

METHODS USED IN AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT OF MASS MEDIA CHANNELS TYPES, RESULTS AND IMPACT

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Abstract

In the present research I will analyze the reactions and opinions of the interviewed persons regarding the main methods used in audience measurement of mass media channels and also it will be analyzed the types, the results and the impact. At the same time, it is aimed at bringing in a connection between the results of audience surveys and the communication strategies developed by public and private companies. Thereby, I will use the interview as a qualitative research method, to confirm or infirm the hypothesis of the present research.

Key words: *Audience measurement, methods, mass media*

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1. Introduction

Various definitions have been proposed for this concept - the audience: "Group or mass of listeners, viewers and spectators. Group of individuals subjected to radio or television programs, or advertisements ". "Dissemination designates the specific number of sold publications, contrary to circulation, the number of prints, and together with the audience, the total number of readers" (Baylon, Mignot, 2000)

Nowadays, there are enough data on the size and structure of media audience, most of them coming from media producers, which induces mistrust of hidden interests in attracting the budgets of communication campaigns, so that such information is often useless for the researchers of media

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phenomenon. The main difficulty in measuring the audience is the lack of unity of used methods, namely their lack of variety, in the USA being developed, for several years, a real industry fixing the rates of audience. The basic techniques for measuring audiences, often combined, are:

- INTERVIEWS. At the beginning of his activity, A. Crossley was building surveys based on calls made to absolutely randomly chosen individuals. The method is still used today exclusively by some companies. Others carry out face to face interviews, full of observations and information, and at the same time, much more expensive and require more time. (Popa, 2007)

- JOURNALS. Many rating companies (the term comes from America and appoints the audience measurement) offer to selected individuals forms that they must fill with data referring to the program or viewed channel at a time. Such data forms are given to each member of the household, aged over 12 years, and then sent to the company, which summarizes and interprets them. (Popa, 2007)

- METRIC DEVICES. To solve the problem, Nielsen and Arbitron have created new devices called „peplemeters”, which involved identifying the person who was watching television, at a given moment. These devices required great responsibility from those sampled, responsibility that not all of them had. Therefore, a new solution was found: „passive meters”, able to recognize automatically, according to body weight, the person watching TV. (Popa, 2007)

2. Case study

In this research, I will analyze the reactions and opinions of the respondents on the main methods used in audience measurement of media channels, and at the same time the results and their impact will be analysed. Thereby, I'll use the interview as a qualitative research method in order to confirm or to rescind the hypothesis of this study:

- a) At present, in Romania audience surveys are primarily funded by media organizations.
- b) Audience surveys, conducted nationwide and internationally, are necessary both to media organizations and to companies investing budgets in communication campaigns.
- c) Generally, audience surveys can influence the making of communication strategies, or at least their optimization inside public or private companies.

The topic of the interview is: Methods used to measure the audience of media channels. Types, results and impact.

The main objective of the research is to present the respondents' reactions on the main methods used to measure the audience of media channels, and also the results and their impact.

The interview was addressed to individuals residing in major cities of Romania, but also to several people living in the United States of America, and in countries of the European Union, such as Germany, France, Italy and Austria, aged over 20 years, with university education, working in public or privately-owned companies, who have visited a large number of countries, worldwide. Undoubtedly, this category consists of people who are very often informed by the media and have a permanent contact with media organizations in each country. Furthermore, these people have very clear terms of comparison regarding mass media activity at European level. The interview was applied to 20 people.

Average duration of the interview was 20 minutes, including detailed answers to all questions.

The interviews took place between 28th February 2015 - 10th March 2015.

After summarization, interpretation and analysis of the answers, I'll answer the two research questions stated:

- What is the most common method to measure the audience of media channels?

- What effect can an audience survey have in developing a communication campaign?

The structure of the interview is as follows: 8 open-ended and closed-ended questions whose main objective is to measure the reactions of interviewees on the main methods used to measure the audience of media channels, and also the results and their impact.

