

A SURVEY TO DETERMINE THE DEGREE TO WHICH
THE KANSAS CITY STAR SATISFIES THE INFORMATIONAL NEEDS
OF RESIDENTS OF MANHATTAN, KANSAS

by 500

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"News exists in the minds of men. It is not an event; it is something perceived after the event. It is not identical with the event; it is an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework of the event--essential being defined against a frame of reference which is calculated to make the event meaningful to the reader."

--Wilbur Schramm

Chapter I
Introduction

This is a study to determine to what degree The Kansas City Star and The Kansas City Times satisfy the informational needs of Manhattan, Kansas, subscribers and to determine some of the reasons why nonsubscribers do not take the paper.

Over the years The Kansas City Star has conducted many readership studies in the metropolitan Kansas City area, but only limited studies have been made in nearby cities and rural areas. The Star has never conducted a study of any type in the vicinity of Manhattan, Kansas.¹

As modern transportation technology increases the geographical area over which a newspaper can provide home delivery, it becomes more important for newspapermen to understand factors that influence out-of-town, potential subscribers.

This study attempted to quantify some of those factors.

A relatively small percentage of the Manhattan area population of approximately 36,000 persons subscribe to the Star. Slightly less than one-sixth of the 6,725 listed households take the Star.^{2,3}

¹Frank S. McKinney, general manager of The Kansas City Star, private interview, Kansas City, Mo., December, 1968.

²Kansas Statistical Abstracts 1968, (Lawrence, Kans., University of Kansas Press, 1969). p. 12.

³Wayne Wash, manager of market research for The Kansas City Star, private interview, Kansas City, Mo., December, 1968.

Review of the Literature

Since the paper's early days, The Kansas City Star's marketing department has done many studies of its audience and its audience's reading habits.

The studies have varied considerably in complexity, accuracy, and purpose. Presently the market research department conducts two or three surveys a year.⁴ They usually are highly specific, designed to determine if a specific article, section(s), or feature of the paper is being read by the audience.

Star surveys usually are conducted at a large public gathering place like a major shopping center. Star personnel are stationed at an entrance and randomly select subjects for the questionnaire. In addition, the marketing department has conducted several surveys on a geographical basis. They are the door-to-door personal interview type. Data obtained are not available to the public.⁵

It is impreative that a newspaper keep abreast of changes in readers' attitudes towards it, and levels of reader satisfaction with it, especially if the newspaper wants to grow.

Most major newspapers conduct studies of their readership by various methods and at differing times, however very little of such information is published.⁶

Current (the past 10 years) academic research in journalism has produced relatively few true readership studies and only one

^{4,5,6}Ibid., Wayne Wash, private interview.

study to determine levels of reader satisfaction with a newspaper. Readership Survey of the Ravenswood (W. Va.) News, by Donna Manula, M. S., West Virginia University, is a 1965 thesis reporting a study done to determine the reading habits of that newspaper's readers and to measure their reactions to the newspaper's contents.⁷ Two methods were used: personal interviews and mailed questionnaires.

A random sample of 100 men and women in the Ravenswood area was interviewed. Interviewed subjects were guided through a fresh copy of the newspaper and asked to specify exactly what news items they had read or, in the case of advertisements, seen.

Several days after personal interviewing was completed, questionnaires in connection with the survey were mailed to each respondent with specific instructions to complete and return the questionnaire.

Responses indicated that readers of that newspaper react favorably to its editorial and advertising content.

The only other journalism research done in the area of informational satisfaction of readers was by J. P. Holman, M. S., Kansas State University, 1963. Holman's thesis, Non-farm Audience Awareness of, and Need for, University of Nebraska College of Agriculture Publications, concluded that 70 percent of the non-farm men in Nebraska, and 60 percent of the non-farm women were

⁷Journalism Abstracts, Vol. 4, 1968, p. 108.

not aware that publications were available from the College of Agriculture.

Holman's study revealed that more than 50 percent of the non-farm audience needed or desired information contained in College of Agriculture publications.⁸

⁸Journalism Abstracts, Vol. 2, 1964, p. 108.

Purpose of the Study

This study was to determine the degree of success The Kansas City Star attained in meeting basic informational needs of residents of Manhattan, Kansas.

As one of many newspaper serving the Manhattan, Kansas, area, The Kansas City Star and Times has a certain basic informational service which is unique to it, when compared with other newspapers in the area. That is, the Star and Times has a "personality" about it due to editorial judgments, policies, layout, order of presentation, size, etc.

