research team started to actualise the questionnaire. This enclosed among others the selection of advertisements of which impact should be assessed. An advantage was that an almost uncontrollable process of planned insertions of participating advertisers could be bent to a flexible selection process, based on realised insertions.

Another important advantage was that the interview could take place on the same day of the paper's issue when memory is still vivid. The timing of the interviewers was essential: too early interviewing could mean that the newspaper was possibly not read well enough, too late interviewing means that memory problems could play a greater role. For the section survey only the morning issues are taken into consideration. The fieldwork started on week-days at 19.00 hrs and for the Saturday edition on 15.00 hrs. A part of the interviews is realised on the next morning, respectively Monday morning.

As said before, the use of CAPI renders the possibility of selecting advertisements on which impact measuring can be done. From each newspaper about 10 advertisements were chosen spread over the various sections and further spread as to product, size and insertion. In total 82 advertisements have been taken into consideration. Variation was the core in our selection process. To avoid a bias, questions about these ads were mixed with questions about the reading intensity of some specific editorial articles.

For the impact measurement we sought linking up with Admedia RRO-measurements of her magazines.

The following impact variables have been measured in the section survey:

- product realisation: when seeing/reading the ad did you realise which product the ad concerned?
- brand realisation: when seeing/reading the ad did you realise which brand the ad concerned?
- likeability: evaluation of the advertisement (schoolmark)

Along with the impact of the advertisements also the product categories or domains in which the respondents are interested, are established. Based on the contents of the sections sixteen relevant domains are chosen. So, on one hand the interest in a product field is measured and on the other hand the impact of advertisements. Therefore it is in the analyses possible to cross eventual reach and effect of advertisements with the degree of interest in the concerning product, split up into an appropriate or non-appropriate 'Umfeld' or environment.

In scheme 1 we summarize the five basic characteristics of our approach.

Scheme 1: Five basic characteristics of the newspaper section model

- (1) four hierarchical levels of reach measurement
 - (a) open eyes before open pages
 - (b) something read/noted at a page
 - (c) advertisement/article seen/looked at/read
 - (d) advertising effectiveness
- (2) copy test in 'nearly real life situation' (with the help of the real newspaper, interview at day of publication)
- (3) use of CAPI combined with electronic distribution of questionnaire (by modem)
- (4) analysis of the relation between domain specific interests and reach of specific newspaper sections
- (5) analysis of editorial environment (sections) and ad-effectiveness

Data

The measurement concerns two national daily newspapers, De Volkskrant and De Telegraaf.

De Telegraaf is a popular paper for a broad public, De Volkskrant is a quality paper for the higher educated segment. De Volkskrant has higher reach figures in the three big cities in the western part of the Netherlands. Total reach figures (13+) are: De Telegraaf 58%, de Volkskrant 29%. Average issue readership figures: De Telegraaf 17%, De Volkskrant 7%. In the highest social class De Telegraaf has an AIR of 18% and De Volkskrant of 16%.

For each of these titles four issues are scrutinized. The selection of these issues is spread as much as possible: firstly over days of the week and secondly spread over several weeks. In the course of four weeks a Wednesday-, Thursday-, Friday- and Saturday-issue are tested. In total data are gathered about 8 issues. For each issue n = 125 respondents have been interrogated, in total n = 1000 respondents.

The sample consists of readers of the respective papers with a proportional representation of subscribers and single buyers, and a proportional representation over The Netherlands.

The respondents have been approached on the day of issue. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of general questions about reading behaviour. Followed by questions of awareness, relation with and appreciation of the sections in general. Then the interview was continued about the newspaper of that specific day, which the interviewer brought with him. So the questions about page-reach and the impact of advertisements were posed with the newspaper on hand. Finally, a number of questions about interests in social, political and product items were asked (domain-specific interests).

It is relevant to specify that there are two types of sections. First there are physical sections: the loose parts a newspaper is made of, because of the printing techniques. Besides that there are sections with regard to contents: regularly or daily parts of the newspaper with their own title or layout.

