

# **Pragmatic Readership Measures for the Future**

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by

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## **1. SYNOPSIS**

This research was undertaken with a very pragmatic aim - to develop a means of collecting data to enable both "recent-reading" figures (comparable with recent-reading currency) and surrogate "through-the-book" figures (inflation due to telescoping being reduced and the figure approximating what would be achieved using "through-the-book") to be collected from the same survey.

The benchmark for surrogate "through-the-book" estimates was the Roy Morgan Readership Survey methodology, i.e. for monthly magazines "through-the-book" and colour front cover recognition, and for weekly magazines "first-time reading" in the last 7 days.

The research did indeed demonstrate that it is possible to achieve either "recent-reading" or surrogate "through-the-book" estimates, or both, in a cost effective manner. However, in the tradition of all good research, the study also held some surprises and raised questions which the researchers had not anticipated.

First, the results showed that for weekly magazines the "recent-reading" question gave higher figures than those achieved using "first-time reading" (i.e. the benchmark surrogate "through-the-book"). This was as anticipated. Moreover, the further finding that a "frequency of reading" question could be used to produce an "average issue" readership estimate which was similar to the "first-time reading" figure, was exactly what these practical researchers were looking for.

However, for monthly magazines the “recent-reading” question gave remarkably consistent figures to the benchmark “through-the-book”. This was not expected: it was useful in terms of the original aim of finding a way of producing “recent-reading” figures and “through-the-book” comparable figures in the same survey. But...

- Replication is supposed to be a greater problem for monthlies than weeklies;
- Telescoping and elastic memories are supposed to get worse the longer the recall period (ie a month more so than a week).

Most of the previously published research suggests that the problem of inflation in “recent-reading” or deflation in “through-the-book” will be greater for monthlies than for weeklies (eg Morgan [1982, 1983], Morgan et al [1991]). Most, but not all. Almost thirty years ago, Simmons (1969) concluded that total audience readership levels as measured by “filter recall method” (which is actually a form of “recent-reading”) the Brand Rating Index Service (BRI) versus the Simmons “through-the-book” were extremely close year after year. (He went on to demonstrate differences in subgroups and frequency distributions, but left unexplained the consistency at the total level between the different approaches.)

Until the late 1970s, because of the similarities in estimates from the two surveys using disparate methods, most American researchers were of the belief that the two methods produced roughly equivalent results. However, when Simmons used the “recent-reading” methodology in their survey, the resulting readership estimates were severely inflated.

What then, was the difference between the BRI research (which was able to produce roughly equivalent results to Simmons’ “through-the-book” estimates) and Simmons’ “recent-reading” research (which produced such inflated estimates)? And does the answer help explain why in our latest research we did not get the same level of inflation in our readership estimates for monthlies as all our previous research had led us to expect?

The difference between BRI and Simmons was the data capture method - BRI being a self-completion survey, Simmons being personal interview. One hypothesis would be that somehow the self-completion survey removes or counteracts the inflationary effects of recent-reading (Joyce [1982]). This study provides support for the hypothesis derived from the somewhat serendipitous experiment that Simmons and BRI were a part of in 1969.

To be confident of the logic we reviewed the various sources of error, and the likely impact of various methodologies. Following that review, our contention is that prestige is a critical issue in readership research - more critical than has been previously considered. And moreover, that the self-completion methodology overcomes “prestige”.

## 2. CONTEXT

For many years, a war has raged over “recent-reading” (recency) vs “through-the-book” (or specific issue) and/or “first-time reading”. Proponents of “recent-reading” claim “through-the-book” and “first-time reading” underestimate true readership, while proponents of “through-the-book” and “first-time reading” claim “recent-reading” overestimates true readership.

We are firmly and unashamedly on the side of “through-the-book”/“first-time reading” - and our conviction grows as we apply the measurement techniques of readership to measurement of consumer behaviour in other areas, e.g.:

- banking and finance
- tourism and travel
- paint purchasing and home renovation

In all these areas where there are known data against which to compare survey results ‘recency’ type questioning has always produced inflated results. Wherever it is important to have accurate data we have found some kind of correction for inflation is always needed.

However, we did not feel that yet another paper arguing the same debate was appropriate for a substantial conference such as this. It’s time to step back and look at the big picture. The reason is simple and obvious. There are moments in any business when massive change occurs, when all the rules of business shift fast, furiously and forever. Andrew Grove, president and CEO of Intel, in his recently published book “Only the Paranoid Survive” calls such moments strategic inflection points.