Does The Kansas City Star (and The Kansas City Times) provide the type of information the people of Manhattan, Kansas, think they should receive from a daily newspaper?

This study attempted to answer that question. That is, the study attempted to discover if the basic informational services of the Star are adequate for readers in the Manhattan area.

Definition of Terms

Resident of Manhattan, Kansas---A person living within a five mile radius of the geographical center of the city.

Basic Informational Service of a Newspaper---Defined for this paper as: Informing readers objectively about what is happening in their community, country, and world; providing editorial comment to bring developments into focus; providing a means whereby goods and services can be advertised; and providing entertainment.⁹

Other authorities concur with that basic definition. George Gallup has stated:

"It is generally agreed that a newspaper must do four basic things to satisfy the informational needs of its readers. These are: (1) To inform. In a democracy the people have a right to know, and it is the primary purpose and responsibility of journalism to protect this right. (2) To interpret. Today's complex age only magnifies the need for full explanation of the news. (3) To guide. News is often described as the raw material of opinion. All forms of journalism try to influence their readers and listeners through public opinion columns. (4) To entertain. In many news happenings there is an element of fun, or as journalists call it, "human interest." Outside the news and opinion articles, these may take the form of crossword puzzles, comic strips and other items of pure entertainment."¹⁰

⁹Emery, Edwin; Ault, R. H.; Agee, W. K., Introduction to Mass Communication, (New York, N.Y.: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1960). p. 162.

¹⁰Gallup, George, "A Scientific Method for Determining Reader Interest," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 7, p. 7, 1930.

Journalistic experience over the years has shown five basic qualities readers demand before they endorse material from a newspaper as valuable or satisfying. They are: Timeliness; the information must be current enough to be of significance. Proximity; the occurrence of an event must have geographical relevance. Significance; the event must affect the reader's life in some way. Human Interest; the reader may require a human element he can identify with. Consequence; the event must effect his life in someway.^{11,12}

In addition, analytical studies show a positive correlation between "text book definitions" of news and reader interest. In other words, studies have shown that the classical journalistic assumptions of what satisfies a reader's informational needs are correct.¹³

¹¹Charnley, Mitchell V., Reporting, (New York, N.Y.: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, Inc., 1966). p. 30.

¹²Hixon, R. F., and Norton, F. R. B., Introduction to Journalism, (New York, N. Y.: Monarch Press, 1966). p. 6.

¹³"A Factor Analytic Approach of Reader Interest in the News," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 44, (1967), p. 327.

Chapter II

Methodology

Procedure for Collecting the Data

The data for this study were collected by mailing a questionnaire to 425 randomly selected Manhattan, Kansas, residents, using 338 subjects from the 1968 Manhattan, Kansas, City Directory,¹⁴ and 87 from a list of known Kansas City Star subscribers in Manhattan. The list of subscribers was obtained from E. V. Lutz, the Manhattan area Kansas City Star distributor.

Using a table of random numbers,¹⁵ the author systematically selected a number in each row of the table and then selected a name in the position on the page that corresponded to the value of the number selected from the random digits table; i.e., if the number selected from the table was 22, the 22nd name, counting down the page, was selected. The same system was used for each page of the City Directory and the list of Star subscribers.

The 87 subscribers were added to assure a significant number of returns from subscribers.

No pre-testing, other than on an informal basis, was deemed necessary for such a noncomplex study. Final results confirmed

¹⁴Polk's Manhattan City Directory 1968, (Kansas City, Mo.: R. L. Polk Publishing Co., 1968).

¹⁵Peters, W. S. and Summers, G. W., Statistical Analysis for Business Decisions, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968). p. 504.

that assumption.

To increase responses, a self-addressed, stamped envelope was enclosed with each questionnaire.

A follow-up mailing, planned to obtain responses from at least ten percent of the original list of respondents, was not necessary.

Construction of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to allow each respondent to indicate his level of satisfaction with 13 basic informational services provided by the Star. Additionally, respondents were requested to provide basic information regarding their residency, sex, age, whether they had read the Star within the last 12 months, and if they subscribed to it.

A seven point semantic differential scale was used for each question. Forced response questions were necessary for answers of respondents to be quantifiable.

The 13 questions were actually statements; they concerned these items: International news, national news, news of the state, local news, financial news, sports news, interpretative articles, columns, editorials, advertising, entertainment features, special sections, and the currentness of the information. The statements were declarative sentences written in the affirmative, so respondent had only to indicate the degree to which he agreed or disagreed by checking a box along the seven point semantic differential scale. The use of this system was explained in detail and by example in the instructions contained in the questionnaire.