Results

Attitude towards sections

Before the application of the hierarchical readership model, some general attitudinal questions about specific newspaper sections were posed to the respondents:

- (a) spontaneous awareness of (names of) sections
- (b) aided awareness (by showing a photograph of the heading of the first page of the section)
- (c) general evaluation of the section by assignment of a schoolmark (1 = very bad, 10 = very good)
- (d) commitment, measured by the 'classical' question: 'if section X would be deleted from the newspaper, to which degree would you miss the section'
- (e) preference, measured by the question: 'if you compare the sections, which one are you looking forward to mostly?'

Data are collected concerning 24 sections (10 De Volkskrant, 14 De Telegraaf). For an international conference it is not very appealing to present data at section level because the audience is not acquainted with the details of the Dutch newspapers. So we will confine ourselves to some general figures:

Spontaneous and aided awareness of sections

14 sections have a spontaneous awareness above 40%, 3 between 20%-40% and 7 under 20%. Aided awareness is much higher: only two sections have an awareness score below 50%.

There is - at one side - a relation between section awareness and frequency of reading, reader commitment to the newspaper in general and history (the number of years the specific newspaper is read) and - at the other side - between awareness of specific sections and domain-specific interests (e.g. interest in cars correlates with awareness of the car section, financial-economic interests correlate with knowing the financial section).

General evaluation of sections

In general the sections are appreciated. The highest assigned schoolmark is 7.7, the lowest 6.1 (on a 10-point scale: 1 = very bad, 10 = very good). No evaluation score can be characterised as insufficient.

Evaluation of the different sections is strongly correlated with interests. This applies especially for sports, arts, science, holidays, financial-economic matters.

Commitment to sections

16 sections have a commitment above 40%, that means at least 40% would regret the disappearance of that specific section. There is a difference between the two newspapers incorporated in this study: 9 out of the 10 Volkskrant sections have a commitment score above 40% and only 7 out of the 12 Telegraaf sections. Commitment is, again, strongly correlated with interests.

All in all we can conclude that in general readers have a positive attitude towards specific newspaper sections. Compared to De Telegraaf, De Volkskrant has a stronger commitment.

In the next paragraph we will describe the results concerning reading behaviour.

Reading of newspaper sections

The reading behaviour of newspapers is characterized by a selection process of sections, pages and articles. In general one starts with the front page and uses this page as a selection for the section. As a consequence of this handling of the newspaper, there is a declining reach between the first, second and following sections.

Almost all readers take the first section in hand. But, also from the first sections not all pages are opened. On average 90% is opened. This is for the second section on average 75% and on average 60% for the third and following sections (see column 3 in table 1).

When opening the pages a selection is made of interesting and relevant items. So, when asked if something is read or looked into, a similar pattern at a lower level is found. From the first section on average 70% of the pages is read or looked into, from the second section 50%, from the third and following sections on average 35% (see column 4, table 1).

Instead of choosing for one reach definition, we decided to make no preceding choice of the definition of the reach. On the contrary we chose for the various definitions, in order not only to prevent a 'definition clash', but also to get more insight into the reading behaviour itself. Each definition has its own meaning. Combining of definitions renders a kind of multiplier effect, because it gives more insight into the handling of the sections.

The four definitions are:

- section open eyes: at least open eyes for one page in a section
- section reach: at least something read at one page in a section
- average page open eyes: average open eyes scores of all pages of the section
- average page reach: average reach (= something read/noted at a page) scores of all pages of the section

As we stated earlier in 1988 the first results about reach of newspaper sections were published in The Netherlands and a definition clash emerged. Some wanted section open eyes (mainly the publishers), others wanted average page reach (mainly media planning agencies). In this study we decided not 'to burn our fingers' and to present the resulting figures from four definitions.

In table 1 we present the detailed figures for various definitions.

	section open eyes	section reach	average page open eyes	average page reach
1st section	99%	99%	89%	71%
2nd section	93%	91%	74%	47%
3rd + sections	82%	76%	63%	36%

Table 1: reach of newspaper sections (4 definitions)

These results are also presented in a graphical form per page (see figure 1 and figure 2, in the appendix).

