



Brand Personality

Researchers spend a great deal of time measuring and tracking "brand image." However, this is like the proverbial inebriate looking for his keys, not where he dropped them, but under a street lamp where the light is better. We know very well how to do such research, but it is rarely of much use.

The hard fact is that brand images are slow to change. We agree with Andy Farr who writes, "Those who believe that brands can be moved around a perceptual map as easily as chess pieces are invariably disappointed." In many categories, furthermore, images differ only trivially across the leading brands.

Brand research is still important, but we need to focus on something that is more malleable, more differentiating, and more salient to consumers. That "something" is Brand Personality (BP)—the emotionally tinged, human qualities that consumers associate with the brand. For instance, David Aaker writes "One important relationship for many brands is a friendship link characterized by trust, dependability, understanding and caring."

BP connects the brand to the consumer. In fact, research shows a correlation between BP and the personalities of users. What would do more to bond you to a brand—the belief that it "offers a wide variety of products" or the feeling that it is "sincere?"

BP develops and is shaped by a combination of marketing communications and actual experience with the brand. Lousy service encounters will defeat a great advertising campaign.

Our point, finally, is that it is short-sighted to track only traditional brand image attributes. We have to broaden our horizons and look seriously at BP. To do so, we first need to develop a vocabulary of personality (and relationship) attributes that fits the brands and category; this is a task for qualitative research.

Quantitative research would then answer a range of interesting questions to help manage your brand better. Has there been movement? What are the roots (drivers) of your BP? What aspects of BP are predictive of consumer preferences? What consumer personality attributes are relevant to the category, and how are they aligned with your brand—and those of competitors?

This is a rich topic, though published materials are still very scattered. However, we have a small collection which we would gladly share with you. All you have to do is ask!

Archives

Adobe Acrobat (pdf) versions of this and previous issues are available on our web site at www.action-research.com/aline.htm

Web Sites of Interest

A logical extreme of customer satisfaction research is found at:
<http://members.esslink.com/~frenchy/godstotal.htm>

A great, new search engine called "google" makes no pretense of being a portal. It is just way fast:
<http://www.google.com>

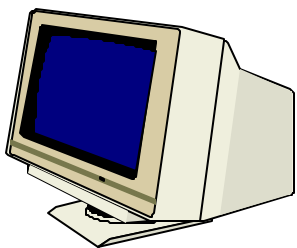
Internet Research

More and more of you are using the Internet as an essential part of your businesses, and that is spawning ever more interest in using the Internet for quantitative research. There are many, weighty issues here. We just want to share two thoughts and even more clichés.

1. Old dogs have to learn new tricks. We researchers have no choice; we must keep current on the tools, methods and unique aspects of Internet research. When progressive firms switched from paper questionnaires to CATI systems 20 years ago, researchers had to learn a whole new set of tricks and rules of thumb. It's *deja vu* all over again. There is no way that web surveys will replace all other data collections but, like rock 'n roll, they are here to stay (how's our count of clichés?).

2. The fundamental things apply (as time goes by). There will be important changes—such as ever faster turn-around times—but being a clever bit-jockey will never be enough. However we acquire it, survey data must still be believable. It must accurately measure things that matter. It must be applicable to substantive business problems . . . all those boring things from Marketing 102.

The upshot is that those flyers which promise that their Internet Research seminars (or software . . .) are going to turn your business around are only about 25% correct. If you and your company fail to stay tuned to the possibilities of Internet research, you may indeed fall behind. But competence in Internet research may soon be just table stakes. You and your research partners will need at least as much critical judgment, statistical sophistication, and basic marketing savvy as ever. Accept no substitutes.



Bad Drives Out the Good

A recent news story reported on a Time Magazine "survey" in which readers were invited to nominate the most influential person of the 20th century. As of this writing the leader was . . . Elvis Presley. In third place was Adolf Hitler, which has prompted a write in for slain Israeli leader Ytzak Rabin. In terms of pure influence (not popularity, as in Elvis, or greatness, as in Rabin), Henry Ford, Vladimir Lenin, and Margaret Sanger would be higher on our list.

Sigh. The marketing research staff at Time/Life can't be any happier than we are. Once again, ill-conceived, self-selective polling emits a bad odor that hangs over all of us who try to get people to take survey research seriously.

Good Reading

A favorite client (you know who you are) put us on to a British bi-monthly publication called Admap. What with overseas postage, it is not cheap, but we have never seen so much clear thinking and understandable evidence in a research journal. The authors are mostly advertising practitioners.

It makes you wonder about our system of higher education where business faculty hanker after the prestige and writing style of their colleagues in Physics, and look on PhD students who go into actual business as failures.

And A Good Reference Source

Did you realize that among the publications of the American Marketing Association are a pair of Marketing Scales Handbooks (ed. Bruner & Hensel)? Drawn almost entirely from academic journals, these volumes provide a nice head start in writing statements to measure attitude constructs. Call, write, or visit www.ama.org for yours.