Readership of Magazines

August 9, 1972.

Attached is a copy of a document issued by McNair on July 4 regarding surveys of readership of magazines.

That document contains several untruths. The truth is conspicuous for its absence.

The truth is that all readership surveys by The Roy Morgan Research Centre cover the capital cities and country areas of all States in proportion to population. In comparison, McNair interviews in only the mainland capital cities. They exclude the reading by the 39% of the population who live in the country or Tasmania.

Most capital city dailies have large country circulations. So do most magazines. Indeed, some magazines sell almost half their copies in the country.

A national advertiser who is, for example, a cosmetic manufacturer may want to know not only the number of girls aged 16-24 who read each magazine in the capital cities, but also the number who read them in the country. Both of those figures are in Morgan reports, but McNair cover only the mainland capital cities.

Morgan reports also show the numbers reached by various combinations of newspapers and magazines. For instance, an advertiser in both a national magazine and the chief capital city dailies can see how many people will be reached in (a) the cities, (b) the country and (c) Australia-wide. You won’t find those figures in McNair reports.

Seasonal Fluctuations

Another important consideration not mentioned in McNair’s memo. of July 4 is that Morgan interviews every month throughout the year, except for 6 weeks in December and January. Reports are published for October-March and April-September. McNair interviews for only three months in the Winter.

It is noteworthy that Simmons, now the only US national readership survey, switched to an all-the-year survey in 1968 because he found considerable seasonal fluctuations.

McNair says appearance of Belle and Woman’s World detracts from the value of Morgan findings. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Subscribers to Morgan reports on readership of magazines will soon receive preliminary figures for readership of Belle, Woman’s World, the Nation Review and the combined Sunday Telegraph-Australian. Those preliminary figures will be based on interviewing every month since publication began. A complete analysis will be in the Morgan reports for April-September, which will be issued in October, concurrently with McNair reports for May-July!

Morgan Questions are Best

McNair’s expression “chalk and cheese approach” shows a complete lack of understanding of the problem of obtaining accurate and comparable measurements of the readership of both weekly and monthly magazines.

The truth is that in market research and readership research, it is sometimes necessary to use a series of different kinds of questions to obtain comparable answers.

A difficulty when surveying readership of monthly magazines is that after a few weeks, many people become hazy about intervals of time. They can’t remember whether something was read 3, 4 or 5 weeks ago, or 7, 8 or 9 weeks ago.

Affiliated with Gallup Polls throughout the world.
Formerly McNair asked how many issues of each monthly magazine had been read in the last four months. We understand that this year they have asked whether any issue of each monthly magazine had been read in the last 4 weeks.

We have found that readership of monthly magazines builds up for about 2 months. We show photos of front covers of specific 8-week-old or 9-week-old issues, and ask whether they have been read. (The McNair memo. of July 4 untruthfully says we average the answers for 4-week-old and 8-week-old issues).

In reporting readership of 8-week-old and 9-week-old issues of monthly magazines, we are in good company: Simmons shows people 9-week-old and 10-week-old skeleton issues.

**Weekly Magazines**

For weekly magazines, Simmons reports for 4-week-old or 5-week-old issues.

Between October 1971 and February 1972 we used Simmons' methods in experimental surveys with weekly magazines. We then interviewed seven different but comparable Australia-wide cross-sections, each of more than 1,000 people. They were shown 3, 4, 5 or 6 week old complete issues of Women's Weekly, Woman's Day and New Idea.

At the same time we used the "average issue" method, in which people were asked whether they had read any issue of a particular weekly magazine in the last 7 days.

The two methods gave results which agreed within 1%.

This showed that the memory problem in measuring readership of monthly magazines did not apply to weekly magazines — which was fortunate, as some weekly magazines use different covers in different States. We have also found that people are more prone to confuse the covers of weekly magazines than those of monthlies.

Therefore, for weekly magazines we use the "average issue" method, to obtain figures comparable with our figures for monthly magazines based on the "specific issue" method.

When McNair's report is issued, we will be interested to see how McNair's figures for five capital cities compare with our figures for six capital cities. McNair, however, won't have any figures for country readership to compare with our Australia-wide figures.

\[\text{Morgan}\]

Roy Morgan, Managing Director.

[Signature]

Gary Morgan, Director.

P.S. Accuracy, of course, depends not only on the questions but also on the number of people interviewed and how they are interviewed. Morgan readership surveys are based on more than 24,000 face-to-face interviews — one per household — in the weekends and evenings. McNair interviews about 10,000 people — many on weekdays.
READERSHIP SURVEYS

We think it's time to draw a few comparisons between McNair and Morgan in terms of methods used in calculating magazine readership. As potential buyers of both McNair and Morgan, you should be aware of the nature of the differences in methods and the significance these differences have on the information presented.

Our major criticism relates to the chalk and cheese approach which Morgan adopts in his treatment of weekly and monthly magazines.

For weekly magazines Morgan asks a simple question to determine average issue readership (similar to McNair) but for monthly magazines Morgan asks about the readership of specific issues. He shows each respondent mastheads of weeklies but whole covers of monthlies.

Within any one survey the definition of readership used (e.g. "average-issue" or "specific-issue") must be the same for all magazines before any valid intra-survey comparisons can be made. Specific issue readership figures are lower than average issue figures, so Morgan is overstating the readership of weeklies relative to monthlies (or understating the readership of monthlies relative to weeklies) within the one survey. To our knowledge Morgan's mixing of average and specific issue questions within the one survey is unique.

In his specific issue question for monthlies, Morgan asks about two specific issues in the one interview, e.g. the December and January issues, so that the respondent has to recall at least eight weeks to establish specific issue readership. Also the "older" of the two issues must have a greater chance of being read than the more recent issue. Any averaging of the two answers is again an example of chalk and cheese! The accepted method of calculating specific issue readership is the "editorial-interest" technique pioneered in the U.S. by Politz and still used by Simmons in the U.S. This technique calls for respondents to be shown
McNair are using the basic average issue question for both weeklies and monthlies and then readership frequency questions to calculate cumulative readership. Further, McNair show mastheads of both weeklies and monthlies to all respondents.

These foregoing differences are not in our view of a minor technical nature, but basic to good research design.

It is also unfortunate that many recent developments in magazine publishing such as the combining of Pix and People, the closure of Finance Week, and the appearance of Belle and Woman's World, have already detracted from the value of Morgan's findings. Further, by conducting his interviewing in the period October 1971 to March 1972, Morgan has straddled the complete summer holiday period. Presumably, many respondents interviewed in this period would therefore be recording abnormal readership behaviour.

When the McNair results are published in September/October for almost forty national publications, they will be tabulated by over 350 demographics and will comprise 120 pages of static, duplicated and cumulative readership.

Most of you bought McNair last year. We believe that the McNair 1972 readership surveys are superior in terms of technique, number and range of publications covered, depth of demographics, etc. to any other. For all these good reasons we recommend you keep with McNair in 1972.

For further details about McNair Readership Surveys call or write to:

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IN MELBOURNE: Jim Blundell on 267 1326, 476 St. Kilda Road, 3004

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