

A Canadian Replication of Mason Haire's 'Shopping List' Study

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INTRODUCTION

In 1950, Mason Haire showed that projective test techniques are of great value in marketing research, because of their talent in penetrating unconscious and conscious mental defences, thus providing motivational material from which inferences can be made about products. The projective technique used by Haire urged the respondent to "ascribe to another person a trait or desire of his own that may have been harmful for his ego to admit." (Anderson and Anderson, 1951, p. 3).

Most readers will recall that Mason Haire's original 1950 study, which consisted of three separate tests, was designed to probe the true reactions of consumers to Nescafé, an instant coffee.

Haire's technique involved the preparation of two shopping lists which were identical except that Shopping List I included Nescafé instant coffee whereas Shopping List II included Maxwell House Coffee (Drip Ground).

Shopping List I

Pound and a half hamburger
2 loaves Wonder bread
bunch of carrots
1 can Rumford's baking powder
Nescafé instant coffee

2 cans Del Monte peaches
5 lbs potatoes

Shopping List II

Pound and a half hamburger
2 loaves Wonder bread
bunch of carrots
1 can Rumford's baking powder
1 lb Maxwell House Coffee
(Drip Ground)
2 cans Del Monte peaches
5 lbs potatoes

Each list was submitted to fifty selected respondents who did not know of the existence of the other list. The accompanying instructions were as follows: "Read the shopping list below. Try to project yourself into the situation as far as possible until you can more or less characterize the woman who bought the groceries. Then write a brief description of her personality and character. Wherever possible, indicate what factors influenced your judgment." (Haire, 1950, p. 651).

The responses produced the following descriptions:

1. "48% of the people described the woman who bought Nescafé as lazy; 4% described the woman who bought Maxwell House as lazy.
2. "48% of the people described the woman who bought Nescafé as failing to plan household purchases and schedules well; 12% described the woman who bought Maxwell House this way.
3. "4% described the Nescafé woman as thrifty; 16% described the Maxwell House woman as thrifty. 12% described the Nescafé woman as spendthrift; 0% described the Maxwell House woman this way.
4. "16% described the Nescafé woman as not a good wife; 16% described the Maxwell House woman as a good wife." (Haire, 1950, p. 652).

In a second test, where Haire added to both lists a fictitious prepared food (Blueberry Fill Pie Mix) the differences between the Nescafé housewife and the Maxwell House housewife tended to disappear. Haire's main interpretation of this result was that the use of prepared foods like instant coffee and pie mixes was not consistent with the role of a good housewife and in fact resulted in guilt feelings on the part of those housewives who used such prepared foods.

Indeed, Haire's third test, which involved only the Nescafé list followed by a pantry audit showed that any respondent who attached undesirable traits to a woman who had bought Nescafé would not buy instant coffee herself. Conversely, women who were found to have instant coffee on the pantry shelf generated "excuses" for having it, almost twice as often as those who did not use it (Haire, 1950, p. 655).

The Webster and von Pechmann Study, "Replication of the 'Shopping List' Study" was undertaken by Frederick E. Webster, Jr. and Frederick von Pechmann in 1968, wherein it was found that the differences between the Nescafé housewife of 1968 and the Maxwell House housewife had diminished to the point where they were no longer statistically significant (see Table 1).

Table 1
 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ASCRIBING
 CHARACTERISTICS TO SHOPPERS
 (From Webster and von Pechmann, 1970)

Ascribed Characteristics	HAIRE STUDY			WEBSTER & VON PECHMANN STUDY		
	Nescafé Shopper (n=50)	Maxwell House Shopper (n=50)	Chi Square	Nescafé Shopper (n=22)	Maxwell House Shopper (n=20)	Chi Square
Lazy	48%	4%	22.921 ^d	18%	10%	0.010
Poor Planner	48%	12%	13.762 ^d	27%	25%	0.034
Thrifty	4%	16%	2.778 ^a	36%	55%	0.813
Spendthrift	12%	0%	4.433 ^b	23%	5%	1.436
Bad Wife	16%	0%	6.658 ^c	18%	5%	0.706
Good Wife	4%	16%	2.778 ^a	18%	25%	0.026
Overweight				18%	10%	0.010
Time-Saver				32%	10%	1.808
Does not Enjoy Homemaking				18%	10%	0.010
Enjoys Homemaking				27%	40%	0.298
No Imagination				41%	30%	0.172
Single Girl, Busy				18%	10%	0.010
Brand of Coffee Mentioned				50%	35%	0.447

^a Significant at .10 level

^b Significant at .05 level

^c Significant at .01 level

^d Significant at 0.001 level

Webster and von Pechmann (1970) interpreted their results as follows:

1. Convenience foods were more acceptable to a 1968 American housewife than they were in 1950.
2. The Nescafé housewife received a more favourable assessment than in 1950.
3. The Maxwell House shopper had gained more negative characteristics.

