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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.

Psychographic profiling has now found its way into the standard research repertoire (Wells, 1975). But nearly all published applications have, first of all, been undertaken in a North American or Western European setting. This raises the important question of the applicability of this type of psychological scaling methodology in developing countries which are characterized by substantial lower levels of literacy and differing ways of responding to questionnaire interrogation (Schramm, 1972). In addition, the majority of reported studies have focused on consumer products or services (Wells, 1975), but there is every reason to believe that psychographic research can contribute much to understanding of behavior in other areas of life.

A major survey was undertaken among urban-dwelling Protestant Church members in Brazil during 1974. One of the primary objectives was to assess basic lifestyle—activities, interests, and opinions—for the purpose of uncovering felt needs for spiritual growth. It became 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.

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 attention must be paid to market segmentation, especially by denomination.

Because the most rapid church growth is occurring in metropolitan areas, the survey was confined to the leading cities of Brazil. The survey was designed and implemented by the Wheaton Graduate School staff in cooperation with SEPAL (Overseas Crusades), a mission organization specializing in research and strategy for the Church of Brazil. The guiding theoretical framework was the model of spiritual decision processes developed by Engel and Norton (Engel and Norton, 1975), which, in turn, is an adaptation of the Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell model (Engle, Kollat and Blackwell, 1973).

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
It is interesting to note that the Bible for the most part does not lay down clear guidelines in any of these areas of behavior with the exception of avoiding of drunkenness and excess. Therefore, these differences are not explainable by reference to the extent to which each church takes the Bible literally.

In reality, the Lutheran church reflects more of an European outlook than Brazilian. The Assembly of God member, on the other hand, is more likely to be a new Christian who has turned sharply from a previous way of life. It is quite to be expected that old ways of behaving would be avoided voluntarily. This also is reinforced strongly by the teaching of the church, whereas this does not appear to be as true among Lutherans. Whatever the causes, these differences cannot be disregarded. These churches represent sharply different segments, and literature and other types of discipleship materials cannot overlook the almost polar opposite lifestyle profile. The Lutheran would quite likely filter out materials produced for the Assemblies, and vice versa. Given such obvious differences, the sophisticated American marketer no doubt would react in disbelief when it is pointed out that market segmentation has been almost completely disregarded in Christian book publishing, and, sad to say, this is largely the case world wide (Engel, 1978). A book is translated and then distributed to everyone. Needless to say, sales volumes reflect this disregard of marketing commonsense.

The AIO Profile

There were statistically significant differences between these two churches on only 12 of the 28 AIO questions, and data are presented in Table 2.

### Table 1

**THOSE THINGS A "GOOD CHRISTIAN CAN DO"**

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### Table 2

**SELF-DESCRIPTIONS OF BRAZILIAN CHRISTIANS ON AIO QUESTIONS**

Some interesting differences in Christian outlook and behavior are reflected in Table 2. Those Christians who characterize themselves as evangelical traditionally are more concerned with outreach to the nonbeliever. Clearly this is the case among the Assembly of God. A remarkable number are actively engaged in evangelism, Christian counseling, and social concern ministry. At the same time, a majority feels inadequate in meeting the needs of neighbors, thus indicating a felt need for Christian growth in this area. The Lutheran, on the other hand, is much less engaged in Christian outreach and tends toward a more secular lifestyle as data in both Tables 1 and 2 indicate.

It is interesting that these churches do not differ much on other dimensions such as daily Bible reading, worry about not having enough money, ratings of self confidence, and concern about children and their upbringing.

Felt Needs for Change

Table 3 lists those areas of the Christian life in which respondents indicated they "need much help." In all but one area, the differences between denominations are substantial. It can be said that Lutherans, on the whole, are relatively less concerned with spiritual growth, at least insofar as this inventory is concerned. This is not surprising given a more secular lifestyle. There is a strong indication that religion is seen mostly as just another activity, whereas the member of the Assembly of God embraces his Christianity as a way of life. Concern about Christian growth is central and not peripheral. The implications for Christian book marketing are obvious: the Assembly of God is a fertile market segment whereas the Lutheran Church offers far less potential.

### Table 3

**FELT NEEDS FOR CHANGE**

The three sets of psychographic questions revealed sharp differences between the two denominations discussed in this paper. The Lutheran church shows a far more secularistic outlook, and there is evidence that interest in spiritual growth is relatively minimal. On the other hand, Christianity reaches to the very heart of the lifestyle of members of the Assembly of God, and there is both felt need for growth in most areas of life and openness to change. Of the two churches, the latter is a far more fertile market segment. Interestingly, other data showed that over 60 percent of the Assembly of God membership are consistent readers of books, even though educational attainment is minimal. The books utilized, however, are mostly in the "photo-novel" and comic book format. Bookstands are flooded with literature written for the semiliterate.

On the other hand, Christian books are largely translated North American titles, which assume at least high school education and a lifestyle very different from the Brazilian. Therefore, the titles now available have relatively little appeal to this important church, and some drastic changes in marketing practices are required. The need now is to produce Brazilian titles, authored by Brazilians, speaking to the felt needs of the Assembly of God members with full cognizance of their distinctly legalistic Christian lifestyle.

On a broader level, this study has demonstrated the utility of psychographic research in a developing country. In conjunction with the Wheaton Graduate School Research Division, it has also been demonstrated that psychographic research, modified for the culture, can be used in such countries as Spain, Jordan, Japan, Ecuador, and Thailand. Obviously appropriate modifications must be made, but the methodology is by no means confined to a North American setting.

### REFERENCES


similarities and differences in individual psychological functioning in various cultural and ethnocultural groups; of the relationships between psychological variables and socio-cultural, ecological and biological variables; and of ongoing changes in these variables. Goals of cross-cultural psychology. Implied in the various definitions given in the previous section are a set of goals for cross-cultural psychology; these may now be made explicit. A second protection lies in a proposal made by Campbell (1970) to carry out every cross-cultural research project four times. If a researcher from one culture (A) studies a phenomenon in that culture (study 1), and no comparisons are made outside the culture, it remains culture bound. Cross-cultural research on organizational leadership: A critical analysis and a proposed theory. In: P. C. Earley, & M. Erez (Eds.), New perspectives on international industrial/organizational psychology (pp. 535-625). San Francisco, CA) and Dorfman (Dorfman, P. W. (1996). International and cross-cultural leadership research. Effectiveness in a cross-cultural context, a recent meta-analysis shows that emotions are recognized universally at better than chance levels (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). Further, the and procedures set by the top in handling day-to-day events. They also report less reliance on. subordinates and their own experience in dealing with everyday events than do managers. Marketing research in the international context is burdened additionally by the fact that data sets collected to analyse market structure of any kind typically contain responses from people with different cultural backgrounds. This could distort results and cause misinterpretations of data due to cross-cultural response styles. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH The results regarding cross-cultural response styles based on the analysis of ERS replicate prior findings that cultural differences in response styles exist. The comparison of Australian and Asian respondents indicates that the latter are more likely to exhibit a mild response style leading to less extreme points ticked and lower ERS scores.