If a recipient of the questionnaire had not read the Star within the last 12 months, he was requested to fill in the statistical information only and return the questionnaire.

Finally, there were several blank lines at the end of the

questionnaire where subjects were asked to make any comments they desired on how the Star might be improved. This question was optional.

The questionnaire is reproduced on the following three pages.

Dear Sir,

I sincerely request your help. I am a KSU Journalism student working on my Master's degree. I am doing a study to determine if The Kansas City Star (and Times) satisfies the basic informational requirements of Manhattan residents. The only way I can obtain this information, is by having you fill out the enclosed questionnaire, and return it to me, in the envelope provided.

This study is for academic purposes only.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely, Jon M. Pollock

On the following pages you will find 17 statements about The Kansas City Star (or Times, the Times is the morning edition of the Star). Below each statement you will find a rating scale as follows:

disagree							agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The points along the scale can be interpreted as follows:

1. Completely Disagree
2. Mostly Disagree
3. Disagree more than agree
4. Agree and Disagree equally (neutral feeling)
5. Agree more than Disagree
6. Mostly Agree
7. Completely Agree

The use of the scale can be illustrated with the following statement:

"Hot weather is good."

If you agree completely with the statement, you would place a mark in box 7. If you mostly agreed, you would place a mark in box 6. If you slightly disagreed, you would place a mark in box 3. In this manner you can indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

In some cases you may not know. If this occurs, please make the best guess you can.

Please make only one mark per question, and put the mark in the box.

Example:

disagree							agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

On the first three questions just check the box which applies.

12. The Star and/or Times contains enough interpretative articles for me. (These are articles that attempt to explain an event or situation.)

disagree	agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

13. The Star and/or Times provides enough columns (columnists' articles to satisfy me.

disagree	agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

14. The Star and/or Times provides enough special sections, such as, homes and gardens, travel, industry, etc., to satisfy me.

disagree	agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

15. The information provided by the Advertising in the Star and/or Times is what I require.

disagree	agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

16. The Kansas City Star and/or Times has enough editorials to satisfy me.

disagree	agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

17. The Star and/or Times provides enough entertainment features, such as comic strips, word games, puzzles, etc. to satisfy me.

disagree	agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

18. (Optional) I would appreciate your opinion on how the Star and/or Times might be improved.

Tabulating Data

The returned questionnaires were analyzed to determine to what degree The Kansas City Star satisfies the informational requirements of residents of Manhattan, Kansas.

The data were assembled in a tabular manner to simplify analysis (see appendix). Statistical information tabulated included the number of: respondents, male and female, subscribers and nonsubscribers, male and female subscribers, male and female nonsubscribers, Manhattan, Kansas, residents; Kansas State University students; Ft. Riley military personnel; and respondents who did not belong in any of the last three categories. Also derived from the data were average age of male and female subscribers; average age of male and female nonsubscribers; a numerical breakdown of subscribers and nonsubscribers by age groups of under 31 years, 31 to 50 years of age; and 51 years of age or older.

Responses to the questionnaire provided the following information: The average degree to which Manhattan, Kansas, residents are satisfied with The Kansas City Star in general. The satisfaction Manhattan residents have with each of the 13 specific sections of the Star. The degree of satisfaction subscribers and nonsubscribers have by age groupings with each of the 13 areas of the Star, and the degree to which male and female subscribers are satisfied with the 13 specific areas, by age groupings.

Chapter III

Conclusions

Statistical Facts About the Returned Questionnaires

The 425 questionnaires were mailed in Manhattan, Kansas, May 5, 1969, and returns began coming in May 7, 1969. Approximately two weeks was allowed for respondents to return the questionnaires. Then analysis of data began. Only three questionnaires were received after the two-week period, consequently there was no significant loss of data.

The total return was 39 percent (167 questionnaires) of the number mailed out. Seventy-four of the 167 returned questionnaires were from the 88 known Star subscribers, approximately 84 percent of that group. A 22 percent return, or 93 questionnaires, was received from the 337 subjects chosen from the City Directory. Nearly all were nonsubscribers.

Statistics on all Returned Questionnaires

Average age of respondents was 44.2 years; males averaged 42.6 years; females, 45.8 years. Of the 167 returns, 123 were from men; 44 from women. There were 140 Manhattan residents, 30 Kansas State University students, two military persons stationed at Ft. Riley, Kans., and 21 "others."