A strategic inflection point can be set off by almost anything:

- mega competition;
- a change in the regulatory environment
- even a seemingly modest change in technology.

In the media research business, and indeed in the broader field of market research, we have all these and more.

- Technology has changed what we measure and how we can measure it; we have new forms of media; the new and the old media are converging; and media is converging with communications;

- Users/clients have become more demanding, more sophisticated and increasingly more practical;
- Social changes have also come into play, e.g. privacy issues;
- The economics of information are changing (collecting, analysing and reporting); and
- The market itself has changed with moves to larger media buying houses, and globalisation of markets and marketing.

Today our industry - market research - is at a strategic inflection point (as are many of our clients' industries). Andrew Grove points out that, managed wrongly, a strategic inflection point can mean the end of the game. Managed right, it can turn into a powerful force. Clearly, we all want to manage it right.

It would clearly not be managing it right to continue to wage war among ourselves about the measurement of print media, as the world of media expands exponentially. The continued relevance of readership measurement is at stake, and depends on our understanding its position within the emerging new paradigm.

Within this new paradigm, much is different but three things are still the same:

- First, the end consumer is still a person - human, fallible, inconsistent - watching, reading, listening and making choices;
- Second, there is still a need for some kind of currency between key negotiators - although the arena for these negotiations is changing;
- Third, the overall aim of the advertiser is still the same: **to achieve increased advertising productivity by enabling more powerful impact at lower cost.**

We believe the means to achieve this for the advertiser, and to recognise both the consumer in the equation and the changing shape of media buying is **a single focus from strategic planning through marketing, media planning into media buying** (eg, Roy Morgan Single Source - see Appendix I).

But what about accuracy in measurement? We'd all agree accuracy is important. We'd also all agree that **it is more important for a sinking ship to identify where the leak is - and fix it - than to measure with infinite precision the rate at which it is sinking.**

So, of course, accuracy is desirable, but at what price, and to what extent, and where are the priorities? If we agree the aim is increased advertising productivity, then the issue of accuracy in measurement must be evaluated against that. In Australia and most other countries where there are good measures of TV, radio, and print, we suggest accuracy in measurement of the new media is critical - hits on the internet vs visits vs visitors is a critical distinction.

But the value of increasing accuracy in existing measures of traditional media must be weighed up against the **cost** of increasing the accuracy. After systematically reviewing our clients' needs in Australia, the view we have taken is that:

- increasing accuracy in measuring **total audience** does not add value;
- increasing accuracy in measuring **within relevant targets** adds enormous value; and
- increasing accuracy within targets **across all media** is all powerful.

This means single source multimedia. This in turn means we have to get practical. What our clients (publishers and advertising agencies and advertisers) will need from us in this ever increasingly complex area of media and communications are flexibility and practical solutions. This may sound simple - it is as simple as changing the culture of an entire industry.

### 3. AIM

Our aim in undertaking the research which will be discussed in this paper was to develop a means of collecting data to enable two sets of readership estimates to be generated from the same survey: the traditional “recent-reading” estimates; and surrogate “through-the-book” estimates (inflation due to telescoping being reduced and the figure approximating what would be achieved using “through-the-book”). **We found that we did not achieve this aim but that we produced a result which was even more useful.**

Although our reason for conducting the research was initially and primarily purely commercial, our reason for presenting the findings in a paper to other researchers has more to do with the realisation that in this field of media measurement where everything is changing and complexity is increasing at a frightening rate, there simply is no time for arguments of the kind we have all enjoyed in the past - like “recent-reading” vs “through-the-book”. We must all put our minds to the real task ahead.

## **4. RESEARCH STRATEGY & METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Overview**

At the simplest level our research strategy was:

- to revisit and review existing experimental research and known sources of error in readership measurement;
- to devise a series of questions designed to measure readership from several different perspectives (or different measures);
- to capture data for each of the different measures in the one survey, i.e. with the same set of respondents;
- to devise a series of calculations which, when applied to the measures, would provide:
  - (a) a figure comparable with recent-reading currency; and
  - (b) a deflated figure, approximating what would be achieved using through-the-book.

