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## MOTIVATION RESEARCH IN CONSUMER MARKETING

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As consumers become more informed in regard to characteristics and quality of food items and more experienced in making decisions to purchase them, our work in consumer marketing research becomes increasingly difficult. Each consumer's knowledge of what she should buy will influence her answers in direct question surveys and will introduce a degree of bias that may become highly significant. Her answers to direct questions concerning what, where, when and how of purchasing decisions (or of preference opinions) may deviate from the actual situation that existed according to what she, as a respondent, thinks the interviewer wishes to learn. Question structure and interviewing procedure have not eliminated this tendency to biased answers.

### The Importance of "Why"

But more important yet in modern marketing research is the answer to "why" a decision is made in regard to what, where, when and how activities of consumer purchasing. The tendency toward bias in answers to direct questions is increased greatly when efforts are made to learn the reasons for a particular course of action by consumers. The influence of custom, tradition, prestige and similar factors results in wide deviations between answers and actual operative motives. Surveys of consumer intentions to purchase usually obtain only quantitative data. Surveys of purchases contain data on price and quality in addition to quantity, but replies to why questions in most instances are insufficient in detail and emphasis. Real motives of the consumer purchasing agent are seldom discovered.

Consumer behavior in the form of reduced purchases of certain types of goods has contributed to the 1957-59 recession in business. And the spring-summer "Buy Now" promotion campaigns have been only moderately successful. The imbalance of consumption and production can be traced to a lack of knowledge of consumer motives. Many producers and promoters fail to realize that consumers generally are rational decision-makers. Exceptions are always apparent and usually receive the greatest attention. However, just the meaning of the term "shopping," plus the practices and institutions involved, should convince us of the rationality of decisions by most consumers. This is especially apparent regarding food items in a modern super market and our consumer research in marketing is concerned primarily with food products.

### Discover Basic Motives:

How do we discover the basic motives that consumer purchasers use in making these rational buying decisions? Not by direct questioning, that is certain, and seldom by observation of buying activity because that is the result of a previous motive. Motivation research techniques offer a promising innovation for consumer marketing research in agricultural products. These techniques were adapted from procedures in clinical psychology and

are being modified for individual or group use in studying the motives behind the decisions of consumer purchasers.

One of the earlier books on description and application of projective techniques in market fact finding is Motivation Research by George Horsley Smith (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1954). This book was reviewed very effectively by Marguerite C. Burk of AMS in Agricultural Economics Research, October 1957. This and other publications, both technical and applied in form, have been listed in a bibliography which is available from the author on request.

Motivation research is a branch in the total framework of marketing research, which attempts to answer the question "Why?" concerning consumer behavior. It is a method of discovering people's desires, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, sensations, images, etc., that form the basis of motives for a particular course of action or decision. In words of the psychologist it concerns the thinking of a person between the time a stimulus occurs and a response is made. Motivation research is a fundamental part of consumer marketing study.

Indirect questioning in one of many forms in a face-to-face interview, individually or in groups, is the basic procedure. Open-end questions or the sentence completion technique is one method. Word association tests seem to be successful with children in discovering attitudes toward foods. Various forms of the role-playing technique are most often used with adult respondents with more experience and knowledge in making decisions as a consumer purchasing agent. In the so-called depth interview, non-directive questioning is a probing technique to obtain additional information relative to motives. Effective application of this technique has been made in marketing research, but well-trained interviewers are essential to learn the feelings and reactions of individuals concerning a specific product.

Intensive interviewing (qualitative interviewing in the language of dynamic psychology) will be the most probable method of transition for agricultural researchers in consumer marketing from the unsatisfactory quantitative, direct question interview to the more modern methods of motivation research. At various points in the interview where additional insight is needed into feelings, frustrations or fancies of a respondent, this probing technique can be employed with satisfactory results. The practical consideration of recording the answers to intensive interviewing requires proficiency in shorthand writing, or more satisfactorily, a portable tape recorder. Complete recordings of motivation research interviews are needed in order to have verbatim typewritten copies for interpretations of answers and extended remarks by respondents.

#### Projective Techniques

Cartoon tests have had limited application in marketing research. In this technique, the respondent is given a cartoon in which one person had made a statement relative to a product, attitude, motive, prejudice, etc. The respondent is to write her answer in the blank speech balloon for the second figure in the cartoon. Space is limited for answers and

further intensive interviewing usually is needed. Cartoon answers supply patterns of motives, attitudes, feelings, etc., that can be analyzed in relation to responses to a standard questionnaire or other forms of tests.