The discrepancy in the total was caused by some respondents checking more than one category. For example, some checked

"Manhattan resident" and "KSU student." In such cases both categories were recorded. The numerical breakdown by age groups was: 46, under 31 years, 34 men and 12 women; 62 between 31 and 50 years of age, 50 men and 12 women; 59, 51 or older, 39 men and 20 women.

Statistics on Returns from Star Subscribers

Eighteen of the Star subscribers who returned questionnaires were women; 56 were men. Average age of subscribers was 54.2, 50.2 for males, 58.3 for females. All 74 of the subscribers classified themselves as Manhattan residents. In addition, nine were Kansas State students, and six checked the "other" category. By age groups, eight male subscribers were under 31; 22 men and six women were between 31 and 50 years old; 38 were 51 or older, 26 men and 12 women.

Statistics on Returns from Nonsubscribers

Thirty-eight nonsubscribers returned completed questionnaires, 30 were men and eight were women. Average age of nonsubscribers was 36; 35 for males, 37 for females. Of the nonsubscribers who completed all items, 26 were Manhattan residents, 11 were Kansas State students, four were classified in the "other" category, and two were military persons. Again, a discrepancy appears because some respondents checked more than one category. In age groups, 17 nonsubscribers were under 31, 13 men and 4 women; 15 were between 31 and 50 years old, and only six were 51 or older, four men and two women.

Analysis of the Questionnaire

The 13 statements regarding the basic informational service of The Kansas City Star were stated positively. Instructions with the questionnaire explained that respondents should indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement. That in effect, would indicate subjects' level of satisfaction with that particular aspect of the Star.

As previously stated, a seven-point, forced-response type of question permitted quantifying degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction expressed by respondents. If the respondent checked box number one, he was considered to be totally dissatisfied with that item. If he checked number two, he was mostly dissatisfied. A check in box number four indicated a neutral feeling; that is, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. On the affirmative side, a check in box five indicated slight satisfaction; box six, general satisfaction; and box seven, total satisfaction, or agreement with the statement by a respondent.

By adding responses for a given question and determining a mean value, an average level of satisfaction was determined. That applied to the total questionnaire as well.

The Results

Data from the questionnaire are discussed in the order that related questions appeared on the questionnaire, except that aggregate findings are discussed first.

The average value of all responses to all items on the questionnaire from all classes of respondents was 5.02, barely above slight satisfaction, with a male average of 5.03, and a female average of 5.02. As expected, Star subscribers were somewhat more satisfied with the paper, rating it at 5.24. Nonsubscribers rated it 4.84. Female subscribers rated it 5.17; female nonsubscribers, 4.86.

Three age groups were chosen for the study, under 31 years of age, 31 to 50 years old, and 51 or older. In general, those over 30 years of age were more satisfied with the informational services of the Star than were those under 30. Average of responses by those under 31 was 4.96, while the 31 to 50 year category registered 5.17, and the 51 and older group, 5.23. The subscriber data indicated that older persons are more satisfied with the Star's contents than younger ones are. The responses for the 51 and over category averaged 5.46; 31 to 50, 5.28. An almost neutral rating of 4.56 was expressed by non-subscriber respondents 30 years or younger; older nonsubscribers were only slightly more satisfied, 5.06 and 5.00, respectively for the 31 to 50 and the 51 and over age groups.

Findings for the 13 Specific Areas

Statement 1. "The Kansas City Star and/or Times provides the international news I require."

This statement was designed to determine to what degree residents of Manhattan are satisfied by international news in The Kansas City Star. The average value of all responses on this question was 5.84, quite near "mostly agree." Women were more satisfied (6.21) while men were only moderately satisfied (5.47). Typically, the 6.10 response by subscribers was higher than the 5.59 response by nonsubscribers. Male subscribers were considerably less satisfied (5.77) with the international news, than were female subscribers (6.43). The same was true among nonsubscribers. The value for male nonsubscribers was 5.18; for female nonsubscribers 6.00.

By age-group categories, older respondents were more satisfied than younger ones. The under 31 group rated statement one only 5.26, whereas the 31 to 50 and the 51 and older groups were fairly satisfied at 5.80 and 5.90, respectively. Similar differences among age groups held in subscriber and nonsubscriber categories.

Statement 2. "The Kansas City Star and/or Times provides the national news I require."

This statement was to determine to what degree residents of Manhattan are satisfied with the national news provided by the Star. The average of all responses was 5.90, an indication