MULTICULTURAL MEDIA-GRAPHICS:
USING TV PROGRAM RATINGS TO PROFILE ETHNIC MARKETS

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Abstract

Marketing educators face a multicultural marketing instruction dilemma. Analytical skills are required to profile diverse demographics, yet many marketing students are averse to quantitative assignments. Drawing upon the notion that "a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down," this study chronicles a consumer behavior course module that uses real world media ratings to sweeten multicultural market analysis. Students were asked to profile U.S. ethnic target markets using Nielsen.com audience ratings for familiar TV programs. The Nielsen media ratings are introduced following an orientation to conventional ethnic market demographic analysis. Weekly class sessions were monitored for improvement in both the range and relevance of multicultural market analysis. Based on this unstructured exploratory class observation, the use of media ratings appears to increase the span of multicultural markets that students choose to analyze, as well as the statistical evidence used to profile ethnic consumers. If familiar media program ratings can make quantitative skills more palatable, then marketing educators may have found a new multicultural market analysis remedy.

Conventional Ethnic Demographics vs. Familiar Media-Graphic Ratings

Multicultural marketing practices and pedagogy rely on conventional demographic analysis to profile ethnic target markets in the U.S. and globally. In the U.S., these demographic analyses are available in the academic and business trade literature (Humphreys 2012; Yankelovich 2009; Rao 2006; Tharp 2001; Halter 2000), as well as from regularly released U.S. Census Bureau reports. Yet, the quantitative skills required to analyze these data and extract specific statistics for targeted ethnic segments may be challenging for marketing students (Remington, et al. 2000). The general perception of marketing courses as qualitatively oriented (Pritchard, et al. 2004), with the exception of marketing research, can be a learning impediment to imparting analytical skills for profiling multicultural markets. Therefore, this study observed whether the use of ethnic audience ratings for familiar television media programs would reduce the quantitative timidity of marketing students and result in tenable multicultural market analysis.

This proposed use of media ratings in place of conventional demographics recognizes the likelihood that media profiles of ethnic market segments will be less quantitatively robust,

precise, and comprehensive than demographic statistics. Still, the use of familiar television program ratings is expected to increase the interest in quantitative data analysis, than would otherwise occur with conventional demographic sources. So, it is hypothesized that; *students will prefer to use media ratings over conventional measures when profiling multicultural consumer segments.* This method of examining student outcomes frames the project as a comparison between the conventional "null dataset" and the "alternative dataset" of media ratings. Based on the students' backgrounds, this study focus on U.S. TV audiences (http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/measurement/television-measurement.html), despite the access to Nielsen.com ratings for multiple media platforms (radio, Internet, mobile, social) and many global markets (http://www.nielsen.com/global/en.html). Thus, media-graphics modules can be designed for global and multi-media objectives beyond the scope of this study.

Designing the Demographics and Media-Graphics Orientation Process

The media ratings module begins with an orientation to conventional sources for analyzing ethnic markets in the U.S. This introduction to conventional statistics serves as a comparative benchmark for gauging the analytical interest in and aptitude for media ratings data. In addition to multicultural market surveys http://www.terry.uga.edu/selig/buying_power.html and U.S. Census Bureau reports http://www.census.gov/population/race, students are shown historical tables in the U.S. Statistical Abstract http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/hist_stats.html, purchasing patterns from the U.S. Department of Labor Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) http://www.bls.gov/cex, ethnic group facts at www.Wikipedia.com, and geo-demographic figures by websites like www.CityData.com. These standard multicultural market profiles are supported by textbook topics like external marketing environment diversity trends, market segmentation and target marketing, as well as ethnic cultural consumer behavior influences.

After showing students conventional demographic data sources, the orientation to media ratings data began by conducting an online 'scavenger hunt' for favorite television programs in the U.S. television listings at www.Nielsen.com. This free-wheeling autonomous approach towards the TV ratings website is intended to diminish the quantitative timidity exhibited by marketing students towards numerical statistics in general (Remington, et al. 2000). Once students became personally involved with the Nielsen TV ratings, instructions were given to compose a U.S. ethnic market segment profile based on five analytical parameters of audience data:

      a) *Program rankings* for a particular audience segment (ordinal scale 1 – 10, or 1 – 20)

      b) *Program rating points* for a particular audience segment (interval scale 1- 100)

c) *Program audience share* associated with ratings points (ratio scale in millions)

d) P*rogram time/day-part* (morning, afternoon, evening, late night)

e) *Program type* (talk show, variety show, drama, comedy, news, sports, etc.).

Project Organization, Operationalization, and Output

Project organization consisted of organizing the consumer behavior class into eight (8) groups of approximately four students. Each group was directed to select a 'real world' company and a primary brand offering, for which an U.S. ethnic market segment could be targeted.

Project operationalization of U.S. ethnic market segments included a historical background on the racially defined categories in existing datasets, as contrasted with the cultural anthropology idea of universal ethnicity. Unlike socially determined racial groups, anthropology regards all human ancestry as contributing equally valid cultural traditions and customer traits (Carter 2010; Jamal 2003; Burton 2000; Costa & Bamossy 1997). Contrary to the contemporary norm of emphasizing ethnic minorities and excluding the diverse European American heritage (e.g., English, French, German, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Polish, Russian, Swedish, etc.), universal ethnicity includes the entire human multicultural spectrum. Unfortunately, the datasets used in this project do not allow students to develop universal multicultural profiles -- whether targeting ethnic American minorities (e.g., Arab, Korean, Jamaican, Mexican, Persian, etc.) or European Americans in the "White" majority. Consequently, students learned how data approximation techniques align authentic ethnic target markets with approximate racial dataset classifications. Future projects can incorporate global markets media ratings to better address universal ethnicity by applying cross-cultural approaches (Engelen & Brettel 2011; Burton 2008).

Project output was designated as three periodic strategic briefings on the ethnic market segment(s) targeted and the media ratings analysis used for target market profiles. These briefings included typed reports with data profiles and graphics, as well as informal dialogue. For each strategic briefing, groups were free to choose any single ethnic target market, or set of ethnic segments. Likewise, students were free to construct ethnic target market profiles using any combination of "null dataset" demographics and "alternative dataset" media-graphics. The consumer "persona" method of market segment interpretation (Gummesson 2006; Stern 1994) guided the logical translation of media audience ratings into target market profiles for specific brands. These personas supplied reasons for brand sponsorship of highly rated programs, and strategic rationale for why media-graphics capture essential target market demographics.

Research Findings: Raising Multicultural Market Analysis Skills

The multicultural media-graphics module achieved the hypothesized results. Students displayed a significantly greater preference for using "alternative dataset" television media ratings compared to the conventional "null dataset" demographic sources. In addition, higher proficiency was observed for the ethnic target market profiles that included television ratings tendencies than the profiles based on conventional demographic sources. In particular, verbal descriptions were articulated more fluently (e.g., pertinent psychographic 'persona' traits) and analytical data were justified with a better grasp of numerical facts (e.g., statistical rankings, ratings, ranges, and relative comparisons). An unexpected favorable finding pertains to the expanded range of different ethnic target markets that groups included in their reports. This observation suggests that quantitative analysis with familiar media ratings increases the likelihood that students will expand their awareness of a diverse multicultural market spectrum. This student affinity for using media ratings, combined with online access, provides marketing educators with a pliable pedagogical tool for raising multicultural market analysis skills.

References Available Upon Request