4. The nature of the shopping list itself was subjectively interpreted to be "old fashioned."
5. The 1968 Nescafé shopper seemed to have the following attributes: busy, single, interested in saving money, quick, energetic, fast-moving, outgoing, friendly, physically active and on-the-move. All of these were stated in a positive way. On the other hand, the Maxwell House shopper was seen as: living on a farm, dull, phlegmatic and having no spirit of adventure and no elegance of taste.

CANADIAN APPLICABILITY

The many similarities in the American and the Canadian ways of life, plus the proximity of Canada to the United States, suggest that the findings of Haire, as well as those of Webster and von Pechmann, could be applicable to Canada.

The general tendency of many people is to ascribe a certain cultural homogeneity not only to the people of Canada, but also to the inhabitants of Canada and of the United States. This is fostered, to some degree, by the similarities in the way of life of the two countries. Both countries have similar economic objectives, with Canada, to some extent, being economically dependent on the U.S.A. Because of this economic dependence, it has been argued that various American cultural elements are exported to Canada.

Furthermore, a tendency on the part of Canadians to accept American products generated from American research and development, plus the spill-over influence from American radio and T.V., would seem to facilitate any exportation of American cultural components to Canada.

The question of whether or not marketers should attempt to apply the findings of U.S. studies to the Canadian setting is not a new one. In practice it is done all the time. The usual justifications cited are that the Canadian population is too small, and/or too dispersed to warrant a separate study. While these reasons may justify the use of American research findings in Canada, they do not guarantee their relevance. If cultural differences exist between Canada and the U.S., the applicability of research findings generated from an American environment and utilized in Canada would seem to be highly questionable. In particular, the fact that Canada is at least bi-cultural, if not a cultural mosaic, casts suspicion upon the notion that findings such as those of Haire and of Webster and von Pechmann would necessarily hold true in Canada.

THE PRESENT STUDY

To provide a base for comparison of the results from this study and the results from the 1950 Haire study and the 1968 Webster and von Pechmann study, the same procedures and methods of analysis were rigorously followed. However, the questionnaire was Canadianized to the extent that the brand names of Weston bread and Magic Baking Powder were substituted for the American brands, Wonder bread and Rumford's Baking Powder.

Both the Nescafé and the Maxwell House questionnaires were translated into French. The French translations were then translated back into English. This method revealed any possible distortions which were then corrected, so that both English and French questionnaires reflected identical instructions which in turn were identical to the instruction given by Webster and von Pechmann. Thus there were four questionnaires: English Maxwell House, English Nescafé, French Maxwell House and French Nescafé.

After pretesting, a total of 200 questionnaires (50 of each type) were distributed to a randomly selected sample in the city of Ville St. Laurent. Ville St. Laurent, a middle class suburb of Montreal, was chosen because of its almost equal representation of Francophones and Anglophones. The questionnaires were hand delivered by a team of two individuals, one who had English as a first language and one who had French as a first language. It was therefore possible, once the householder had made an initial response for the appropriate member of the team to converse in the housewife's own language and thus ensure that the appropriate version of the questionnaire was presented.

RESULTS

Strict procedures were followed for the categorization of the ascribed characteristics for each housewife. This categorization required literal interpretation of words, and strict content analysis in the case of descriptive sentences and paragraphs. The categories of ascribed characteristics were the same as those used by Webster and von Pechmann, with the inclusion of additional categories to take into account the characteristics which were peculiar to the present study. In the few cases where the expected frequencies were less than 5, the Yates' correction for continuity was applied.

The English-Canadian Housewife

While it was hypothesized that there would be little difference between the results for the English-Canadian housewife and those that were obtained in the Webster and von Pechmann study, such did not prove to be the case (see Table 2).

Where Webster and von Pechmann found no significant differences between the American Nescafé housewife and the American Maxwell House housewife the Canadian study found that English-Canadian housewives ascribed "laziness" and "doesn't enjoy homemaking" to the Nescafé housewife. Even though the differences are not as striking, they are consistent with Haire's original findings. At the same time the negative image of the Nescafé housewife is tempered in English Canadian minds by the supposition that she is working and thus may have some excuse for using instant coffee.

Most of the other characteristics peculiar to the present study (reference to brand names, influenced by advertising, nutrition conscious) can be viewed from the perspective of increasing consumer awareness. The increasing dissemination of consumer information regarding nutrition values, advertising in general and the price advantages of buying private brand food items, would add strength to the idea that the English-Canadian housewife may be much better informed than her 1968 American counterpart. (This is not to suggest however that the present-day American housewife may not also be more aware as a consumer than the 1968 American housewife.)

