

MARKETING SCIENCE

EDITOR ■
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The Psychographic Fad

Ten years ago, we had a fad about something called motivation research. It reached such proportions of making money for its practitioners that Vance Packard wrote "Hidden Persuaders" to "expose" it to the people. Since that time there have been various other fads, mostly related to operations research. There has been the media model fad (e.g., High Assay, Mediametrics, COMPASS, and MEDIAC), the new product forecast fad (Natural Sales Projection Model and another from MRCA), the statistical routine fad (the MTBI study design, AID, MAPP, etc.), the marketing information system fad, and the psychographic fad.

Some of these fads may seem to have disappeared. A number of people have asked me whatever happened to motivation research. The question was, I think, best answered by Peter Langhoff, president of ARB, who said to one questioner, "It's still here. It's just changed its colors." He is right. What else could we call the recent re-awakened interest in mixing "psychographic" descriptors and fancy statistical routines for segmenting markets?

For those readers who are already puzzled, let me define this funny term "psychographic" and explain its new uses. Periodically, there is a wave of trying to relate product usage to various psychological scales. The last major wave of this occurred around 1959-60 and used scales with names like "hypochondriasis", "intelligence", "general knowledge", "self-esteem", and "propensity to try new products." In addition, scales were developed to identify "influentials" and "taste makers" who, it was assumed, caused their friends and neighbors to buy new products. This effort has never completely stopped, and just a few years ago, a magazine trying to differentiate its audience used the word "psychographics" to denote these psychological descriptions of its audience. The argument was that they were more meaningful than the traditional demographic descriptions. To maintain some connection with tradition, the new name imitated the old one. (This may not really be the origin of the term but it is the earliest commercial use I know of.)

By 1969, the term has taken on some added dimensions of more mundane character. There has been a rather general (but not complete) failure to find the old clinical scales useful for market descriptions, since product and brand usage are usually unrelated to the scales. When success was to be had, it usually came from developing special attitudinal scales rather tightly related to the product itself. At Harvard University, for example, studies of general self-confidence scales showed only little relation to marketing behavior, but rather strong connections were found when the scales were made more specific to the product involved. A number of good papers related to the subject are to be found in "Risk Taking and Information Handling in Con-

sumer Behavior," edited by Donald Cox and published in 1967 by the Harvard Business School.

This leads us, then, to a revival of interest in psychographic methods and a need to develop special scales for most applications. The hoped-for "standard" psychographics to replace demographics for media audience descriptions still seem as elusive as ever, but use for marketing strategy and advertising copy strategy seem to be current and viable applications. Since the scales have to be developed especially for each application, there is a resurgence of interest in our old statistical friend, factor analysis, as a means of scale reduction. But that is just the beginning. A rash of new procedures are appearing, many based on work done at Bell Labs by Shepherd, which have interesting relationships to factor analysis. Volney Steffre begins with a list of adjective descriptions of the product including brand names (which are legally adjectives) and ends up with a three-dimensional display of the perceived psychological distance between the adjectives in the product context. At the Marketing Science Institute, a technique called MAPP has been developed which is quite similar but usually has only a two-dimensional output. The latter is perhaps easier for people to follow because it assumes there is significance to the axes while Steffre asks us to do the difficult task of attending only to distances while ignoring the axes. Both procedures are aimed at providing characterizational assistance to marketers and are thus forms of psychographic study.

Still more forms of cluster analysis are also being developed in many places. Quite a few market researchers have rediscovered Q-factor analysis which clusters people instead of attributes. Others have gone on flings with the University of Michigan's AID program. And there are many using Multiple Discriminant Analysis.

In sophisticated research operations, these combined interests in psychographics and clustering procedures have produced what must be considered an unholy alliance. The old style motivation researchers are now talking to the mathematicians and statisticians. There are now joint projects underway which make use of both kinds of talents. And this is most important, for the one thing that is lacking in all the fancy new procedures is the matter of relevance. There is no technological requirement that MAPP, or AID, or factor analysis, or multiple discriminant analysis be fed relevant data. The routines work just as efficiently on gibberish. So motivation research is needed to identify the important set of variables for study which will make the scales and clusters meaningful and discriminating with respect to consumer behavior and product performance.

So you see, Peter Langhoff was right. Motivation research is still with us; it's merely changed its colors. In the process, its contribution to successful marketing is enhanced even though it doesn't get the kudos it used to.

Thoughts for Management Scientists

In the charter issue of the new magazine *Careers Today*, one can find Shapero's first and second laws. Since they are a source of great comfort to all management scientists, I quote them here:

Shapero's First Law: "No matter how many problems you solve for a man, he will take on an equal burden of problems."

Shapero's Second Law: "No matter how badly we design a system, humans will make it work."

In other words, there will always be business for management scientists, and they can expect a lot of help from other people.

Elsewhere in the article ("The Official Organization-Watcher's Guide" by Albert Shapero), you can find the thought that "The average housewife unconsciously uses more managerial skills than all of Asia." I doubt if that's true, but it's followed by a good list of management problems coped with successfully by the American middle class housewife.

As a final news-note, I was delighted to find Longman's Law (see this column for August 1967) accurately and appropriately quoted at the October conference of the Advertising Research Foundation. Keep up the good work, folks, and keep those cards and letters coming to:

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