At the same time it is aimed at bringing in a connection between: the results of audience surveys and the communication strategies developed by public and private companies.

At the end of the interview, after the 8 questions that follow the goals stated before, I have asked two more questions, whose main objective is to acknowledge the age and the actual residence of targeted subjects. I have chosen a structured interview in order to keep the same number of questions and the same disposal for all the respondents, likewise for the profound approach on the topic of the research.

I will interpret and analyse the answers for each question in the interview guide.

2.1. What do you think is the most common method used to determine the audience of media channels?

After addressing the first question in the interview guide, these percentages arise, regarding the method used in audience measurement, by category:

- 70% of the respondents believe that metric devices represent the main method used to measure the audience of media channels.

- 30% of the respondents believe that surveys (telephone or face to face) represent the main method used to measure the audience of media channels.

2.2. Have you ever been contacted by telephone or interviewed relating to a survey about the media?

After addressing the second question in the interview guide these percentages arise, in terms of involvement of interviewees in audience measurement:

- about 70% of the respondents said they did not participate in such a survey.

- about 30% of the respondents had participated in at least one survey on media channel audiences.

2.3. Who do you think is funding these audience surveys in Romania?

After addressing the third question in the interview guide these percentages arise, as regards the financing of audience surveys in Romania:

- about 60% of the respondents consider that media organizations are funding audience surveys and their involvement is direct in this process of measuring the audience.

- about 35% of the respondents consider that audience surveys are funded by public and private companies that invest significant budgets in communication campaigns.

- about 5% of the respondents believe that audience surveys are funded by private independent organizations which are not part of the media.

2.4. In your view, who should fund and monitor the audience surveys?

Please explain your answer.

I will present the opinions and arguments of the respondents regarding the organizations that should fund audience surveys, nationwide. The main responses of the interviewees were:

- The state and organizations specialized in mass media.
- National Audiovisual Council of Romania.
- Funding can be made by state institutions specialized in media and communication, and by media organizations as well.
- Media organizations, pointing out that the results of these surveys should be respected, making no matter if they reflect the reality desired by different factors.
- State institutions because they have to be impartial and totally objective.
- Media organizations given the fact that they are interested in audience.
- Media organizations must fund their audience surveys because the survey is a tool that helps monitoring the evolution of the organization, but monitoring must be carried out by a specialized institution of the state because the state should be closer to the interests of its citizens.
- Organizations outside the media market.
- Audience surveys should be funded and entirely controlled by public and private companies investing in communication campaigns. The reason is simple: they are the beneficiaries of the direct results, and it is their interest for these surveys to be transparent and fair, with the main reason: investing the budgets in communication campaigns through the media.
- An independent company, eventually from the public sector, that has no interests in the media.

2.5. What is your level of confidence in terms of audience surveys' transparency?

After addressing this question in the interview guide, the following percentages arise, as regards the respondents' level of confidence on the transparency of audience surveys

- about 60% of the respondents say they have an average confidence as regards the transparency of audience surveys.
- About 15% of the respondents say they have high confidence as regards the transparency of audience surveys.

- About 15% of the respondents say they have little confidence as regards the transparency of audience surveys.
- about 10% of the respondents say they have very little confidence as regards the transparency of audience surveys.

2.6. To what extent do you think the results of audience surveys are in accordance with reality?

After addressing of the sixth questions in the interview guide these percentages arise, as regards the results of audience surveys and their reflection in reality :

- about 60% of the respondents believe that the results of audience surveys reflect the reality quite remotely.
- about 30% of the respondents believe that the results of audience surveys reflect the reality to a great extent.
- about 10% of the respondents believe that the results of audience surveys reflect the reality unsatisfactorily.

2.7. Do you consider audience surveys a necessity, nationwide and internationally?

Question number seven brings in the importance and the necessity of audience surveys nationwide and internationally. The results are, as follows:

- about 90% of the respondents think that audience surveys are necessary nationwide and internationally, provided they are made transparent, objective and reflect reality as much as possible.
- about 10% of the respondents think that audience surveys are unnecessary neither nationwide nor internationally.