It would seem then, despite some similarity of our findings for English-Canadian housewives with those of Haire, that it would be a mistake to conclude that English Canadian housewives are merely a latter day version of the 1950 American housewife. The criticisms of Haire's housewives were directed to the convenience aspect of the coffee, which was associated with failure on the part of the woman to fulfill her role as a wife and mother. In fact, the English-Canadian housewife does not even mention a good wife or bad wife characteristics which were important in both American studies (1950 and 1968). This would seem to indicate a difference in role perception between the American housewife and the English-Canadian housewife. For the English-Canadian housewife household task may no longer represent, if they ever did, a very important standard with regard to being a good or a bad wife.

Table 2
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ASCRIBING
CHARACTERISTICS TO SHOPPERS

English-Canadian Respondents

	Nescafé Shopper (n = 28)		Maxwell House Shopper (n = 31)		
Ascribed Characteristics	Observed Frequency	%	Observed Frequency	%	Chi Square
I					
Lazy	6	21	2	6	5.8121 ^c
Poor Planner	15	54	12	39	1.3092
Thrifty	9	32	12	39	0.2778
Spendthrift	5	18	3	9	0.8383
Bad Wife	-	-	-	-	-
Good Wife	-	-	-	-	-
II					
Overweight	3	11	4	13	0.0676
Time Saver	-	-	-	-	-
Does not Enjoy Homemaking	3	11	-	-	5.9551 ^c
Enjoys Homemaking	9	32	9	30	0.0671
No Imagination	9	32	5	16	2.0850
Single Girl, Busy	3	11	1	3	1.1327
Brand of Coffee Mentioned	1	3	1	3	-
III					
Working	9	32	1	3	7.7214 ^d
Limited Budget	5	18	12	39	3.1201 ^a
Reference to Brand Names	17	61	9	30	5.9920 ^c
Influenced by Advertising	9	32	3	9	4.5829 ^b
Limited Time	5	18	7	23	0.2024
Nutrition Conscious	5	18	4	13	0.2788
Not Nutrition Conscious	-	-	6	19	4.4367 ^b

I: Categories used by Mason Haire
I & II: Categories used by Webster
and von Pechmann
I, II & III: Categories used in
Canadian Study

^a Significant at .10 level
^b Significant at .05 level
^c Significant at .02 level
^d Significant at .01 level

The French-Canadian Housewife

The bi-cultural nature of Canada and the probable reduced spill-over effect of American advertising into the French-Canadian culture would suggest that French-Canadian attitudes towards certain foods, such as prepared food, could be quite different from American and English-Canadian attitudes towards the same products. It was not expected therefore that Webster and von Pechmann or Haire's findings would hold for French-Canadian housewives.

As shown in Table 3 the only characteristic from Haire's categories on which there was found a significant difference (at the .10 level) was on the matter of being thrifty, except that the French-Canadian housewives ascribed this characteristic to the Nescafé shopper whereas Haire's housewives ascribed it to the Maxwell House shopper.

In comparison with Webster and von Pechmann's findings the French-Canadian housewives ascribed "being overweight" to the Maxwell House shopper and "no imagination" to the Nescafé shopper.

Both the Nescafé and Maxwell House shoppers are seen by a large percentage of the French-Canadian women as working individuals, mainly because of the overall shopping list items, but the Nescafé shopper is seen as having more limited time. The relationship between the thrifty and no imagination factors would seem to indicate that the French-Canadian woman does not view thriftiness as an all-important value.

The omission of the bad wife or good wife characteristics, mentioned in the previous American studies (1950 and 1968) would seem to indicate that the French-Canadian woman's perception of the wife role is also changing. Food preparation and enjoyment remain important both in family and social circles, but it is not the criterion which makes a good or bad wife. The wife who goes to work to "pitch in" and bring in additional income which will afford luxuries for her family, may be as good a wife as the one who is too wrapped up in her household chores to even consider the idea. The fact that the working woman has less time for the preparation of time-consuming dishes would seem to be understandable to the French-Canadian woman, but she will nevertheless take the time, whenever she can, to make her coffee and food as enjoyable as possible.

All the above suggests that the French-Canadian woman has a value system of her own and she seems to emerge as an individual very different from the American housewife and considerably different from her English-Canadian counterpart.