In this pattern two conclusions are clearly visible. On the first place the gradual decline. On the second place the clear "saw tooth shape". This is a reflection of the basic-offer pattern of the newspaper, with on the left page the advertisements and on the right page the editorial articles. In figure 1 we see the reading profile of De Volkskrant Thursday-issue. The newspaper consists of two physical sections. The line above represents the percentage open eyes before an open page, the dotted line represents the reading score for a page. The percentage readers with open eyes varies from 100% (front page first section) to 56% for page 28 (back page second section). It's striking that the back pages of both sections have relatively low levels of open eyes and reading scores (they are behaving more or less like 'normal' left pages).

In figure 2 the reading profile of De Telegraaf Saturday-issue is given. For this newspaper the back page of a section scores the expected higher reading level than the last pages within the section.

As is shown in figure 3 there is a relation between number of pages and open eyes before open pages. As the volume of the newspaper grows, readers will be more selective. But the relation is clearly not linear. A five times bigger volume reduces the page openings by about 20 - 25 %.

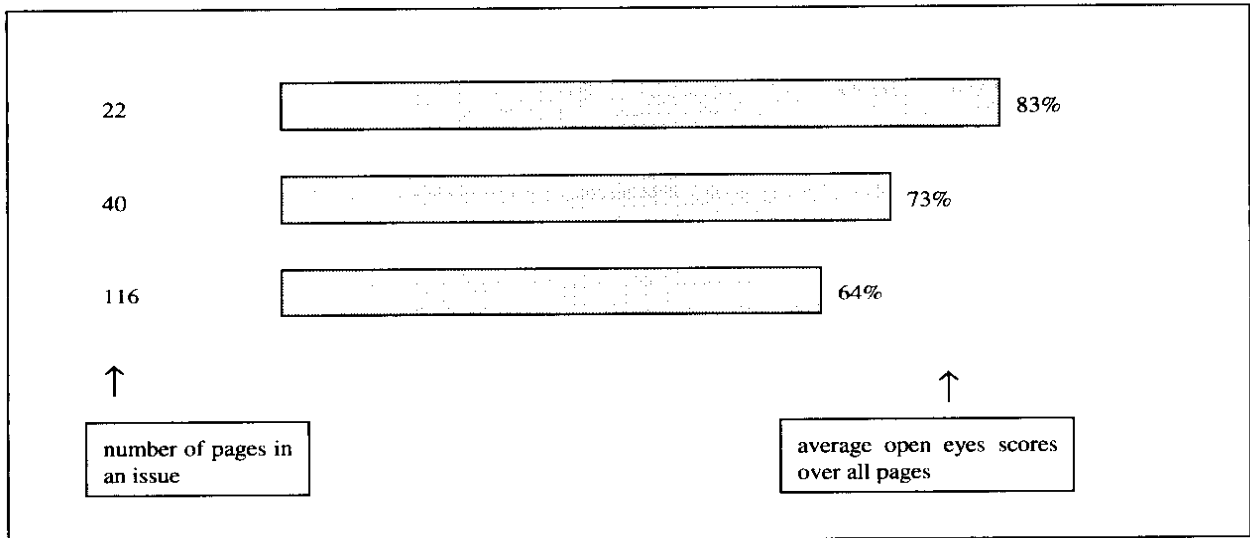


Figure 3: relation between number of pages in an issue and average open eyes scores over all pages

Sections and advertisements

The average reach of all advertisements (n = 82) is 36% (based on recognition); this is in line with earlier findings in The Netherlands (see Cebuco 1985, 1992). As is shown in table 2 there is a relation between advertisement reach and section, but the decrease is not dramatic. The highest reach score of a specific advertisement is 62%, the lowest 17%, there is a broad range in noting scores.

	average ad reach
of ads in 1st section	41%
of ads in 2nd section	34%
of ads in 3rd+ section	29%

Table 2: advertisement reach and section

Of course, advertisement reach takes place in the 'slipstream' of section and page traffic. To separate advertisement-effect and page-effect we developed a kind of 'visibility measure' (in Dutch: zichtbaarheidsindex). In this measure we divide the advertisement reach score by the page reach score. If we apply the measure we don't see a declining effect as is shown in table 3.

	average ad visibility
of ads in 1st section	66%
of ads in 2nd section	79%
of ads in 3rd+ section	75%

Table 3: advertisement visibility scores and section (advertisement reach/page reach of the page on which the ad is placed)

So we can conclude that if a page has been read the ad will be in the 'slipstream', independent of the section.