### **4.2 Experimental Readership Research Review & Sources of Error**

A number of issues have been identified and well documented over many years as potentially affecting the accuracy of readership estimates:

- Telescoping or elastic memory: a tendency among respondents to report reading a particular publication within a specified time period when in reality they read it outside that time period;
- Poor memory: poor recollection of reading events which took place, i.e. respondents forgetting they read the publication or recalling the event as outside (earlier than) the specific time period;
- Replication: the repeated reading of a particular issue of a publication including after the next issue is available;
- Parallel reading: the reading of more than one issue of a publication for the first time within the publication period (e.g. catch-up reading);
- Prestige or social desirability: tendency among respondents to claim readership of publications they have not read, or not read within the specific time period, to look or sound good (or perhaps to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear);

- Confusion: mistaking one title for another similar title, eg in New Zealand there are three confusing titles: The Australian Women’s Weekly NZ Edition, English Woman’s Weekly vs NZ Woman’s Weekly.

Clearly, some of these “errors” have an inflationary effect, while others tend to deflate overall readership estimates.

Methodologies and measures designed to overcome, prevent, or correct for these biases are numerous, and the permutations and combinations possible are even more extensive.

The following eight points appear to be the critical criteria upon which to distinguish between the various methodologies used for measuring readership.

- ***Specific Issue Vs Recent-reading:***  
The “specific issue” measure is designed to overcome replication, parallel reading, telescoping and to reduce confusion while “recent-reading” is designed to rely less on the respondent having a good memory, ie recalling a particular issue read some time ago.
- ***List of Titles Vs Single Title:***  
The use of a list of titles from which respondents select those they have read has been shown to reduce over-claiming due to prestige (especially if the respondent answers by saying a number rather than the title of the publication), and to reduce confusion between titles (especially if the list is carefully constructed to have similar titles together).
- ***Use of Card Sorting Technique:***  
This may reduce confusion as respondents are able to sort out for themselves what they have and have not read; and may reduce prestige and other interviewer biases.
- ***Screen or Filter Question:***  
This may reduce inflation due to prestige as respondents have the opportunity to “have their say”, i.e. say they have read particular publications without distorting readership estimates by claiming readership in the specific time period.
- ***“Recent-reading” then “Frequency” Vs “Frequency” then “Recent-reading”:***  
Asking frequency first may reduce prestige by acting in a similar way to a filter or screen question.

- **First-time Reading Screen:** i.e. asking respondents who have claimed readership of a publication in the specific time period whether that was the first time they had read the publication or whether they had read it before the time period. This is designed to eliminate inflation due to replicated reading.
- **Second/Third Issue Readership:** i.e. asking respondents who claimed readership: how many issues of the publication they had read in the specific time period. This is designed to include and take into account parallel reading.
- **Personal Interview Vs Self-completion:**  
Traditionally in research circles personal interviewing, where an interviewer can guide the respondents through the questions in a logical manner is seen as the “gold standard” while self-completion surveys are frowned upon as “cheap and nasty”. However, self-completion surveys eliminate “interviewer effects” and “prestige” - there’s no-one there to impress.

The following chart provides a summary or “ready reckoner” of the preceding discussion. This was the framework within which the questions were designed, and the analysis undertaken.

**Figure 1: Overview of measures and methodologies and the biases they are designed to correct.**

✓ = reduces the bias or “error”  
 ✓✓ = totally eliminates the bias or “error”

	Telescoping	Poor Memory	Replication	Parallel Reading	Prestige	Confusion
Specific Issue Vs Recent-Reading	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		✓
Recent-Reading		✓				
List (rather than Single Title)					✓	✓
Card Sort					✓	✓
Screen/Filter					✓	
Frequency then Recency					✓	
First-time Reading post screen			✓			
Inclusion of 2nd/3rd issue Readership in period				✓		
Self- completion (rather than Personal Interview)					✓✓	



### 4.3 Data Capture and the Questions

Data was captured using a combination of face-to-face personal interviews and self-completion diaries. The Australia-wide sample for reporting here was limited to those who completed both surveys. n = 11,159

### 4.4 The Questions

The following sets out the questions used for measuring readership of weekly magazines and monthly magazines. Several other questions required are not reported here.

#### Weekly Magazines

##### a) **Benchmark Surrogate “Through-the-book” - “First-time reading” in the last 7 days (personal interview)**

The next pink card lists some weekly magazines. Thinking of the last 7 days - since THIS time last (SAY TODAY'S DAY). Have you, yourself, read or looked into any of those magazines or magazines which come with weekend newspapers - either at home or elsewhere - since THIS time last (SAY TODAY'S DAY)? I mean, have you read any issue in the last 7 days? Please be as accurate as you can.