2.8. How do you think audience surveys can influence the results of communication strategies of public and private companies?

Please explain your answer.

I will present the opinions and arguments of the respondents about the connection between the results of an audience survey and communication strategies developed by public and private companies. The main responses of the respondents were:

- Audience surveys influence communication strategies to a large extent.
- The bigger the audience, the more the communication campaign reaches its aims better.

- Depending on these more or less true results a company can choose a specific media channel to carry a communication campaign, destined to a specific target audience.
- Audience survey results can affect the decision making process in communication, both in the private and public environment. A survey substantially conducted can give long-term solutions for communication campaigns.
- Audience survey results have a direct influence on communication campaigns.
- Communication strategies are based on the results of audience surveys, thereby companies adjust their strategies accordingly to the surveys.
- A communication strategy of a company has to inform the public about certain issues. In my opinion the goal of the strategy shouldn't be influenced by audience surveys. These must, however be borne in mind when choosing the communication channel to deliver the information to the public.
- If two or more surveys held on the same subject in the same period of time have approximately the same results, they can affect, one way or another, the future strategies of companies.
- Very much, because there is no other barometer, and decisions are made after this barometer that may be wrong, leading to a wrong decision inside public or private companies.
- Depending on the results of audience surveys, new targets may be assigned inside the communication campaign.
- Depending on the results acquired from an audience survey, for certain companies that invest in communication will react as such. Budgets will be directed towards media organizations with the largest audience, according to surveys.

2.9. How old are you?

Questions were addressed to people aged over 20 years, as follows:

- 60% of the respondents aged 20 to 30 years.
- 40% of the respondents aged between 31 to 40 years.

2.10. Where do you live at present?

The questions were addressed to people living in the United States of America and in Europe - mainly Romania (Bucharest, Sibiu, Brasov, Cluj-Napoca), Germany, Franta, Italia and Austria.

3. Results and conclusions

Most of the respondents believe that metric devices represent the main method used to measure the audience of media channels, and about 30% of the respondents believe that surveys (telephone or face to face) represent the main method used to measure the audience of media channels.

About 30% of the respondents had participated in at least one survey on media channel audiences.

Most of the respondents consider that media organizations are funding audience surveys and their involvement is direct in this process of measuring the audience.

The main opinions and arguments of the respondents regarding the funding of audience surveys and who should fund them, were as follows: Funding can be made by state institutions specialized in media and communication, and by media organizations as well. Media organizations, pointing out that the results of these surveys should be respected, making no matter if they reflect the reality desired by different factors. Audience surveys should be funded and entirely controlled by public and private companies investing in communication campaigns. The reason is simple: they are the beneficiaries of the direct results, and is their interest for these surveys to be transparent and fair, with the main reason: investing the budgets in communication campaigns through the media.

Most of the respondents affirm that they have an average confidence as regards the transparency of audience surveys, and only 15% of the respondents say they have high confidence as regards the transparency of audience surveys.

Most of the respondents believe that the results of audience surveys reflect the reality quite remotely, and about 30% of the respondents believe that the results of audience surveys reflect the reality to a great extent.

Most of the respondents think that audience surveys are necessary nationwide and internationally, provided they are made transparent, objective and reflect reality as much as possible.

Almost all respondents concluded that the results of audience surveys can influence the communication strategies of private and public companies, and the main answers and arguments were: Depending on the results of audience surveys, new targets may be assigned inside the communication campaign; Depending on the results acquired from an audience survey, for

certain companies that invest in communication will react as such. Budgets will be directed towards media organizations with the largest audience, according to surveys; Audience surveys results can influence the decision making process in communication, both in the private and public environment. A survey substantially conducted can give long-term solutions for communication campaigns.

Case study results open a new research direction in this area, particularly towards the results of audience surveys and the developing or optimization of communication campaigns depending on these results, and at the same time the involvement of public and private companies in financing these surveys.

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