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READERSHIP AND LIFESTYLE SURVEYS

REASONS FOR A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTION OF READERSHIP

The problem of readership analysis methods cannot be addressed separately from that of the target's description and understanding.

Communication strategies are in fact a direct expression of more general marketing strategies.

It is only in a market where products are addressed to an undifferentiated mass of consumers that the ideal medium is the one with the widest audience or readership, capable of reaching the greatest number of people. And it is only in a market where the differences in consumption behaviour are directly connected to such variables as age, income or education, that it can be enough to have at one's disposal the socio-demographic profiles of the various titles, to single out the medium with the profile that is nearest to that of the consumers of one's product or brand.

But nowadays we have a different situation before us. We are conscious that the growing segmentation of the markets and of the targets is of a new kind.

The socio-demographic parameters do not always (and anyway less and less) discriminate in an effective way. They are not sufficiently exhaustive on values, attitudes and behaviour, and therefore also not on consumers' choices.

Anybody involved in research knows very well that one can continuously run into consumer segments which are extremely alike from the socio-demographic point of view but profoundly different in terms of their consumption strategies.

Similarly, the fact that the consumers of a product and the readers of a certain title are socio-demographically homogeneous is not enough to imply that the two targets coincide, and thus to state that that specific title can be considered a correct vehicle for talking about the product.

On one hand we face an increasingly specialised market which makes it possible for the policy of a product to be the more effective the more it is able to define its target with precision.

On the other hand, in the segmentation of psychological and cultural dimensions, tastes and styles are acquiring increasing importance.

For these reasons it has become absolutely necessary to adjust research tools to the changed market conditions, through the use of qualitative indicators. This is specially true for the study of readership.

Advertising planning has, and will more and more have, a constant need for instruments able to achieve a real homogeneity between readers of various titles and consumers (present or potential) of products.

NEED FOR A GLOBAL APPROACH

In times where consumption behaviour is determined not by needs but by desires, the only way to explain the consumers' behaviour is to face the question with a global approach using a great multiplicity of indicators.

We are in fact convinced that the comprehension of any consumption phenomenon exactly coincides with the understanding of the subject-consumer who is the real protagonist of it;

that is to say, with the interpretation of the microphenomena under study, against the background of all the other characteristics that describe the consumer.

Therefore, for their own titles to be qualified as media, the publishers must first of all have at their disposal 'global and multi-dimensional' indications (values, attitudes, behaviour and consumption) about their own readers.

EURISKO'S EXPERIENCE

Since 1976 we have been trying to put into practice this basic postulate and to create a survey able to describe all the most relevant aspects of the consumer, those that are the basis of his/her choices in everyday life and, thus, of consumption behaviour.

Psychographia was thus born: a study annually repeated until 1984, when it was considered appropriate to make it entirely new to keep it in line with changed times.

The new designation 'Sinottica' is intended to render explicitly the globality of the approach: that comprehension can occur only through the whole.

'Sinottica' is at present one of the largest European surveys, being conducted through a double personal interviews on a sample of 5,000 persons, representative of the adult Italian population aged from 14 to 74 (the universe of reference is estimated at 42.4 million people).

This survey gives an analytic profile, on nearly 700 parameters, of any population segment (consumers of a product or a brand, readers of a title).

The general structure of the information collected through a double interview, can be schematically grouped into four main areas:

Socio-demographic and socio-economic classification variables

Psychological and socio-cultural variables

- self-portrait
- individual and socio-political values
- behavioural trends in the principal areas of daily life (style of dress, purchases, food, hygiene, health, leisure).

Data on specific purchasing and consumption behaviour

- products/services
- brands
- frequency of use/consumption.

Data on media usage

- radio (frequency of listening, dayparts, channels/stations)
- TV (frequency of viewing, dayparts, networks/stations)
- dailies (frequency of reading, titles, topics)
- weeklies and monthlies (frequency of reading, titles, topics).

Each target can therefore be described on the basis of all the variables. And the relationship between consumption and media usage can be specifically analysed both by supplying the analytic description of the readers of each title and by supplying, for the consumers of each product, an extensive description of media usage.

FROM ANALYTIC DESCRIPTION TO SYNTHETIC DESCRIPTION

By increasing the amount of information used to describe a target it is possible to obtain extremely detailed profiles of consumers of a certain product or brand. But, undoubtedly, an excessively analytic description makes it

impossible to establish a link between different targets (in respect of what kind of variables must two targets be so similar as to be considered 'globally' similar?)