YES ..... P (Continue)  
NO ..... V (Go to.....)

IF YES: Which of them since this time last (SAY TODAY'S DAY)? Please read the whole list and be as accurate as you can. Please say the number after only those magazines, or magazines which come with weekend newspapers, you've read or looked into since THIS time last (SAY TODAY'S DAY).

→ IF READ ANY, ASK

Would you please look again at the name of each magazine, and say which others you've read or looked into, since THIS time last (SAY TODAY'S DAY)? Just say the number after the name. Which others? Any others?

→ FOR EACH MAGAZINE READ OR LOOKED INTO IN LAST 7 DAYS, ASK

In the last 7 days, how many different issues of (SAY MAGAZINE) have you read or looked into - since THIS time last (SAY TODAY'S DAY)?

Thinking of the (last) (2nd last) (3rd last) issue of (SAY MAGAZINE) you read. Did you read or look into that particular issue for the first time in the last 7 days or had you also read or looked into any part of that particular issue before 7 days ago?

**b) “Recent-reading” and “Frequency of reading” (self-completion)**

Have you read or looked into any of the following weekly magazines (Group A) in the last 4 weeks?

Yes (Continue)  
 No (Go to.....)

Please complete the table below

Mark the number of different issues of each magazine you read or looked into in the last 4 weeks	Did you read or look into that magazine in the last 7 days	
	Yes	No
0 1 2 3 4+		

**c) Benchmark Surrogate - “Through-the-book” (specific weeklies)**

The top part of the next blue card shows the names of some more weekly magazines. (PAUSE) In the last 6 months, have you, yourself, read or looked into any of those magazines either at home or away from home - in the last 6 months? I mean, have you read any issue of any of those magazines in the last 6 months?

YES ..... 1 (Continue)  
 NO ..... 2 (Go to.....)

IF YES: Which of those magazines have you, yourself, read or looked into in the last 6 months? Which others in the last 6 months?  
 Any others?

→ FOR EACH MAGAZINE READ IN LAST 6 MONTHS, ASK:

Here’s a copy of (SAY ITS NAME) that you may or may not have had a chance to read or look into. Would you please look through it, and say which articles or features look especially interesting to you?

As you know, articles in different publications often look alike. Now you’ve been through that particular (SAY ITS NAME), would you please look at the bottom of the blue card and say the number after the line which describes whether or not you’ve read or looked into that particular issue of (SAY ITS NAME) before now?

**Monthly (and other) magazines**

**a) Benchmark Surrogate - “Through-the-book” Colour Cover - Specific issue recall**

Next are some cards showing the front covers of some fortnightly, monthly and three-monthly magazines, mostly 9-14 weeks old. Looking at the first card. Have you, yourself, read or looked into the ..... edition of ..... either at home or away from home?

**b) “Recent-reading” and “Frequency of reading” (self-completion)**

Have you read or looked into any of the following monthly magazines (Group F) in the last 4 months?

Yes ..... (Continue)  
 No ..... (Go to.....)

Please complete the table below

Mark the number of different issues of each magazine you read or looked into in the last 4 months	Did you read or look into that magazine in the last month?	
	Yes	No
0 1 2 3 4+		

**5. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The research findings are presented in two parts. The first presents the percentage results of each question. The second discusses the results and the differences between them, and draws out some of the broader implications. The following tables present the percentage results (i.e. average issue readership estimates as percentage of population aged 14 and over).

The first table shows that for weekly magazines the “recent-reading” question obtains higher figures than the benchmark surrogate “through-the-book” estimate. The table also shows that the figures for “average issue” based on the “frequency of reading” questions are very close to the benchmark.

**Table 1: Weekly magazine readership figures comparing the benchmark “through-the-book” surrogate “first-time reading” (personal interview); “recent-reading” (self-completion); and average issue as calculated from “frequency of reading.”**

Australian Weekly Magazines	Benchmark surrogate “through-the-book” %	“Recent-reading” last 7 days %	“Average issue” from “frequency of reading” %
Woman’s Day	14.5	18.8	14.8
New Idea	11.5	14.1	11.3
New Weekly	4.0	4.6	3.7
Who Weekly	5.1	6.3	4.7
That’s Life	7.9	9.8	8.3
Picture	1.9	3.1	2.5
Post	1.1	1.8	1.4
People	1.6	2.6	2.0
TV Week	8.2	9.4	8.1
Bulletin	2.0	2.9	2.3
Time	2.4	2.8	2.3
BRW	1.8	2.2	1.7
Australian Magazine	3.7	4.1	3.9

The second table shows that for monthly magazines, the “recent-reading” questions obtained remarkably consistent figures to the benchmark surrogate “through-the-book”.

