

Performance Measures at BBC World Service Definitions

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1 Introduction

Since at least 1992 the BBC World Service (WS) audience research department have been producing quantitative data to be used in the assessment of performance. The results have been used to within WS, in regular reporting to BBC management and in provision of annual performance data to the funders, the FCO.

Over the years many different metrics have been used in an attempt to reflect key aspects of performance. The one constant has been the Global Audience Estimate (GAE):

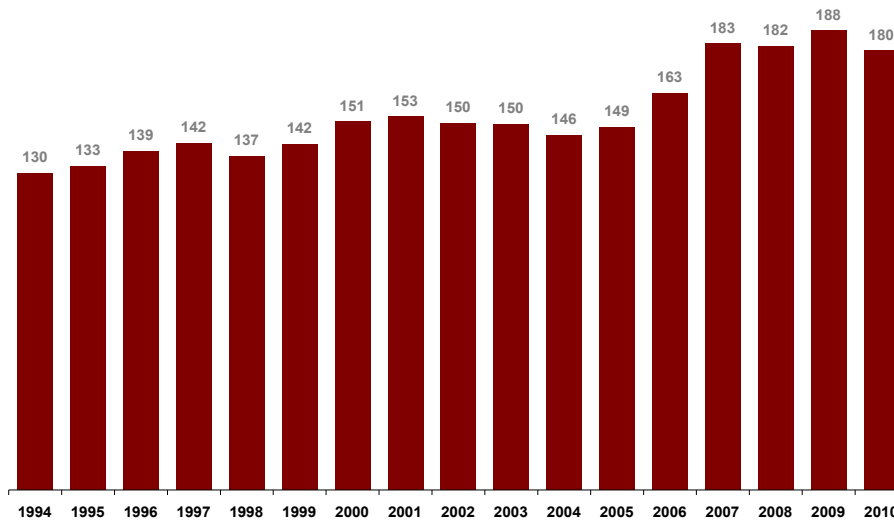


Figure 1: BBC World Service Global Estimate 1994-2010

A detailed discussion of the construction and use of this metric is available elsewhere.

Important as the GAE may be, it is very limited as an indicator of performance, let alone of 'value', however you may choose to define it. Below I set out in detail the definitions of other measures that have been reported across the years.

These measures can be grouped as follows:

- Awareness
- Reach amongst specific target groups
- Attributes
- Statements

2 Awareness

This is defined as the total number of people in a given sample or subsample who are know of the existence of the relevant broadcasts. There are two types of awareness question, unprompted (e.g. *'which radio stations are you aware of, even if you have not listened to them?'*) and prompted (e.g. *'have you heard of [station X]?'*). Prompted awareness is used for performance measurement.

Awareness is a weak measure but it may give some indication of the extent a broadcaster has at least a minimal presence in the life of a given community.

3 Target group reach

The GAE measures use (listening, viewing etc.) of the BBC amongst the adult population as a whole. It is often felt that there are certain types of people who would be more likely than others to value what the BBC offers, and there have been various attempts over the years to identify such people and look specifically at the use of the BBC amongst them. Some key target groups that have been used over the years are:

- The more highly educated
- 'Elites' (variously defined)
- 'Opinion-formers' (variously defined)
- Cosmopolitans, defined by an interlocking set of demographic criteria (income, education, occupation and age)

- Aspirants, defined by self-reporting on a set of statements about attitude to life (*'I want to improve my position in life'*, *'Gaining knowledge and becoming better informed is a priority to me'*, *'I actively seek to understand current events in the world'*)
- Information Poor, defined as people living in places where access to reliable news is very limited
- Lifeline, defined as people living in places that are in crisis due to conflict or natural disaster.
- 'Active Internationals': people who access news and current affairs more than daily, are very interested in international news and discuss international news with others.
- International news users.

4 Attributes

Questions can be asked of BBC users, and of the audiences for other stations, to ascertain the extent to which the station possesses a particular attribute, such as trustworthiness. These questions can be asked in a comparative context, e.g. *'Which of these news providers would you say is a source that you trust?'* or separately for individual stations, e.g. *'How trustworthy would you say the BBC is?'*

The most important attributes that have been used in measures are:

- Trustworthy
- Objective
- Relevant

Other attributes that have been examined at various times include 'high quality', 'distinctive', 'providing detailed analysis', 'first with the news', 'easy to understand' and 'popular'.

It is worth noting that the questions asked in a comparative context give very different results from those asked individually. For example, if you ask people 'which of these news providers is a source that they trust' then even though respondents will be allowed to name more than one news provider many people will not name the BBC even though they would agree when prompted that the BBC is trustworthy. Also worth noting is that the questions asked separately by news provider can still be used to compare one with another.

For our purposes it is highly significant that the list of attributes is defined by the BBC and its stakeholders and not by the audience. It may well be that people are asked to rate the BBC on trustworthiness when this is not actually something they care about. Further, people may

evaluate one news provider primarily on the basis of one attribute and another provider on a different attribute – so, for example, they may value the BBC for its trustworthiness but use another provider more because its output is more relevant to them. Sometimes questions have been asked which seek to ascertain how important each attribute is to the respondent when s/he chooses a news provider.

5 Statements

More nuanced assessments of users' attitudes to the BBC can be gleaned by asking them to what extent they agree or disagree with certain statements presented to them. Some of the most important statements that have been used in performance assessment are:

- The BBC helps me to form my opinions on important issues.
- I will continue to use the BBC.
- I would recommend the BBC to others.

As with the attributes, the results of these questions can be used to compare one news provider with another; again the statements are devised by the BBC and the importance of these assessments to the respondent is generally not examined.

Around 1995 there was a programme of research under the heading of 'Effective Quality'. This sought to discover through structured qualitative research what attributes of a news provider led people to approve of it and/or actually to use it. Attributes which were important for assessment were those which featured as drivers for both approval of and listening to the BBC. The formative research was used to define a set of statements which was appropriate to a specific context, together with a set of weights for each statement which were applied to the results in order to produce an aggregate figure, the Effective Quality Score. This was by far the most detailed attempt to devise a performance measure which was relevant to the audience; however, it was a complex and expensive exercise and imposed a significant burden on the survey process.