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**Article — Digitized Version**

## Towards a behavioural science of market research: The challenge of Africa

Intereconomics

*Suggested Citation:* Blair, T. L. V. (1966) : Towards a behavioural science of market research: The challenge of Africa, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 01, Iss. 4, pp. 10-15,  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02933673>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/137607>

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sell the proceeds he anticipates receiving in foreign currency on the six-months forward exchange market, at a rate known in advance.

**INTERECONOMICS:** It is often argued by exporters that hitherto it has been by no means certain whether the currency risk could always be covered on the forward currency market. Experience has taught that at certain periods it is not possible to cover this risk, for example, during the weeks immediately preceding the revaluation of the D-Mark in 1961.

**SOHMEN:** People are apt to forget that these are phenomena which have occurred in the present system of "adjustably pegged" exchange rates. Under this system, such phenomena indeed occur often. Experience gained under this system must not, how-

ever, be extended to a system of more flexible rates. With freely flexible rates, it would be practically impossible for the forward markets to collapse in the way they sometimes do under the existing system. Both forward and spot exchange rates would be completely free at all times to settle at the current equilibrium level. The reason why the forward exchange markets collapsed after the revaluation of the D-Mark was simply that the forward markets were not being supported by the central bank and that, in periods when parity changes are expected to occur under the present system, central banks are forced, either by administrative measures or by moral suasion, to prohibit forward dealings not directly connected with export or import transactions. When all forward currency dealings not directly connected with

commerce are thus prevented more or less successfully, commercial traders have no market partners to whom they would offer, or from whom they could buy, forward currency. This is why there is a great danger that these markets may collapse at such times. It is precisely this danger which could be avoided by the introduction of more flexible exchange rates.

**INTERECONOMICS:** To boil it down to a formula, could we say: the system you propose is, in reality, a system offering greater security for all involved. Whilst the present monetary system forces us to lock the stable door after the horse has gone, the system proposed by the 27 experts would prevent the horse ever getting out of the stable?

**SOHMEN:** Quite right. that is the essence of our proposals.

## *Towards A Behavioural Science of Market Research: The Challenge of Africa*

*By T. L. V. Blair, Ph. D., London \**

Market research in developing world areas faces the most challenging tests in its brief history. Development implies the transformation of society; new sights and sounds jostle crowds on Main Streets in Africa, Latin America and Asia. And, as researchers follow new products into these arenas of contact and co-operation, they encounter new problems and opportunities. At this early stage in the confrontation between African consumers and markets and Western manufactured products it is appropriate to review market research, theory and method and to illuminate those areas where our present assumptions and methods falter before the thrust of social and economic change.

### *Origins, Definitions and Interests*

Market research emerges out of the needs, intentions, and impulses of Western social, economic and intellectual history. Market research definitions, especially in England, tend to describe "what it does", i.e. its empirical contribution to the resolution of specific problems put forward by business. Its functions being conceived of as directly, and simply, related to the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer.

\* This essay is based on a paper given at The Annual Conference of The Market Research Society (Great Britain) at The Grand Hotel, Eastbourne, England. Dr. Blair is a sociologist and author of: *Africa: A Market Profile*, London: Business Publications Ltd., 1965.

Occasionally along the continuum of marketing activities, definitional emphasis is placed on particular functions. For example, one writer defines market research as "investigations made by firms or by research organisations on behalf of firms, to find out how well a certain product was selling compared to its competitors and what sort of person is buying it and why". Other writers stress the intelligence function of market research in clarifying and solving business problems. John Downham and his colleagues have emphasised the "provision of information—designed to help in the formulation and solution of business problems".

Market research today reflects these orientations and operates in several fairly distinct ways. It has the responsibility of gathering the facts, monitoring the behaviour of existing products, exploring ways to better existing products and to research new possibilities. It also assists by analysing the correlates of marketing decision making, i.e. those things that must be known about people and social processes in order to formulate and realise technical and commercial decisions.

To carry out these functions market research has selectively borrowed insights, methods, concepts and findings from the natural and social sciences, linguistics, and arts and humanities. In some areas of market research important tools have been fashioned from this exotic pot-pourri. However, we are

still far from having an integrated science of market research. It may be that the challenge of new markets and consumers in the developing areas of the world will stimulate progress in that direction. This idea constitutes the fundamental premise of this brief essay.

