Psychographic Research in a Cross Cultural Nonproduct Setting

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ABSTRACT - A survey was undertaken of members of Christian churches in seven major cities of Brazil. The intent was to measure basic lifestyle for the purpose of uncovering felt needs for spiritual growth. This paper reports on modifications of psychographic methodology necessary for cross cultural application and presents major contrasts between lifestyles within two denominations.

[ to cite ]

METHODOLOGY

This survey was commissioned by Editoria Betania, a major publisher of Christian books, headquartered in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. While there has been a substantial measure of sales success with a few leading volumes (The Cross and the Switchblade and Run Baby Run are of special significance), market opportunities still are far from fully capitalized upon. Part of the problem is reliance on translation of North American books (Engel, 1974). Management recognized the need to initiate an all new series uniquely adapted to the lifestyle within the Brazilian Church. In addition, it is a well-known fact that there are many segments within the broader church which totals over 12 million (Read and Ineson, 1973). Therefore, greater contrast between lifestyles is necessary to modify the usual psychographic methodology, however, because of important cultural differences. This paper reports on these methodology considerations and presents the sharply contrasting lifestyle profiles of members of the Assembly of God and Lutheran Churches.

Sample

Brazil is one of the few developing countries which has a sophisticated national census. This census also provides unusually thorough data on religious background of the population (Read and Ineson, 1973). From these data it was possible to draw a random sample of churches which closely paralleled the proportions in the major denominations in each of the following cities: Belem, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.
Within each church, an attempt was made to draw a sample of members at random from church rolls in proportion to the size of the membership. This required the cooperation of pastors who serve as a potent gatekeeper, and cooperation was not 100 percent. The result was some minor deviation of the final denominational breakdowns from the originally projected sample. The sample totaled 2,625, and it closely paralleled the expected attributes in terms of age, education, and other demographic characteristics.

Questionnaire and Interviewing Methods

An unspoken assumption underlying all forms of survey research used in North America is the availability of a literate populace. Although the majority of urban-dwelling Brazilians are claimed to be literate, such is not the case. The most that can be said is that they are semiliterate and can understand elementary textbook Portuguese. This, of course, makes questionnaire development and administration a much more difficult task than it normally would be. It was decided that an interviewer must be present to assure proper understanding of each question. Where necessary, explanations had to be provided, and, of course, it was nearly impossible to standardize these added explanations so that there are no significant variations in the question stimulus presented from one respondent to the next.

The presence of an interviewer, however, only accentuates a pervasive response bias encountered in most developing countries—a tendency to give the “expected answer.” This, of course, is always a problem in survey research, but it reaches such proportions in some parts of the world that it is nearly impossible to design valid surveys other than those calling for strictly factual data. This type of response bias cannot be fully eliminated by questionnaire wording, because it reflects a deep seated “people orientation” where the motivation by the respondent is to help the interviewer by giving the expected response.

It was decided in view of these conflicting aspects of interviewer usage to employ a modified group interview format in which respondents came to each church in groups but took the questionnaire individually and anonymously. Interviewers were volunteer Christian workers and seminary students who read each question one-by-one, ascertained understanding of its content, and moved to the next question accordingly. The patterns of responses which resulted seemed to verify the success of this method. The highest percentage of non-response did not exceed 10 percent. In addition, there was a good distribution of responses across various categories of agreement which reflected the fact that most apparently avoided giving what seemed to be the expected answer. The guarantee of anonymity, then, seemed to achieve its intended purpose.

Another difficulty is the fact that Brazilians have more of a tendency than North Americans to think in terms of “black and white” rather than in shades of agreement or disagreement. Therefore, a standard five to seven point scale normally utilized in AIO questions was not applicable. To overcome this factor, three different types of lifestyle questions were used.

First, respondents were given a list of various types of behavior such as smoking, drinking, and reading the horoscope. Then they were asked to indicate whether a “good Christian” can or cannot undertake each item of behavior. This inventory was significant in that Christians in the developing countries have a tendency to develop a lifestyle which is legalistic (characterized by “thou shalt not”).

