

8.4 A suggestion from India

The deliberations of the last few days have brought to the fore sharp differences among the different interests assembled here – the researchers, publishers, advertisers and agencies – not to speak of the different views held within each group itself. Yet one underlying factor was never missed in the midst of the conflicting views and the confusion created thereby. The need for research was never in dispute. If at all, the need for, and benefits of, readership research were further emphasised.

The advertiser wants it because he would like to be assured that his decisions on media selection are right, and as immediate measurement of results might not be possible he can fall back on research findings to justify his decisions.

For the advertising agency, it is more an aid to sell their campaign to the client than a tool to draw up the campaign itself, while research helps publishers like us to continue to educate and inform us in more detail about our readership: we certainly welcome more and more information on the subject so that we can make further and continuing improvements in our products.

And lastly, the researchers, they, of course, need research – because – well, they need research.

I confine my comments here to my requirements as a publisher. We are not concerned about the methodology adopted by the researchers. Whether it be the 'TTB' or 'RR' or 'MRR', the 'IMS' or 'Telmar' or 'HRS' and so on, that are employed, we should have findings that can stand scrutiny and that can be acceptable to the different interests concerned.

The primary objective should be to achieve a reasonable measure of acceptability and credibility in the findings. If different exercises carried out by different bodies or by the same body applying different techniques produce varying results, we are not benefited at all – nor do such exercises carry conviction.

How can we achieve acceptability and credibility? I believe that if the responsibility for national surveys could be vested in all countries in an apex body comprising all the interested groups, advertisers, agencies, publishers and researchers, perhaps in a modified form of JICNARS in the UK, we would have taken a step forward in this regard.

Most countries have an ABC – an Audit Bureau of Circulations – to carry out the quantitative analysis of circulation. In my view, a similar body could undertake the qualitative analysis of circulation too.

Although most of us have in our respective countries independent audit bureaux, all these bureaux subscribe largely to the general tenets and principles, and the reach and authority of ABC on an international basis have been accepted. Cannot a similar apex body be formed to carry out the qualitative analysis too? Besides the advertisers, agencies and publishers who constitute the ABC, the proposed body could have the benefit of the participation of researchers too – and as ABC entrusts the function and responsibility of quantitative analysis to a panel of auditors approved by them, an approved panel of researchers could be invited by the proposed body to undertake the qualitative analysis of different publications.

The yardsticks to be employed, methodology to be adopted, models and techniques to be used, etc, for the qualitative analysis could be designed and decided by the body, as is done by ABC for quantitative analysis.

The ABC's findings – the audited net sales of their member publications – are accepted by all concerned, and publishers who believe in making tall and false claims about their circulations keep themselves away from ABC for their own reasons. Cannot a similar body enforce similar discipline in the industry in so far as qualitative analysis is concerned? I believe it can.