The systematic formulation of an integrated science of market research has a definite priority in modern independent Africa. It can provide a firm basis for nation-building and a means of monitoring the growth of markets. The achievement of these goals, however, requires awareness of some crucial problems and opportunities.

### *Theory and Assumptions*

As market research advances into Africa and assimilates new knowledge its propositions come up for re-examination. Changing people and productive forces, cities and cash wages, reveal the gaps in theoretical knowledge and expose the underlying cultural biases which retard the formulation of efficient and effective research designs.

In Africa and the developing areas of the world the implicit assumptions which underlie market research are challenged wherever the following conditions obtain:

#### 1. Market Research: Culture-bound:—

(a) Where analysts, the market researchers, are not of the culture of the respondents and are themselves culture-bound.

(b) Where the assumption of slow gradual change in a laissez-faire society concerned with the preservation of the past does not hold.

(c) Where assumptions that each person holds an individual view and that these are randomly distributed in the universe appear to be contradicted.

#### 2. The Chain of Distribution:—

(a) Where the producer and the consumer are separated from each other along a tenuous chain of distribution from the capital city to the remotest village.

(b) Where goods are traded in a progressive series of transactions from the European wholesale shop to the African market place and from the urban area to the rural area.

(c) Where the purchaser of a product is not usually its consumer and goods are bought and sold from hand to hand, until their utility for generating money or barter decreases.

#### 3. The Market Place and Market Principle:—

(a) Where "man's natural propensity is to truck, barter, traffic and exchange".

(b) Where the market place is not the primary

source of daily needs and cash income.

(c) Where we do not know the market principle nor the ways in which the structure of society affect the operation of price mechanisms.

(d) Where "irrational" factors govern to a large degree the forms of organisation and division of labour, i.e. custom regulates buying and selling, for example, buying may be a man's function, certain foods may be "taboo", and bargaining is really "playing the game" and regulates the relationships between buyers and sellers.

#### 4. Information Exposure:—

(a) Where exposure to information is a function of collective class or kin membership, and messages come from proscriptive sources.

(b) Where there is a two-step flow of information from those in authority to the humblest of men.

(c) Where there is a vast cultural and economic gap between the intent of a message and the individual's response.

#### 5. Consumer Behaviour, A social question:—

(a) Where consumer behaviour, normally considered as the proper sphere of individual choice, is viewed as a social question with national implications.

(b) Where the test of a "profitable investment" is not only its monetary return but its net social benefit, that is, its contribution to economic independence, planned progress, a diversified economy, the development of skilled cadres and the diffusion of worthwhile products.

### *Auto-Criticism and the Host Sciences*

In the teeth of change many crucial aspects of the sciences which are hosts to market research theory are also being challenged. Social scientists have had to revise or discard, old models of human behaviour and create new ones. With more cases to be studied in a rapidly urbanising world, we learn more; with new circumstances arising in differing civilisations, new theories arise.

In economics, assumptions about rational economic men operating within a proto-typical laissez-faire society are giving way to new formulations. The works of Messrs. Little, Balogh, Schatz and Galbraith are worthwhile reading in this regard. Western definitions of class—those of Weber, Warner, Marx, Centers and others—have not been shown to be universal; as a matter of fact, the definitions used by market researchers in different Western countries often vary in several crucial respects.

Statistics provide a method of obtaining and verifying accurate information gathered from selected



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samples within clearly specified and calculable limits. However, the presentation of complex and sophisticated designs and formulas should not be taken for complete wisdom. All the necessary and sufficient facts about developing nations are far from being gathered. It may be that we know a lot about things that are relatively innocuous—like how many people park their cars on the left hand side of Broad Street, Lagos, Nigeria at 12 noon—and very little about how seemingly isolated scraps of behaviour reflect the whole individual or society.