The only exception was Women’s Weekly. Further exploration showed that the specific issues surveyed included an exceptionally high circulation issue which was not covered in the “recent-reading” period (specific issues shown are 9-14 weeks old).

The “average issue” estimates based on frequency of reading questions were much lower than obtained from the other two methods.

**Table 2: Monthly magazine readership figures comparing the benchmark surrogate “through-the-book” (colour covers in personal interview); “recent-reading” (self-completion); and “average issue” as calculated from “frequency of reading”.**

Australian Monthly Magazines	Benchmark surrogate “through-the-book” %	“Recent-reading” last month %	“Average issue” from “frequency of reading” %
Australian Women’s Weekly*	24.8	18.7	12.3
Family Circle	5.0	5.4	3.6
Cleo	3.7	3.8	2.3
Cosmopolitan	4.1	4.3	2.6
New Women	2.6	2.0	1.3
Dolly	3.0	3.0	2.2
Girlfriend	2.7	2.5	1.7
Readers’ Digest	11.5	12.3	9.7
National Geographic	6.1	6.2	4.8
Aust Home Beautiful	3.2	4.6	2.9
Aust House & Garden	4.2	5.9	3.8
Better Homes & Garden	12.7	11.7	7.9
Gardening Aust	3.8	3.6	2.5

\* Australian Women’s Weekly has been published monthly since 1982.

<sup>1</sup>Those who read a weekly publication in the last seven days or a monthly publication in the last month were asked how they obtained that copy. The number of *personally* bought copies and a proportion of subscription (home delivery) copies were used to form an estimate of total copies bought. This was compared with audited circulation figures for the closest available period. Similar estimates of copies bought were made using the frequency-of-reading question.

In both cases the estimates of copies bought were lower when derived from the recency question. For the weeklies, the ‘read in last seven days’ question produced estimates higher than audited circulations (Fig. 1), just as the ‘read in last seven days’ question produced overall readership estimates generally higher than those from the ‘through-the-book’ surrogate questions.

In the case of the monthlies the ‘read in last month’ estimates were generally in line with audited circulations (Fig. 2). This suggests that the frequency question gives better results for the weeklies and the ‘read in last month’ question better results for monthlies. Possibly a month is the most reliable time horizon for asking about past reading behaviour.

These findings also support our contention that the ‘through-the-book’ surrogate measurement is a valid estimate of average-issue readership and that different methodologies are required to measure publications with different publication intervals.

<sup>1</sup> The four paragraphs on this page and Figs. 1 and 2 were added after the conference paper was printed.

Fig. 1 - PURCHASING v. CIRCULATION (WEEKLIES)  
from 'source of copy' question ('last 7 days')

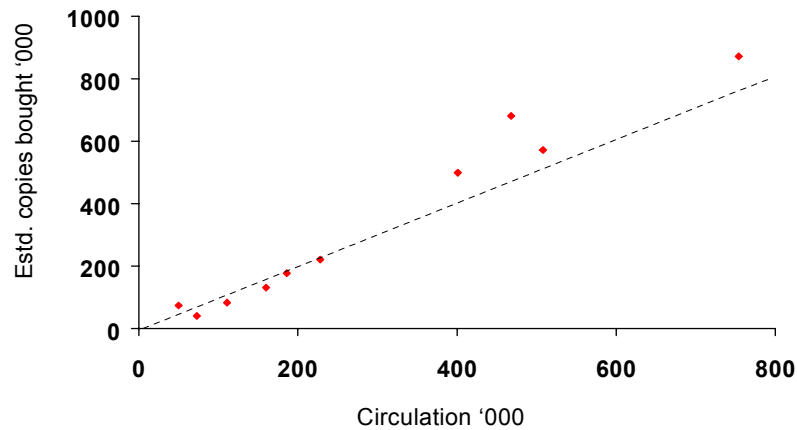
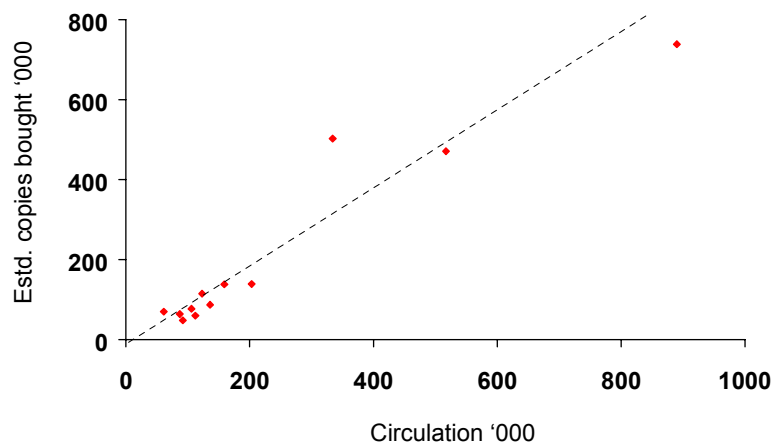


