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HOW ARE WE DOING?

When I entered the market research business, I think 27 years ago, I joined BMRB and was quite soon after obliged to sit in the research officers' room with seven other research officers, one of whom was a former District Officer in Her Majesty's Colonial Service who had a very loud booming voice which drove us all crazy. He was doing a survey on tractor driver shovels when I first started work there, but BMRB obtained a commission to do a survey in what was then called Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on the consumption of Horlicks, a malted milk drink. He got his pith helmet, I think quite literally out of his attic, and dusted it off and went out like a good Colonial Officer: he recruited the interviewers, drew the sample, did everything, and back came the results. The early tabulations showed claims to consume Horlicks which were equivalent to nine times its known sales in Ceylon. That did not phase him a bit; his comment was "Awful liars, these people".

The same, of course, can be found in any country in the world; it is part of the deficiencies which we all know very well in market research, and know very well too in media research. We have been reminded at this Symposium that if you ask different questions you get different answers, that changes in techniques give different results. There are concerns about audience levels, which have been raked over endlessly. Are they too high? Are they unbelievably high? Are there problems in the links back to circulation or not? Are they too low? In the audience estimates, could it be that we are losing people because of screening, because of memory problems of whatever kind, whatever the memory stimuli?

I heard of a country where there are two competing services (not the United States I hasten to add) but where one service apparently gets twice the levels of another and the head of the

first organisation says this is because his interviewers are twice as good. But, seriously, validity is extremely important and we will lose credibility as a profession if we do not try and make some concerted attempt to establish the true level of magazine reading. The point which should be not be overlooked is that there is a truth out there. If you have a definition, and the definition is clear, if we want to know the number of adults in the United States aged 18 or over who read or look into (which can be defined further) the average issue of *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News*, whatever it is, over a given time period, then for that clear definition there is a truth and I think it is our duty and responsibility to do further work in the validity area. And so in this regard I am absolutely on the side of those involved as I am myself, in the validity work of the Advertising Research Foundation in the United States, and I suggest that all of you should continue to take considerable interest in what will come out of that.

There is also, and this has been adverted to by other speakers, an issue about comparability. Something which I am hearing more and more is the concern that one cannot know whether the results obtained by different surveys done in different ways, and in different countries, have any comparability at all. They are certainly different, I cannot think of a single case where exactly the same procedure is applied in two or more countries. There are advertisers, and I think there will be more as time goes by (and I am remembering a contribution made by Roger Godbeer in one of the early sessions on the question of global marketing and global magazines), concerned that one cannot know where to spend one's money. The international advertiser is increasingly being faced with this question, in just the same way as *within* the United States or the United Kingdom or other countries, one is concerned about the allocation of

television money across markets. One cannot make rational decisions in the absence of comparable data, and I have firstly a certain intellectual curiosity about what would happen if, let us say, our system were to be applied in other countries, and secondly (quite frankly) I have maybe a commercial interest in that which I certainly intend to pursue and would be interested to discuss that with anyone else who was interested.

My last point - and here I agree very strongly with Clark Schiller - is that we must be concerned all the time with relevance. While we are concerned about accurate total audience numbers they are a surrogate: what one should be concerned with is the economic return the advertiser gets and the closer we can get to collecting media measurements which have a bearing on that, the better. I think the previous session was highly relevant in that regard. The more one works with qualitative data (and I do a lot concerning magazines) the more one

becomes aware of the enormous range so far as readers are concerned. It is just not true, to misquote Gertrude Stein, that a reader is a reader is a reader. We have people with very casual contact with the magazine issue - let us talk about the average issue audience, who should be counted towards that audience - and we have people who read and re-read, spend hours with a magazine issue, and are being exposed over and over and over again to the advertising in that particular magazine. It seems to me just plain wrong to go on assuming that everybody counts either one or zero. I believe that the qualitative thrust is important, I believe that the page exposure is important, and that to have more relevant measures, to have credible measures because the validity has been checked, and to have comparable measures across the different countries of the world, will mean that in a very small way the world will be a better place, and we can say to advertisers that we are serving their interests well.