One of the major projective techniques is known as the Thematic Apperception Test (usually abbreviated as TAT). The basic method is to show a complete picture of a person or persons in a situation and ask the respondent for the plot of a story about the picture. Recorded responses to a series of pictures will give the thoughts, feelings, desires, attitudes, etc., of the respondent to the situation or event. Prompting for answers on a major aspect of the story may lead to an intensive interview. Individual tests are preferable, but satisfactory results are possible with groups, when slides are projected and each respondent writes her story. Scoring, analyzing, and interpreting the TAT consists of many approaches which depend upon the type of problem being studied. Market research would concentrate on study of attitudes and motives in relation to a specific stimulus, such as a sales promotion idea.

#### Possible Application of a Projective Technique, TAT

In the past few years a number of studies have been made concerning consumer preferences for beef. These might more accurately have been considered as opinions and prejudices. Much of the information which was obtained considered only the how, what, when and where of consumer expectations. Stereotyped answers were given generally to questions relating to why an opinion was expressed. When these opinion preferences were related to actual purchases by consumers, a different relationship was discovered. Evidently some bias was present in the answers by respondents. Definitely the replies to why questions were incomplete and quite often ambiguous.

Experience with direct question surveys on purchases as well as preferences indicates that a new approach is needed to learn the basic motives for decisions by consumers. This should be a supplementary research method to a short-form questionnaire on purchases of meat in the immediate past. The number of schedules on purchases should be sufficient and a random method of sampling used to obtain statistically significant quantitative data. A stratified sample of these respondents could then be used in a TAT to obtain basic motives for the purchasing decisions that had been made previously (and probably would be made again).

Briefly, the procedure of this technique could be to show each respondent in the second sample a sequence of pictures (preferably in color) of a woman at a meat counter obviously making a decision to purchase meat. The question "What is the woman thinking?" will be answered on the basis of what the respondent thinks. She will project her attitudes, desires, beliefs, feelings, images and motives to the woman in the picture. Freedom in answering in the format of constructing a story around the various situations in the picture will provide valuable supplementary information on the motives involved in decision-making. A tape recording of these answers is essential to obtain all information as well as the emphasis placed on certain answers by voice tones and inflection.

Coding of the typewritten replies would consist primarily of determining the frequency of occurrence of key words and phrases that express the motives of the respondent. The sequence in which these words and phrases occur might be significant in judging relative importance. The classification, tabulation, computation and interrelations of coded answers would be the chief activities in analysis to determine extent and degree of importance of various motives. Results of the analysis of consumer purchasing motives should be interpreted into action programs of the marketing situation.

In the case of beef, if definite motives for purchase and consumption can be determined with a high degree of significance, these motives can be interpreted into a sales promotion campaign. Certain media will be more effective than others in carrying the message to prospective customers. The stimulus for subsequent action (a decision to purchase) should be coordinated with available supplies in the retail markets for a successful selling campaign. Advertising in local media plus point-of-purchase promotion probably would be the most effective methods of increasing sales.

The present production cycle for beef cattle shows a tendency to be shorter in the number of years of declining numbers of cattle. Under favorable range and feed conditions the peak of cattle numbers and large suppliers of meat may occur some years earlier than in a normal cycle. If methods are known by which the motives for purchase of beef can be stimulated, a degree of influence on consumer purchases may be exerted to balance consumption with increased supplies. In a short time basis (two or three years) beef might be substituted for other meats to a considerable extent. With short supplies of beef the opposite situation would occur. If consumption could be influenced to more nearly equal the increased supplies, wide fluctuations in prices to ranchers and feeders could be reduced.

#### Summary

Motivation research is a psychological technique to determine the basic reasons for decision-making. Through projective techniques and intensive interviewing homemakers are more likely to reveal the fundamental attitudes that guide their decisions. These attitudes and motives are incorporated into advertising and promotional material to influence the decision to purchase the commodity or product.

Results of this method of consumer research will assist agricultural economists in reaching the goal of balance between production and consumption. Much policy and many programs have been evolved to regulate production of agricultural products on the basis of past consumption. A modern supplement to this activity could be developed in motivation research which would influence further consumption of excessive supplies.

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