

Multicultural Market Research

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Multicultural Marketing Research: We're Getting Closer, But We're Not There Yet

Michael Halberstam
President, Interviewing Service of America

Multicultural marketing research has always lagged behind general market marketing research. There are many reasons for this and they have been hashed and rehashed. Rarely, until the 1980's was any population other than English speaking residents surveyed in the USA. African Americans became marketable to a great extent

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during the 1960's. It took almost 20 more years for Hispanic Americans and 30+ years for Asian Americans to be recognized as segments worthy of the expenditure of advertising and marketing dollars. Although, still not quite equally representative in these expenditures, most would agree that

money is being spent, to a much greater degree, in all segments.

What does this mean for marketing research? Looking back, I remember conducting mall interviews and focus groups in the Tri-State NY area in 1978 when nothing

was done electronically. For the most part, our respondents were Caucasian with a smattering of African Americans. In the mid-1980's with the advent of CATI telephone data collection as well as the refinement of RDD high-density sampling, we were able to conduct bilingual Spanish data collection in a cost efficient manner. Suddenly, we were getting requests every week for bilingual marketing research!

When the 1990 and 2000 Census data were released, and I've mentioned this a thousand times before, Fortune 1000 companies began to take notice. Already in place were a slew of excellent multicultural advertising agencies, PR firms, marketers as well as a very small number of market research firms who had a passion for the market and the vision of what it would become. The strong growth of many of these agencies over the past 15 years is testimony to that vision.

Again, I ask the question, what does this mean for marketing research? As we enter the next decade we now have the tools necessary to conduct multicultural, multilingual marketing research with incredible speed in any language necessary. Imagine for a moment

that you are company that wants to know about the shopping experience of a group of people who shop at your stores. And, you wanted to conduct this in Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. Today, right now, market researchers are able, via smart phone technology, to have shoppers take pictures and send back survey data while still in the store shopping! We are getting regular requests to build and maintain multilingual online panels for use among our clients base. This is now, not the future.

Social networking, mobile technology, better online panels with Flash technology along with the new Census data will make the future an exciting time for multicultural market research.

Since 1983 ISA has conducted multilingual, multicultural research in 67 languages for a wide array of industries such as CPG, automobile, health care, entertainment, media, political, utilities, colleges and universities and government agencies.

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