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Methodological issues in international segmentation.

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1. Introduction.

International marketing and marketing research have become more important during the last years. The opening of a Common European market, the scale of modern mass-production and the saturation of international home markets have made the orientation on foreign markets a necessity. The complexity of international markets, the large differences between countries, and the unfamiliarity with these new markets lead to a higher need for international research.

A true international marketing strategy needs comparable information across countries, which is especially true when consumer segments are expected to cross geographical borders. The comparability or equivalence of information over countries demands for a sharpening of the current research methodology. This demands for comparability, equivalence, in both research setup and data as well as equivalence in research outcomes and possible implementations.

This paper focusses on the methodological issues in comparability of consumer segments across borders. Only equivalent data can reveal true differences and similarities between segments across countries. Equivalence influences implementation possibilities.

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2. Conceptual background.

For creating segments across borders certain conditions concerning equivalence between countries have to be fulfilled. Equivalence is important in all levels of a study. At the start of a study the equivalence of the research domain and behavior within that domain are most important. Then the equivalence of research conditions between countries asks for equivalence in research methodology, questionnaire design, sample selection and organizational aspects. Equivalence of coding and data-analysis are important in the final phase of the study. The combination of these equivalences will be called research equivalence in the sequel of this paper. The last step is outcome equivalence, which makes it possible to find and to approach segments across borders.

3. Research-setup and Method.

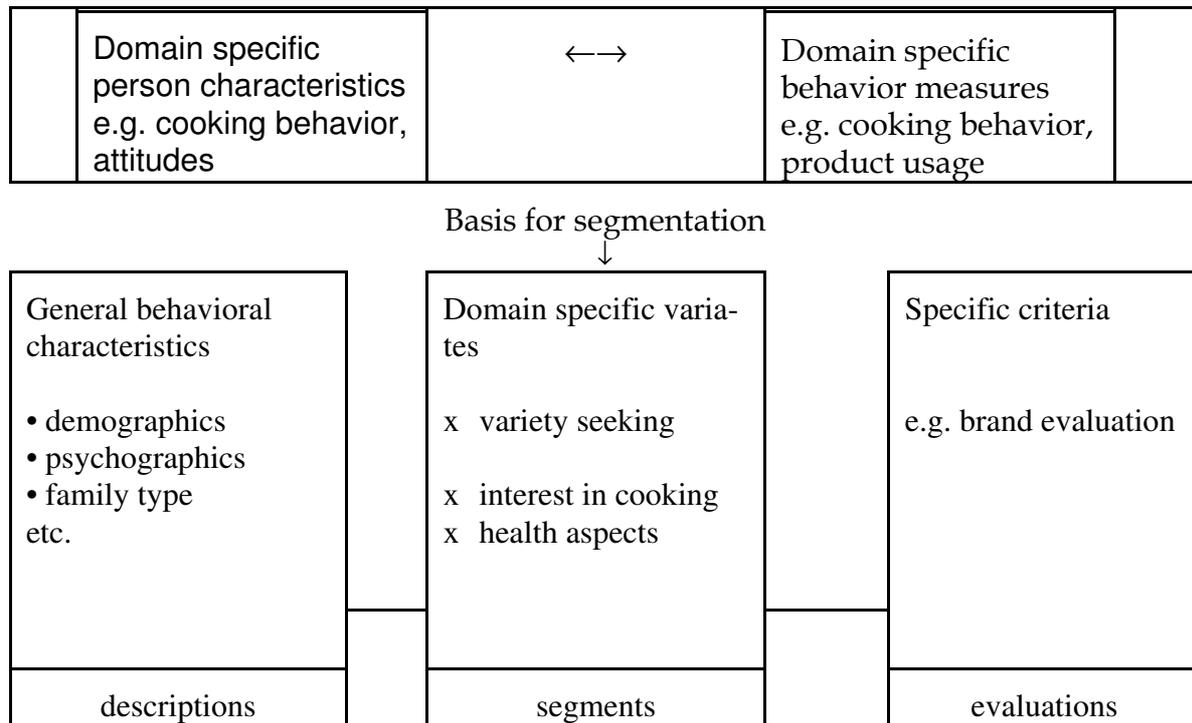
An international study on cooking behavior was carried out in four European countries: Belgium, France, Greece and Italy. The study comprised two phases: a qualitative and a quantitative phase. In the qualitative phase 30 to 60 families per country were observed during cooking and meal preparation using video cameras. In the quantitative phase a sample of 600 families in each country, representative for the national population, took part in the study. Information was gathered on psychographics, cooking behavior, food buying behavior, product usage, general attitudes towards cooking and demographics. During all phases of the study the research equivalence of the four studies was taken into account and the conditions concerning research equivalence while performing international research were satisfied.

In the presentation of the study we will describe the methodological issues when segmenting markets across countries within a product domain. A segmentation based on psychographics reveals cross-national consumer segments. A traditional cook in Italy is equivalent to a traditional cook in Greece with respect to psychographics; but their behavior regarding cooking is totally different. They behave and react differently to products and applications. The approach we have taken involves using both psychographics and behavior simultaneously as a segmentation basis. The segments are formed on the basis of similarities between consumers both in behavior and corresponding attitudes. The relations between behavior and corresponding attitudes and psychographics values can be revealed through canonical analysis. The consumer segments are formed by clustering individual respondent scores on the canonical variates. By using simultaneous segmentation more stable and actionable segments can be defined within countries. These segments have the advantage above traditional psychographic segments that behavioral criteria are already included. The behavior of these segments is comparable across countries and provides possibilities for explaining product usage and product applications.

4. Results and Discussion.

The canonical variates found include variety seeking behavior, interest in cooking activities, and health related behavioral aspects as revealed in both attitudes and behavior. The analyses will compare segmentation outcomes between countries.

Figure 1. Research model: domain specific segmentation.



The segments found in each of the national studies will be compared in terms of psychographic and demographic characteristics as well as in terms of specific behavioral characteristics and product usage. Also a comparison between similar segments across countries will be made with regard to cooking behavior and product usage.

Such a domain specific segmentation approach forms an attempt to create consumer segments across borders that are equivalent in both psychographics and behavior within the cooking domain. This segmentation approach focusses on research equivalence, but also tries to incorporate outcome equivalence. Such an approach to international consumer segmentation creates the possibility to better understand product usage and product application as a basis for marketing strategies within and between countries.

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