A second set of questions was a 28 item AIO inventory. It was developed in part from the standardized inventories used by others (Wells and Tigert, 1971). In addition, a group of questions was designed to focus more directly on issues of concern for this study. To overcome the problem of replying only in “black and white”, questions were asked in two phases. First, the respondent was asked to indicate, “is this you?” or “is this not you?” in response to such items as “my tendency is to worry about the possibility of not having enough money” or “I think that I have more self-confidence than the majority of the people I know.” The second phase was, “how much is this you?” and this was gotten by having them fill in a box as follows:

GRAPH

This method proved to be quite workable. A partial validity check provided by similar questions worded in both positive and negative form showed that respondents were not just blindly checking the first or second box and giving the expected answer.

Finally, 15 questions were included which indicated the extent to which help is needed in various areas of life such as learning to study the Bible, handling finances, and so on. Respondents checked whether or not they needed “much help”, “some help”, or “no help”.

One additional validity check was provided in another set of questions which assessed readership of a list of books. One title in the list was a dummy, and it was checked by only one percent of those interviewed. This is further indication that the methods used avoided, at least to a large extent, the tendency to give the expected answer.

Tabulation and Analysis

Generally, adequate statistical packages are not readily available in third world countries. Therefore, it was necessary to utilize the facilities of Wheaton College and Illinois Institute of Technology. Our experience has shown that the best method of analysis is question-by-question cross classification with statistical significance assessed by chi square and the contingency coefficient. This is confirmed by Wells and others (Wells, 1975). Therefore, cross classification was undertaken with each lifestyle question against various demographic breakdowns in the sample. Some of the more useful analyses were differentiation of members of one denomination from another, analysis of differences between readers and non-readers of certain key books, and analysis by age category.

RESULTS

Some of the most interesting data was provided by analysis of lifestyle differences between various denominations. Of particular interest were the sharp differences between members of the Assembly of God and the Lutheran churches.

Demographic differences between these two churches were not pronounced, and reliance on demographics alone would have masked essential differences. There were minor differences in age in that the median age in the Assembly was between 25 and 34, whereas the median age of the Lutheran Church was under 25. In addition, median educational attainment of the members of the Assembly of God was primary school not beyond fifth grade, as contrasted with 6-9 grades with its Lutheran counterpart. Other demographic factors did not show statistically significant differences.

Before discussion of the lifestyle data, it should be pointed out that the Lutheran church is predominantly centered in the southern cities of Porto Alegre and Curitiba. Because these cities are distinctly European in outlook and lifestyle, one would expect some real differences between the more traditional lifestyles of the Assembly of God. The Assembly has made its greatest inroads among newer residents migrating from rural areas into Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The Assembly of God is entirely indigenous in its religious expression, whereas the Lutheran church has until recently at least been dominated by European leadership. As one might expect, the growth rates of the Assembly of God are dramatically higher than the Lutheran church which shows real evidence of stagnation (Read, 1965 and Read and Ineson, 1973).

The Inventory of Legalism


Wilbur Schramm. Survey Research in Developing Countries(Unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 1972).
FACTORS EXAMPLES

Differences in language and meaning

Words or concepts may not mean the same in two different countries. Differences in consumption patterns

Two countries may differ substantially in the level of consumption or use of products or services. Differences in the perceived benefits of products and services

Two nations may use or consume the same product in very different ways. Differences in marketing research possibilities

The availability of professional consumer researchers may vary considerably from country to country. Differences in cross-cultural response patterns account for up to six percent of the variance in the data, thus representing a significant source of misinterpretation in cross-cultural studies.

The same may be true for Australian respondents, given that a large proportion of Australian residents have migrated and may well have been raised in a different cultural setting. Table I gives the relative number of respondents from each culture separately for each data set.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results regarding cross-cultural