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The Influence of Politz on European Research

Product Research and Testing

At the 1963 ESOMAR congress at Lucerne, Hugh Hardy presented the Politz philosophy of product testing, as elucidated in Chapter 3, page 31¹. Since this was an international gathering it is probable that some researchers took notice of this philosophy, and as a consequence, may have carried out their product tests accordingly.

Only one reference to this paper has come to my attention. In his rather critical exposition of motivation research, Gerhard Schmidtchen stated that only now one discovers that the objective quality of a product is important for success in the market in the long run; even though consumers may not be able to distinguish between different qualities in unfair small-scale tests.

He then referred to the so-called „*excess power of groups*“ as an explanation why a larger group may have the ability to find differences of quality even though individuals may appear to be quite uncertain. Although this may sound somewhat mythical, he went on, it has a real meaning since consumers by cumulative experience may gain a certain image of a product's qualities.

Even today one can read statements regarding consumers' inability to find differences between different products - based on research folklore and/or inadequate tests. I shall resist the temptation to quote examples.

However, a number of large, mostly international manufacturers have carried out product tests for two or three decades (if not longer) which are based on large enough groups of consumers who are given the test product for a long enough period of time to get thoroughly acquainted with it before they are asked for their opinions about it.

Questionnaires used contain properly worded relevant characteristics; and test participants are asked to indicate on some kind of scale the extent to which the item applies to the product. Then, a quantitative analysis (in the sense of natural sciences) can be carried out.

The method has proved time and again that even small differences of quality, consistency, taste, flavor etc. are properly reflected by test results.

These successes have, of course, propagated the method. Whether the original impetus came from Politz directly or indirectly will be hard to ascertain; good ideas quite often occur simultaneously to several people. In our case, the direct influence is obvious; and we have had the good fortune to meet clients who accepted this convincing concept.

References

Hardy, Hugh S.: „The Illusion of the Image and the Excess Power of Groups“, ESOMAR-Congress, Amsterdam 1963

Schmidtchen Gerhard: „Motivforschung und Soziologie“ in: „Vorträge zur Marktforschung“, BVM-Schriftenreihe 13/14, 1965

¹ Dieser Text stammt aus: Hugh S. Hardy: „The Politz Papers; Science and Truth in Marketing Research,“ AMA 1990; die o. Anm. bezieht sich auf ein weiteres Kapitel dieses empfehlenswerten Buches