In table 1 we saw in the second section a decrease in average page reach compared to the first section (47% and 71%), but if a page in this second section has reach the probability of noting an ad is high.

In a further analysis we find that product realisation, brand realisation and likeability of an ad do not vary according to section. As an example we present an overview of the results of brand realisation in Table 4.

	average brand realisation of ads
in 1st section	75%
in 2nd section	79%
in 3rd+ section	73%

Table 4: brand realisation (average % brand realisation of ads in a section) and section

We can conclude that the noting scores of ads decline in the newspapers because page traffic declines from front page of the first section to the back page of the last section. But, if an ad is noted there is no difference in assimilation process according to the position in a section.

The influence of domain-specific interests

The question now is whether a decline in reach because of the 'normal' reading pattern is compensated by the power of attraction on interested readers of specific sections. Therefore the next example is rendered (see table 5) with regard to respondents who say to be interested in financial subjects (domain-specific segmentation).

	interested in financial affairs	not interested
average page reading scores		
· 1st section	72%	70%
· financial section	57%	34%

Table 5: average page reach in 1st section versus financial section according to domain-specific interest

We can conclude that there is in the first section no different filter between interested and non-interested persons (average page reading scores 72% and 70%). But in the financial section we see a clear difference: the average page reach is in case of interested people substantial higher than in case of non-interested people (57% versus 34%). So sections focussed on target groups are better read by these groups. But, at the other hand, it can be stated that the attraction power of the financial section on interested persons is, however, not to such a degree that it can bridge the 'normal' decline. The reach of the financial section is also in case of interested ones lower than the first section (72% versus 57%). The loss is not compensated by the interest-effect.

This phenomenon is also valid for other areas of interest: people interested in cars do read the car section better than the non-interested segment, but reading scores of car interested individuals in the car section are still lower than in first and second section.

Effect of 'Umfeld' or environment on assimilation of an ad

The question which lies finally within the scope of reach and interest is whether an appropriate 'Umfeld' generates a qualitative surplus value. It is striking that from the 82 measured advertisements only 10 (12%) were placed in a more or less appropriate setting. So 'Umfeld' planning in newspapers takes a moderate place. Because of this we dispose of only a few observations and the results can only be interpreted as being indicative.

With regard to advertisements within an appropriate 'Umfeld' we find a small positive influence on product-realisation, and no influence on brand-realisation level. An explanation could be that the appropriate setting is explicit at product-level (for example insurances in the financial section), but not at brand-level. One expects an advertisement for investments in a financial section, but has no specific expectations at brand-level.

Conclusions

Readers have in general a positive attitude towards specific newspaper sections. Commitment is relatively strong. But, it still remains true that during the handling of the newspaper a decline in reach appears, partly because of a sequence-effect, partly because of filtering by the reader. Interest in a subject influences this pattern in a positive way, but not to such a degree that it compensates the normal decline.

Advertisement reach takes place in the 'slipstream' of section and page traffic, so there is a relation between advertisement reach and section. In the first section ad scores are higher than in the third and following sections. A very interesting finding in this study is that the assimilation process of ads (product realisation, brand realisation, likeability) is not influenced by the section they are placed in, scores are the same in the first section and third and following sections.

For media planning purposes to generate reach the first section remains to be the most attractive section. With regard to advertisements within an appropriate 'Umfeld' or environment we find a small positive influence on product realisation, and no influence on brand realisation level. The appropriate setting creates expectations at product level, not at brand level.

The survey regards two national daily newspapers. It is the question in how far this is representative for all newspapers. In our survey we find some differences between the two titles, but all in all we think generalisations can be made.