Fig. 2 - PURCHASING v. CIRCULATION (MONTHLIES)  
from 'source of copy' question ('last month')



These findings were not as expected. They were useful in terms of the original aim of finding a way of producing “recent-reading” figures and “through-the-book” comparable figures in the same survey. However, they raised two fundamental questions - Why were these monthly figures from the two different methods so similar, when the industry had a history of finding differences and debating over how the differences could be explained?

Why were the comparisons between the two methods so different for monthly magazines and weekly magazines? Previous research had shown:

- Replication is supposed to be a greater problem for monthlies than weeklies;
- Telescoping and elastic memories are supposed to get worse the longer the recall period (i.e. a month more so than a week).

Most of the previous research suggests that the problem of inflation in “recent-reading” or deflation in “through-the-book” will be greater for monthlies than weeklies.

Most, but not all. Almost 30 years ago, Simmons (1969) found that total audiences readership as measured by the Brand Rating Index Service (BRI) “filter recall method” (which is actually a form of “recent-reading” versus the Simmons “through-the-book” were extremely close year after year. (He went on to demonstrate differences in subgroups and frequency distributions, but left unexplained the consistency at the total level between the different approaches.)

Until the late 1970s, because of the similarities in estimates from the two surveys using disparate methods, most American researchers were of the belief that the two methods produced roughly equivalent results. However, when Simmons used the “recent-reading” methodology in their survey, the resulting readership estimates were severely inflated.

In New Zealand in 1991 we found that our magazine readership estimates, using our benchmark surrogate “through-the-book” methodology, were considerably less than those obtained in the AGB:NRB magazine survey, using the “recency” method, far less than could be explained by any difference in sampling or universe definition.

What then, was the difference between the BRI research (which was able to produce roughly equivalent results to Simmons’ “through-the-book” estimates) and Simmons’ “recent-reading” research (which produced such inflated estimates)? And does the answer help explain why in our latest research we did not get the same level of inflation in our readership estimates for monthlies as all our previous research had led us to expect?

The difference between BRI and Simmons was the data capture method - BRI being a self-completion survey, Simmons being personal interview. One hypothesis would be that somehow the self-completion survey removes or counteracts the inflationary effects of “recent-reading”.

Our recent study provides support for the hypothesis derived from the somewhat serendipitous experiment that Simmons and BRI were a part of in 1969. To be confident of the logic we reviewed the various sources of error, and the likely impact of various methodologies. Following that review, our contention is that prestige is a critical issue in readership research - more critical than has been previously considered. And moreover, that the self-completion methodology overcomes “prestige”.

In order to explore the differences, a more detailed review was undertaken of the previous work, with a particular focus on the methodology and questions - specifically as they related to the framework in Figure 1. The following surveys or experimental surveys used “recent-reading” questions and obtained higher readership estimates than were obtained using “specific issue” or “through-the-book” methods.

Simmons (US) 1969:	Personal interview List of titles
Roy Morgan Research (Aust) various experiments:	Personal interviews List of titles of monthly magazines with and without screen questions
Mediamark Research Inc. (US):	Personal interview Card sort screen Card sort recent-reading
National Readership Survey (UK):	Personal interview Frequency of reading (using mastheads) Recent-reading (single title by title)

Looking across all the various surveys and experiments every variation of methodology identified in our framework was covered - with the exception that all the surveys and experiments were personal interviews - none were self-completion. The BRI survey and the research reported in this paper were both self-completion surveys.