Descriptive sociological studies have enriched our awareness of the human group; they have helped us to understand the social factors affecting consumer behaviour. There is a large body of useful concepts in the specialised studies of population, demography, mass communication, group dynamics and public opinion. Nevertheless, popular sociology requires cautious appraisal. The tendency to explain the conditions and behaviour of people in former colonies by generalisations like "under-developed countries are under-developed societies" merits substantiation by a greater mass of data and insights than presently exist. The same inadequacies hold true for typological dichotomies or linear abstractions which place whole nations, peoples and classes, in rigid categories and obscure facts which do not conveniently fit.

Anthropology and its related branches have increased our knowledge about national cultures and the range of similarities and differences which mark the family of man. With independence, however, the sensitive pendulum of empirical field research is shifting from studying static communities to researching modernising African nations. The re-emergence of Africa has highlighted several hoary anthropological maxims and stimulated a re-emphasis upon the ethics of professional scientific activity. Wherever the market researcher is a stranger in a community he should adhere to two cardinal principles: (1) ethical objectivity, i.e., stating one's value assumptions openly and guarding against impressing one's values on the data, and (2) cultural relativism, i.e., accepting for the purpose of analysis the integrity and ethos of the culture under examination.

Fortunately, the emergence of Africa has stimulated the production of numerous books, theses, monographs and articles on many aspects of modern life and every field of science. The systematic collection and compilation of ancient and contemporary Africanana has become a major task of Africanists and a boon to applied researchers who wish rapid access to new data and revised methods and theories.

Modern market researchers in the developing nations should be aware of the auto-critical tendencies in the host sciences and learn from their efforts to break through the cul-de-sacs which bar the evolution of scientific thought. Market research should confirm or deny the principles they borrow and, picking up the residue, move forward as a science in its own right.

### *Towards A Behavioural Science of Market Research*

What is the proper study of market research? In the last decades, definitions of "what market research is and does" have changed in emphasis in response to



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new consumers and markets, both in the newly affluent Western societies and the independent African nations. They have become more behavioural, comparative and socially aware.

Markets and marketing are interrelated aspects of change and development. The quickening pace of independence, urbanisation and industrialisation creates changing conditions of life and labour. New income groups, spending habits and food choices occur and reflect new aspirations and requirements for modern household and community life.

Marketing behaviour is a social process—a chain of interrelated phases of human action from the primary producer to the ultimate consumer. This special process involves communication, institutional infrastructures, like traders and market places, and transport and distribution. Complex patterns of human relations occur between individuals and groups, and among buyers and sellers, peasants, factory hands, co-operatives, merchants, governments and world-wide trade associations. Tension, conflict and resolution punctuate the process as the needs and demands of the nascent, newly-independent "poor nations of the South" cast ominous shadows on the affluence of the older richer industrial nations of the Northern Hemisphere. In sum, markets are institutions, marketing is a process, and the agents, involved in particular types of human activity and interaction, exert a profound influence on the wider social and cultural environment in which they operate.

Within this framework, market research can make a substantial contribution toward analysing behaviour in developing countries and by so doing enrich social science. It may be that market research with its greater resources and more pressing commercial interest, will be better equipped than the University social scientist to do the kind of basic research necessary to understand changing people. Market research is increasingly being seen, therefore, as a behavioural science utilising the methods of scientific enquiry for the purpose of discovering the principles of changing human institutions and behaviour.

## *Social Utility and New Areas of Application*

Contemporary definitions of market research are increasingly making reference to its potential social utility. They stress its use as a tool of good management and its function to reduce waste of economic resources. In Africa, the test of economic development is the degree to which there is an increasing diffusion of worthwhile goods and services to a greater number of people within an expanding economy. Market research can be a yardstick measuring the growth of healthy communities and nations. It can be the tie that binds Africa and the exterior forces of development into a dialogue of progress. To achieve these objectives, however, market research requires innovation and the discovery of new areas of application and social utility.

In recent discussions with financing agencies, research administrators, planners and university personnel in Nigeria, Great Britain and America three specific types of research were most often mentioned: pre-planning research, action research and evaluation research. Pre-planning research is a necessary step before a sound long-term aid or developmental programme can be drawn up. Pre-planning research makes its contribution by gathering the basic relevant facts about target populations and changing patterns of life; it is an instrument for rationalising the decision-making process. Action research accompanies the introduction and diffusion of innovations, concepts, and products. Evaluation research on the efficacy of training programmes is of vital concern to agencies and governments sponsoring recruitment, training and placement projects.