We can conclude that we developed a tool that clarifies a basic reading behaviour of newspapers and helps to get insight in the contribution of the medium to advertising effectiveness. Also our figures can be a helpful tool in discussions about differential advertising tariffs dependent upon the position in the newspaper.

References

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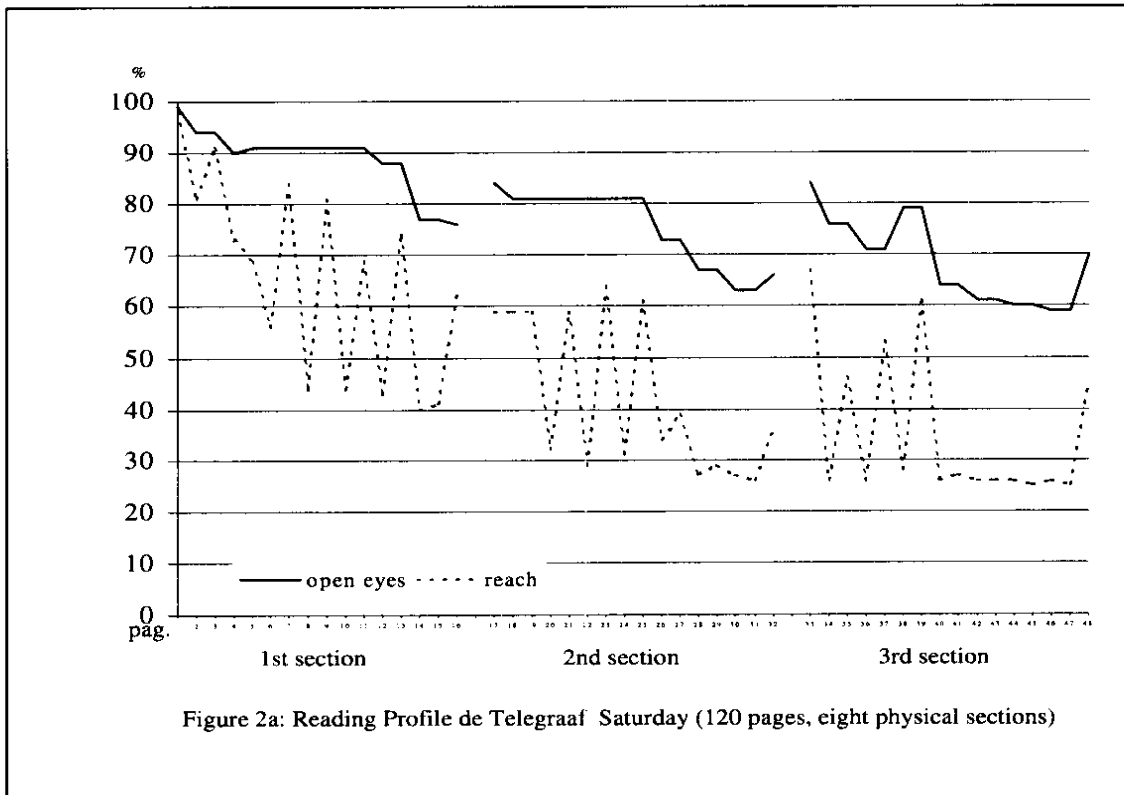
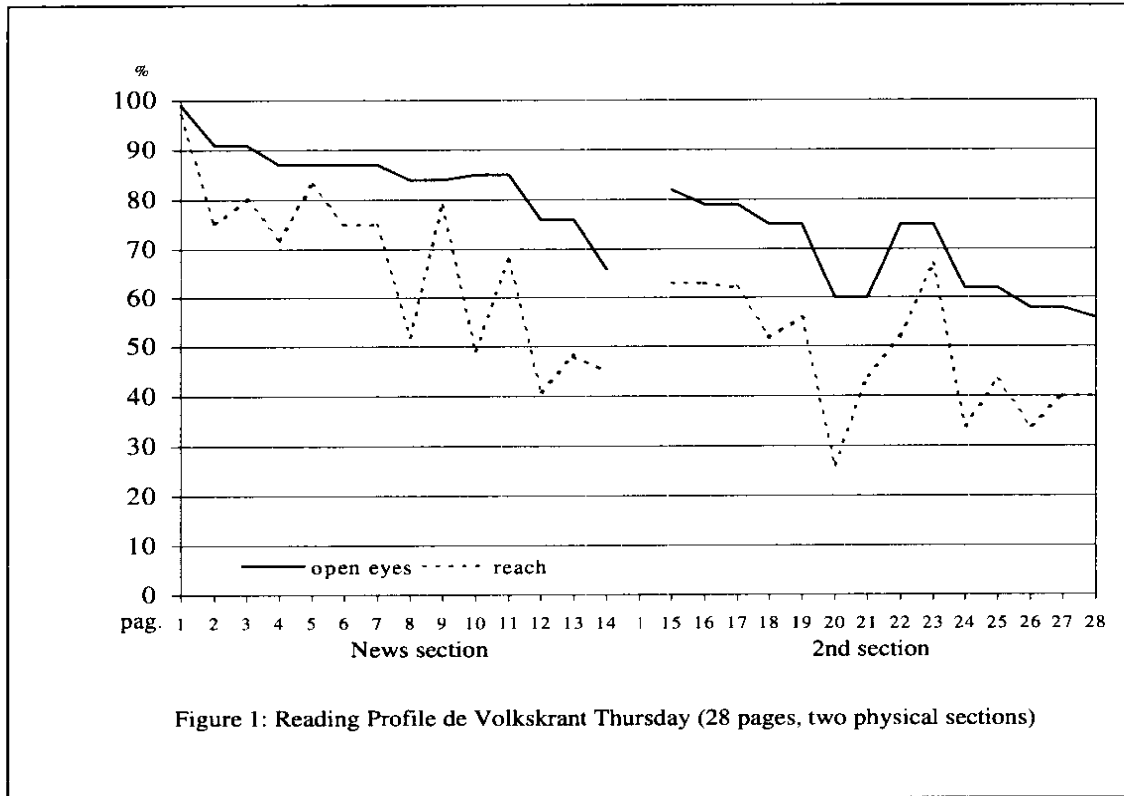
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Appendix