It is evident that one needs a synthetic description of the targets, a unitary 'reading key' able to link media and products efficiently.

This 'reading key' which makes it possible to identify the homogeneities between different targets has been identified, in the past, by socio-demographic variables but today we know for certain that these are no longer enough.

It is therefore necessary to have at our disposal a new parameter, capable of summing up the broad ensemble of descriptive variables. And this is possible, considering that the individual variables, the behaviour of consumers, are not independent among themselves but highly correlated, up to the point of structuring themselves into coherent culture patterns.

That is why Eurisko, whilst not giving up the analytic approach, has also decided to establish, within Sinottica, a typological segmentation of the Italian population, whose results have generated a classification into 14 lifestyles.

To define this segmentation, the approximately 800 variables originally contained in the questionnaire have been taken into consideration.

The procedures has involved the following steps:

- the questionnaire has been divided into 'themes' sections
- each section has been submitted to factorial analysis
- the factors of every section have then been analysed in order to identify the variables that

'interpret' at their best each factor (75 variables in all)

- a subsequent further correlation analysis has been conducted on the 75 variables, until 47 'primary' variables were obtained

- on the basis of these variables, the 14 'types' have been generated through clusterisation and segmentation.

It is important to point out and make explicit a theoretic assumption which characterises Sinottica as against similar studies: consumption behaviour is better explained by lifestyle, defined as the globality of everyday life behaviour which is coherent with a personal project, than by attitudes or values.

Thus our 14 groups are based on demographic characters and on criteria, norms and behavioural habits. Of course, for every style one also has a complete description by all variables, values included.

The methodology adopted implies (and it has been experimentally checked) that the descriptive and discriminatory capacity of this tool is highest.

In fact it is evident that the discriminating capacity of the 47 variables, when used together, is superior to that of any other single variable or set of variables arbitrarily combined. (This is confirmed by a check done on 100 products taken at random from those of the Italian mass market).

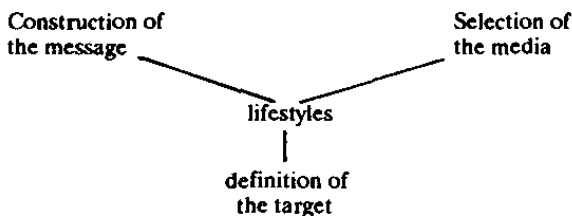
Knowing the distribution by styles of one's present or potential target, a double opportunity is offered for communication:

- develop a more focused message in terms both of content/values and of form/language
- select the most effective media to reach the target

Three important synergies can be realised in this way:

- between message and target
- between media and target
- between message and media.

In this way the lifestyles that become the point of connexion are able to guarantee the maximum consistency among the elements involved in every communication process. The following outline can be useful as a synthesis:



LIFESTYLES AS CONNECTING ELEMENTS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SURVEYS

The tool we have now established gives us another opportunity. In fact, the original calculation procedure used to obtain the 14 styles has been memorised. In other words, mathematical functions have been defined that allow us to reclassify any respondent into his/her own lifestyle without any possibility of error.

To achieve such typological reclassification it is sufficient to administer to the individuals, of whom one wants to know the lifestyle, the 47 original variables, in the way already used in Sinottica.

The application of the 47 variables requires no more than eight to ten minutes of interview.

Consequently, in recent years Eurisko has had the opportunity to apply them not only in its annual psychographic study but also in all the major surveys conducted on its own initiative.

A patrimony of information has therefore been built and it is still growing, becoming broader and more comprehensive for each one of the 14 styles. It is evident that, through this procedure, the 'applicative power' of Sinottica has increased considerably.

Today the styles are not only an effective key for understanding the consumer but also the tool for interfacing all the data contained in Sinottica and those of any other survey which uses the 47 variables.

This is particularly relevant for media surveys. Readership research and audience research must often make use of specific methods and samples in relation to the characteristics of the medium itself.

The set of 47 variables and the segmentation into styles derived from them can be the solution towards an integrated model of understanding capable of closing the gap between different surveys.

An important step has already been taken. The most recent application of lifestyles, through the 47 variables, is in fact the one undertaken in the last few months for the Ispipress survey, the official survey on the readership of magazines in Italy whose results are used for advertising planning.

In this case it has been sufficient to administer the short questionnaire with the 47 variables to the 24,000 respondents of the Ispipress sample, to obtain the classification of the readership of weeklies and monthlies into 14 lifestyles.