A socially responsible science of market research allied to the desires of emerging populations for social reconstruction can make a significant contribution in public administration, statecraft and social and economic development. Market research methods of enquiry, enriched by a behavioural science point of view, can provide efficient and valid information for social institutions and national resource agencies. For example:

1. **Manpower research:** to study the abilities and skills of workers, needs of management, training schemes, manpower distribution.
2. **Public affairs:** the analysis of public opinion, concepts of citizenship and civic duty, and problems of nation-building.
3. **Health, Food and Nutrition:** to study health and dietary practices and food taboos; and the feasibility of introducing low-cost protein concentrates.
4. **Export-Import Trade and Marketing Surveys.**
5. **Media research:** to determine broadcasting needs and tastes; to evaluate the effectiveness of media in promoting new behaviour.
6. **Development projects and their results:** to evaluate the social effects of dams, highways, training programmes, rural extension work, literacy and health campaigns.
7. **Urban socio-economic surveys:** to determine patterns of individual and household composition, income and expenditure, and demographic characteristics.

8. **Social inventories:** to survey attitudes and aspirations among youth for technical education; the distribution of interests and skills: the range of average body sizes (for shoes and clothing); and consumer indexes.
9. **Urbanisation and housing:** pre-planning research for migration control, housing, urban redevelopment, slum clearance and new towns.
10. **Monitoring Behaviour:** periodical analysis of types and frequency of repetitive behaviour, e.g. usership, ownership, readership, etc.

The potential contributions of market research in Africa intersect with developmental and commercial needs. The field of housing offers one obvious example. Housing workers and their families is one of the major objectives along the pathway of African development. It is widely recognised that slums filled with sick and angry people are a danger to progress in all nations. Good housing, to promote stability and responsible worker-citizens, has high priority, therefore, and industries and governments are embarking on vigorous urban and rural housing programmes.

Housing development is linked, of course, with commercial products, such as aluminium, cement, amenities, furniture, home furnishings, and so on. The new industries supplying these materials are in need of research on every aspect of the marketing process from product development and purchase in the marketplace and urban shop, to product performance in the home and community. Both government and industry require more research knowledge concerning the ways in which people use, modify and adapt to physical objects and structures. By developing and extending anthropometry and ergonomics into the home a science of market research can have great utility for industry, marketing and family life in Africa.

### *An Integrated Science*

Overcoming the manifold problems of the present will lead toward an integrated science of market research. In the short run, researchers will continue to

provide useful answers to particular marketing problems. They will be continually engaged in adapting old methods to new problems, devising new techniques of analysis and validation, raising performance standards and the quality of research.

However, ad hoc research, isolated and undigested, does not provide all the answers to long-range problems of clients or of science. It is only when research takes place within the frame-work of basic theory and experimentation that its efficiency and effectivity and "scientific-ness" increases.

A science of market research in the future will have to be equipped with dynamic concepts to embrace vast, volatile and changing markets. It will be challenged by the prospect of building, step by step, a theory of emergent man big enough to encompass a revolution of rising expectations and complex enough to understand and predict behaviour as men, machines, products and wages come together in the African arenas of change.

Fifty years from now, when marketing in Africa will be more than finding convenient outlets for surplus goods, market research will be more than studying Africans with outmoded ideas from Western experience. Market research must develop theories and techniques sensitive enough to explain and monitor the accelerating changes of the next decade, and beyond. It must search for concepts and methods which are applicable to many differing cultures at similar stages of social evolution and marketing development. Market research in the African future must be development-centred, consumer-directed, and action-oriented.

On the horizon, then, is a new science of market research. What will be its main characteristics? It will be a problem oriented study of the properties of groups; a science of collectivities devoted to the study of pre-action, action and re-action. It will have social utility as an instrument of human development through its emphasis on pre-planning, action and evaluation research. It will be comparative, and seek to establish significant cross-cultural generalisations about marketing and society in the changing cultural settings of mankind.

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