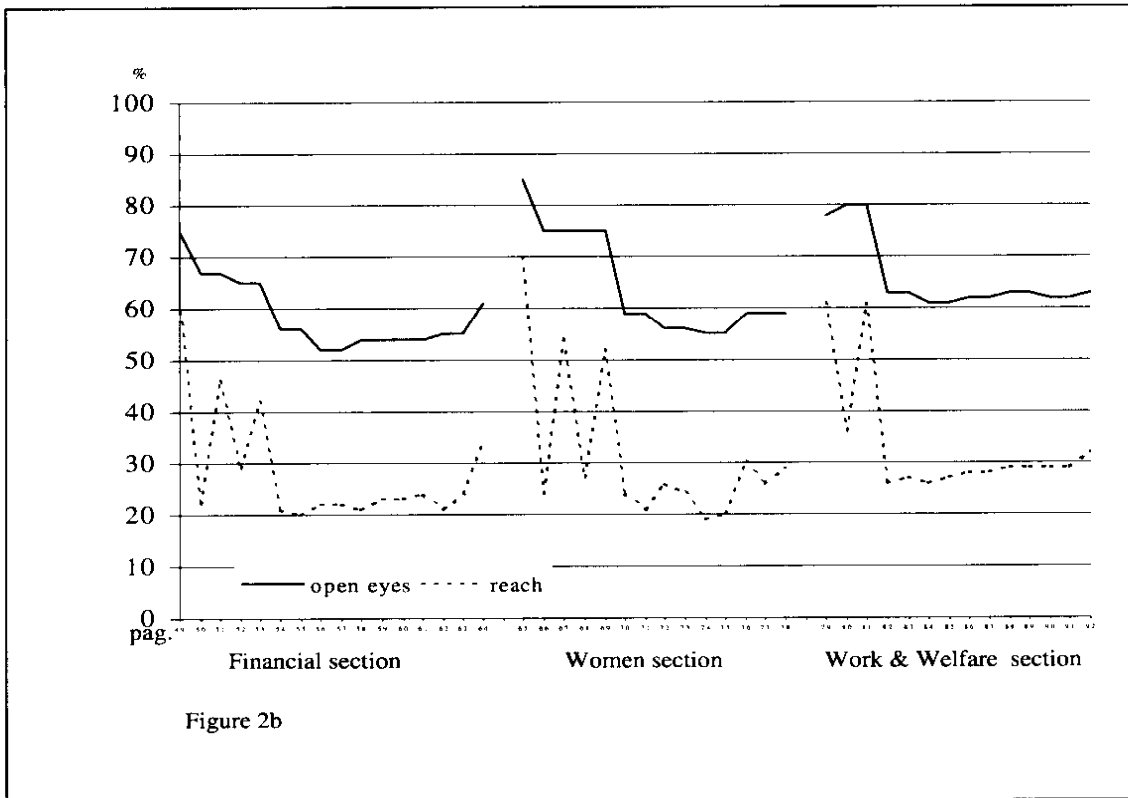


Figure 2b

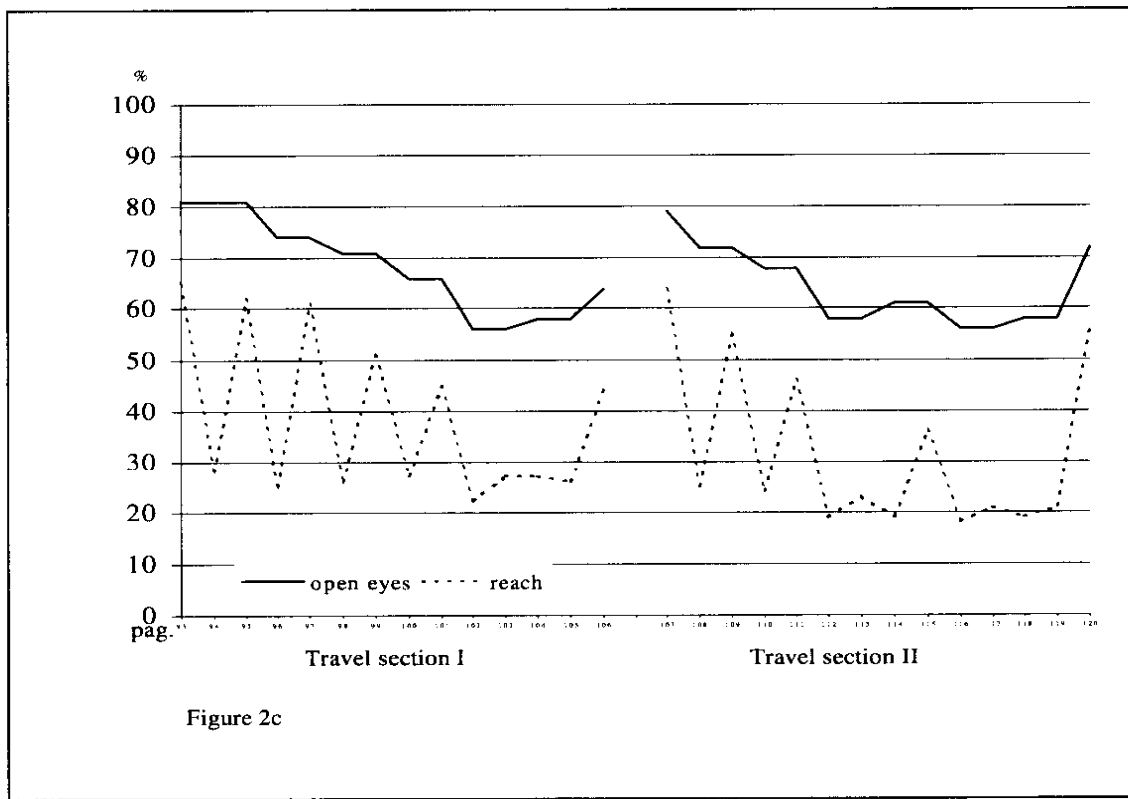


Figure 2c

