

Psychographics used to target audience

By Wendy Fisher
Emerald Contributor

Are you the right type? Are your values what they should be?

Based on a survey of 193 University students, members of the college community here are likely the "I-am-me" type and value high self-fulfillment. "I-am-me (socially active and outgoing)" and "self-fulfillment" are two human traits uncovered through psychographics — the study of opinions, values and attitudes.

Categorizing individuals using this process commonly is used in research projects, such as the VALS (Value and Lifestyles System) and LOV (List of Values) programs.

The research helps program directors and advertisers determine which programs and products will attract the largest audiences.

Neill Roan, director of marketing and programming for the Hult Center for the Performing Arts, recently used VALS to find the target audience for its 1988-89 season.

"We feel it is our mission to serve the entire population," Roan said. "We try to program for everyone."

Roan chose VALS because other programs don't compare, he said. "Nothing comes close. (VALS) has absolutely the largest data base and is the most widely used system," Roan said.

Last August, Hult Center personnel mailed 5,000 VALS questionnaires to randomly selected homes in Eugene and Springfield.

The questionnaire opens with demographics: name, age, sex, income and education. Respondents are categorized based on their answers.

The psychographic questions are quite different, however. One question inquires if the individual had danced at discos in the past 12 months. "Are you more likely to attend a performance, do some gardening or go to a bar?" reads another.

Other questions address musical preferences, whether marijuana should be legalized, and if the earth was literally created in six days.

The responses are compiled and sent to SRI International (formerly Stanford Research Institute), where they are computer-analyzed to determine the spectrum of different attitudes, lifestyles and values.

The Hult Center will receive the results to their latest survey next spring.

VALS works well for Roan's purposes, but the program may also have its drawbacks.

Dr. Lynn Kahle, associate professor of marketing at the University and a specialist in consumer behavior, believes VALS could be improved.

The program "doesn't relate to people as well as others could," Kahle said. He recommends the LOV program, which asks only direct value questions.

"Better information is obtained from 'value' than VALS, and 'value' is better for predicting consumer behavior," Kahle

said.

Kahle added that an individual's values are derived from demographics and attitudes with the VALS program.

Another problem with VALS, Kahle noted, is the secrecy used in their research, making it impossible to criticize and therefore difficult to prove its accuracy.

In fact, VALS is currently undergoing a massive revision, Kahle said.

Roan, however, remains faithful to VALS. "LOV has nowhere near the data of VALS," he said, adding he is "yet to be convinced on others."

Although Kahle doesn't agree with the Hult Center's choice of psychographic research systems, he admires the Hult Center for trying a new approach in program selection.

Still wondering if you're the right type or if your values are what they should be?

Don't worry, you can't be wrong.

The 1985 study of 193 University students was taken using questionnaires containing both VALS and LOV questions.

The following are percentage

ratings from the LOV questions taken from a 1986 Journal of Consumer Research. (Ranked from most important in people's lives to least important.)

Self-fulfillment, 25 percent; self-respect, 17 percent; warm relationships, 17 percent; accomplishment, 12 percent; other, 12 percent; security, 10 percent; sense of belonging, 7 percent.

Here is the breakdown of the different types of individuals according to VALS research:

I-am-me, 58 percent; achiever, 10 percent; believer, 9 percent; sustainer, 8 percent; experiential, 5 percent; emulator, 5 percent; survivor, 3 percent; socially conscious, 2 percent.

I-am-me types are those who are daring and socially active and outgoing. They think their greatest achievements are yet to come, perceive themselves as experimental and are quick to accept new ideas.

There are many psychographic systems available. Both Roan and Kahle believe psychographics in association with demographics can only help with program and advertising selection.

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