In looking for a logical reason as to why a self-completion survey should obtain consistently lower readership estimates than obtained using the same questions in a personal interview - and results which consistently agreed with a different type of questioning in a personal interview - we came upon a paper by the late Roy Morgan presented at "Symposium II" on Readership Research in Montreal in June 1983. In his paper he urged us to beware of prestige. He pointed out that as early as 1941, Ed Benson, then Chief Statistician of the American Gallup Poll, had written to him with this warning:

*"Beware of prestige. Like marsh gas, prestige is difficult to detect. And also like marsh gas, if you don't detect prestige, it will kill you."*

Ed Benson's awareness of prestige came from a long battle with what was called "past preference inflation" meaning the habit of many people wrongly to claim to have voted for the winner in a previous election. For example, before the 1948 American Presidential election 14% of American voters wrongly claimed to have voted for President Roosevelt four years earlier in 1944. Roy Morgan went on to say that Ed Benson's warning about prestige was always foremost in his mind when drafting questions.

We would even go so far as to suggest that telescoping is more likely to occur for positive events than negative. For instance, would we expect someone who occasionally smokes and had smoked eight days ago, to telescope time when asked if he had smoked in the last seven days? What about a motorist stopped and asked by a policeman how long since he'd had a drink?

We would expect telescoping to be much less, or even negative, in these situations. This leads us to suspect that inflation previously thought to be due to telescoping may more realistically be due to a combination of telescoping and prestige.

Our contention is that prestige is a critical issue in readership - more critical than has previously been considered; and moreover, that the self-completion methodology overcomes prestige.

We now turn to the second question - Why were the comparisons between the two methods so different for monthly magazines and weekly magazines?

While prestige may be extremely important, the other biases listed in Figure 1 still apply - in particular, replication and poor memory. These two biases operate in different directions.

Replication has generally been considered to be higher for monthly magazines than weekly magazines - although this has generally been deduced from the finding of larger differences between “recent-reading” and “through-the-book” methods for monthly magazines than for weekly magazines. There is no fundamental logic in the notion that replication should be greater for monthly magazines, i.e. why should the active life of a monthly be four times as long as that of a weekly? It would seem equally logical to suggest replicated reading would be lower for monthly magazines because the casual reader already has a whole month to read and re-read the magazine without creating a replicated reading problem for a readership survey. The difference may in reality have more to do with greater levels of telescoping for monthlies, the quality of the magazine rather than its publication frequency, greater impact of prestige on monthlies. These possibilities do not appear to have been explored in any systematic way.

The other key difference between the measurement of monthly magazines and weekly magazines is the length of time the respondent has to remember, i.e. if poor memory is to deflate the figures, it would be expected to have a greater effect on monthly magazines. The research reported in this paper showed asking respondents how many issues of a publication they had read in the previous four months produced a substantially **lower** average issue readership than either “through-the-book” or “recent-reading”. This may well be due to respondents not being able to recall four months back, and in the absence of “prestige” not saying “yes” when they are unsure.

It is not possible from this current research to determine whether there is higher replicated reading for weekly magazines than monthly magazines, or whether replicated reading is the same or higher for monthly magazines, but that the replication error is more than compensated for by poor memory in the case of monthly magazines but less so for weekly magazines.



It would be useful to know the answer, and no doubt this research will spur us on to seek an answer. However, from a pragmatic point of view, it is enough to know that the self-completion “recent-reading” question can be used as a surrogate “through-the-book” measure for monthlies, and the “average issue” calculated from the “frequency of reading” question can be used as a surrogate for “first-time reading” for weekly magazines.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

First, the research has demonstrated that it is possible to achieve either “recent-reading” or “through-the-book” comparable estimates or both in a cost-effective manner.

In our view, history (and the need to be shown to be right) has no place in today’s new paradigm. The choice must be made based on user needs. In Australia and New Zealand where this system is available, the decision should be able to be made by the users - the advertisers. And the decisions will be made within the context of the total communications mix, and so in the global market.

Second, this research has raised some very interesting questions about our previous assumptions, and given strong support for the contention that prestige is a critical issue in research - more critical than ever previously thought - and moreover that the self-completion methodology overcomes prestige.

It would be a very useful exercise to review all the previously published work in this area with a prestige detector - to see whether prestige may have played a bigger part than previously thought, and whether some of the conclusions may be different as a result.

## **7. REFERENCE**

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