

POLICY BRIEF

QUALITY CONTROLS IN OUR AUDIO DIARY SERVICE

Over time, we've built a robust set of quality controls into our Audio diary service. These controls include automated processes, manual procedures, and data analysis. As a group, these controls help ensure that the in-tab sample is up to our research standards. This policy brief offers an overview of these quality controls.

QUARTER HOURS

The Diary processing system automatically checks the Quarter Hours of listening in each Diary and in the household against three different volumetric thresholds. If a Diary exceeds any of these thresholds, the system will reject the Diary. There is a threshold for total number of Quarter Hours credited in a Diary, another threshold for the total number of Quarter Hours credited to a station in the household (indexed by household size), and a third threshold for continuous hours of listening in the Diary. The thresholds remain confidential.

COMPLETENESS

The system checks each diary to determine if it is complete. In instances where the diarykeeper returned an incomplete diary, we apply the applicable procedures to complete the diary. There are different procedures in place to model answers to the qualitative questions at the back of the diary and/or to model listening to blank day pages (based upon listening elsewhere in the diary). If the respondent did not provide all the necessary information for weighting, we may attempt to recontact the diarykeeper to collect that information. If the diary remains too incomplete to use after we apply all of the applicable procedures, we will reject the diary as unusable.

DUPLICATE AGE SEX

The system checks all households for diaries of the same age and sex. If a household returns more than two duplicate age sex diaries, the system will reject all but one of the Diaries. If the household returns two duplicate age sex Diaries, the system will compare the listening within the Diaries. If the listening patterns in the pair of Diaries falls within the acceptable threshold, the system will retain both diaries. If the listening exceeds the threshold, the system keeps one Diary and rejects the other.

NON-COMPLIANT DIARYKEEPING

We have checks in place intended to identify when one individual in the household represented his or her listening in multiple Diaries. Via this set of checks, the system will flag any household that exceeds a threshold based on number of Diaries and number of Quarter Hours to an individual station in a specific demo and daypart. An analyst will then review the flagged household's Diaries. For these households, we interpret similar handwriting and patterns in diary-keeping from one diary to the next as evidence that one person in the household attempted to represent his or her own listening in multiple Diaries. The analyst may also review information collected from additional sources during this Diary review. If the analyst determines that it is likely that one individual attempted to represent his or her own listening in multiple Diaries, we will remove that household from the sample.

(Note: due to illiteracy, illness, or other lifestyle factors, one individual in the household may have to assist another household member by completing his or her diary. During recruitment, we explain to all respondents that one person serving as 'secretary' for the household is acceptable.)

AUDIENCE ESTIMATES REVIEW

We also have checks in place to flag a station when that station's estimates rise to a statistically significant degree (as compared to the station's estimates in prior surveys). This series of checks starts with an analysis of all stations' ratings. If the ratings for a particular station spike outside of the accepted threshold, that station is flagged for additional review. Analysts will then take another look at the station's estimates to determine if the higher ratings appear to be due to any miscrediting, credit anomaly, or other security concern. If this review uncovers an issue, we will remediate the problem.

PRODUCT CONSISTENCY

There are also a series of quality checks in place to ensure that the data for a particular survey or report period is consistent among all of our different reports, data sets, and services. If key metrics such as in-tab and population are not the same, the system would stop processing. Such a stop would prompt additional research and other remediation procedures.

REMOVING DIARIES FROM THE SAMPLE

Removing diaries from the sample (either before or after the data is released to clients) is a serious matter. The procedures we describe in this brief are supported by a highly structured, objective and documented process. We believe that these steps are necessary to help ensure that we apply the same standards in all markets and circumstances, and that we retain Diaries that include legitimate listening and reject Diaries that do not.

COMMUNICATIONS

We generally do not communicate information to the marketplace about our diary quality controls, the controls' processes, or the results of any of our analyses. Clients should not view this confidentiality as a desire to hide information that should be disclosed. Rather, as a matter of Nielsen's privacy policy, we do not notify clients of any specific Diarykeeper information, including the outcomes of our security processes.

AUDIT AND VALIDATION

Our Diary service is MRC-accredited. Every Diary market continues to participate in the MRC accreditation process. As a part of that process, all of the controls, policies, and procedures described in this brief are audited and validated by independent auditors on behalf of the MRC.

EVOLUTION

As is the case with our research methods in general, we are always looking for ways to improve and enhance our Diary quality controls. While we may not be able to broadly communicate with the marketplace regarding every enhancement that we implement, clients can be confident that we are always striving to refine our policies and procedures, and to develop new procedures, that will help us improve the quality of our surveys.

CONTACT

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