Table 3

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ASCRIBING
CHARACTERISTICS TO SHOPPERS

French-Canadian Respondents

	Nescafé Shopper (n = 29)		Maxwell House Shopper (n = 32)		
Ascribed Characteristics	Observed Frequency	%	Observed Frequency	%	Chi Square
I					
Lazy	5	17	5	15	0.0285
Poor Planner	10	34	6	19	1.9462
Thrifty	8	28	3	9	3.4126 ^a
Spendthrift	3	10	3	9	0.0161
Bad Wife	-	-	-	-	-
Good Wife	-	-	-	-	-
II					
Overweight	1	3	6	19	4.4962 ^b
Time Saver	-	-	-	-	-
Does not Enjoy					
Homemaking	-	-	1	3	-
Enjoys Homemaking	-	-	2	6	-
No Imagination	8	28	3	9	3.4128 ^a
Single Girl, Busy	-	-	-	-	-
Brand of Coffee					
Mentioned	-	-	2	6	-
III					
Working	10	34	8	25	0.6579
Limited Budget	5	17	9	28	1.0700
Reference to					
Brand Names	13	45	17	53	0.4208
Influenced by					
Advertising	6	21	7	22	0.0128
Limited Time	10	34	3	9	5.7184 ^c
Nutrition Conscious	6	21	5	15	0.2637
Not Nutrition					-
Conscious	-	-	2	6	-

I: Categories used by Mason Haire

I & II: Categories used by Webster
and von PechmannI, II & III: Categories used in
Canadian Study

^a Significant at .10 level
^b Significant at .05 level
^c Significant at .02 level
^d Significant at .01 level

It would seem that the English-Canadian housewife and the French-Canadian housewife differ from the 1968 American housewife in ways which may be due to cultural differences and changes in consumer values brought about by time. Although there were significant statistical differences between the French-Canadian group and the English-Canadian group, the following characteristics, which they have in common, differentiate them from the 1968 American housewife: working, limited budget, reference to brand names, influenced by advertising, limited time, and nutrition conscious.

The Canadian housewife may have quite a different concept of what constitutes a good or bad wife. The omission of the good or bad wife characteristics (characteristics which appeared in the American studies of 1950 and 1968) would seem to indicate that the type of food on the shopping lists was not a basis for judging the shopper as a good or bad wife. The criterion no longer seems to be associated with household chores such as food preparation.

The Canadian housewife would also seem to be much more aware of the role that advertising can play in the market place, since many references were made to brand name shoppers as being easily influenced by advertising. In addition, she seems to be quite conscious of the nutrition value of food. Overall, the Canadian housewife seems more concerned about food values and more determined to obtain maximum benefit from food purchases than her 1968 American counterpart. Quite often, some form of financial or time constraint was mentioned as a reason for buying—or not buying—brand name food items which, many respondents felt, were not necessarily the best buy for the money spent, but could be relied upon for quality consistency. Del Monte peaches, for example, were nearly always looked on as being a good but expensive brand.

The English-Canadian housewife and the French-Canadian housewife differ in how they perceive convenience foods and the circumstances under which they would use them. The French-Canadian housewife places more importance on spending time and effort in preparing food for her family. She is apparently more interested in food which requires a creative effort and imagination. Instant and quick items do not always seem fully acceptable, but excusable under certain circumstances. However, the use of these items should not be at the cost of quality or taste. The French-Canadian housewife seems aware that many women today are working; however this fact does not appear as a justification for dull eating. Short-cuts may be necessary when time is limited, but should not

be reflected in the overall quality, taste, and presentation of food. To achieve this end, imagination and/or a few extra pennies could be used to compensate for the limited time. One can easily imagine that if on a rare occasion she has to buy a frozen dinner, it would be a "gourmet" frozen dinner.

The English-Canadian housewife places more emphasis on nutrition value, as such. Instant and quick items are acceptable as long as they meet the requirements of nutrition and value for her money. She can enjoy homemaking without the factors of imagination and creativity. She is aware that brand names are more expensive and feels that private brands often offer better value. Other material comforts appear equally as important as food and she will make whatever savings she can when purchasing food. For this reason, she is careful not to let advertising influence her too much. She seems to measure her success as a mother and wife more by the amount of money she can contribute to other material comforts (through her savings on the household budget and through contributions from her own earnings), than by the gourmet aspect of her meals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING MANAGEMENT

There seem to be sufficient differences between the American housewife and the Canadian housewife, and between the French-Canadian housewife and the English-Canadian housewife, to justify different marketing approaches in terms of promotion and adaptation of product type.

The marketer who wishes to penetrate the English-Canadian food market, or improve his position therein, should consider the following factors: ease of preparation but with emphasis on nutrition; value for money; avoidance of seemingly spectacular claims, since the English-Canadian housewife appears suspicious of some forms of advertising; some form of appeal to the housewife's independent contribution to the family welfare.

The marketer who wishes to penetrate the French-Canadian food market, or improve his position therein, should pay particular attention to the following factors: ease of preparation only in association with another aspect (gourmet food, better taste, etc.) for the working housewife; emphasis on quality; better quality food even at a slightly higher price; emphasis on the unusual or gourmet aspect of a dish; some form of appeal to the creativeness of the French-Canadian housewife; emphasis on family welfare.

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