

## Projective Attitudes Toward Instant Coffee in Late Sixties

Jagdish N. Sheth

*During 1966 and 1967 three separate studies of coffee consumption were carried out in two areas of North-east U.S. The report deals with the habits of users and their attitudes towards old and new ways of drinking coffee. The first, now classic study of this kind, was made by Mason Haire in 1950. Professor Sheth's article shows what has happened since. The projective technique used seems a useful way of obtaining insights into consumer behaviour and in some instances reveals things not expected by the research.*

In a classic study, Mason Haire (1950) found that there existed strong negative attitudes among housewives toward instant coffee in the late forties and very early fifties. Haire believed that housewives resisted the adoption of instant coffee because it symbolized certain characterizations of a wife using it in her household which were mostly negative. He also felt that the housewife would not admit to these negative connotations associated with instant coffee as the real inhibitors if asked directly. The unwilling housewife was likely to use some stereotype and plausible excuse in direct questioning either to ingratiate the interviewer or to get rid of him. In the case of instant coffee, this excuse was likely to be related to its different and hence poor taste compared to the drip grind coffee.)

In order to obtain the real inhibitory factors, Haire used an imaginative projective technique. Two shopping lists were created

which were identical except that one list contained Maxwell House (drip grind) as the coffee item, and the other list contained Nescafe Instant Coffee as the coffee item. Two groups of 50 housewives were given the two shopping lists. Presumably the two groups were similar in their distribution of attitudes toward coffee. Each respondent was asked to project herself into the situation as far as possible until she could more or less characterize the woman who would buy groceries according to the shopping list.

### I. Summary of Haire's Findings.

The findings of the study are summarized below in Haire's own words:

"1. 48 percent of the people described the woman who bought Nescafe as lazy; 4 percent described the woman who bought Maxwell House as lazy.

2. 48 percent of the people described the woman who bought

Nescafe as failing to plan household purchases and schedules well; 12 percent described the woman who bought Maxwell House this way.

3. 4 percent described the Nescafe woman as thrifty; 16 percent described the Maxwell House woman as thrifty. 12 percent described the Nescafe woman as spend-thrift; 0 percent described the Maxwell House woman this way.

4. 16 percent described the Nescafe woman as not a good wife; 0 percent described the Maxwell House woman this way. 4 percent described the Nescafe woman as a good wife; 16 percent described the Maxwell House woman as a good wife."

"A clear picture begins to form here. Instant coffee represents a departure from 'home made' coffee, and the traditions with respect to caring for one's family. Coffee-making is taken seriously, with vigorous proponents for laborious drip and filter paper methods, firm believers in coffee boiled in a battered sauce pan, and the like. Coffee drinking is a form of intimacy and relaxation that gives it a special character." (p. 651).

Despite (a) the general methodological problems raised against projective techniques (MacFarlane and Tuddenham 1951) in general, (b) another coffee study soon thereafter, using more structured and direct ways to measure consumer's attitudes toward instant coffee (Westfall, Boyd and Campbell 1957), and (c) a scathing, and

somewhat erroneous, attack on both the coffee studies by Hill (1960) on sampling and other subjective aspects of motivation research, I feel that the two studies did reveal negative attitudes toward instant coffee in the early fifties. In short, strong negative attitudes were present toward instant coffee similar to what we all observed just a few years ago toward male cosmetics, and particularly toward hair spray. Today, my students do not laugh, as their predecessors did only three to four years ago, when I mention that a new brand of hair spray for men came out in the market. The same students today, however, do laugh aloud when I mention that lipstick for men is being test marketed or that today one can buy false hair for his chest if he so desires. The point I want to make is that while there may have been methodological problems, particularly related to sampling aspects, I think the Haire study revealed a real world phenomenon. The validity of its existence came further in the replication by Westfall *et al.* (1957).

#### II. Basis for Replicating Study.

In marketing, the best way to negate or support that a phenomenon exists, is to replicate studies with suitable modifications primarily to accommodate other environmental changes. It is regrettable that the controversy related to instant coffee was more verbal than real.

Suppose we want to replicate the study after mere than fifteen years. What should we find? Obviously, the times have changed and perhaps very rapidly. A look at the volume consumption of instant coffee today (Newman 1966) suggests that it is definitely well-established in our culture. Similarly, most of the successful innovations in the sixties are in the direction of providing greater convenience, quickness and routinization in consumption of food items. Many of them probably would have been taboo in the late forties.

The answer to our question then would be that if the study were replicated in the late sixties, it ought to reveal that either there are no differences between regular and instant coffee lists or at least the differences, if any, should be much less pronounced than what was found by Haire.

Replication presumes the necessity of using the same procedures so that comparison is possible between the new and the old findings. In the case of a projective technique, it has an added benefit: the ambiguity of the stimulus presented to the respondent may elicit responses on matters other than the one under investigation which may be revealing for further empirical research. In our case, it is very plausible that the shopping list used as a projective device may be incompatible with the present day shopping practices although it may have been congruent with the early fifties. Hence, the shopping list with its items other

than coffee may elicit responses revealing the concern of today's housewife in her buying behavior.

#### III. Study and Findings.

During 1966 and 1967, three separate studies were carried out in two areas of the Northeast. The sample comes from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and was drawn primarily because of convenience in approaching and obtaining cooperation from the respondents. The procedure followed was essentially the same as in Haire's study: Two shopping lists were created which were identical except that one included instant coffee and the other regular coffee. The shopping lists were the same as Haire's except for two minor changes to offset the environmental differences. First, baking powder's brand name was changed from Runford's to Calumet because of the popularity of the latter brand. Secondly, Maxwell House coffee was specified as Regular Grind instead of Drip Grind.

About 300 women were personally interviewed during which each respondent was asked to describe in writing the characterization of the woman who would shop according to the list shown to her. The final usable sample came to 131 respondents for the list containing regular coffee and 123 respondents for the list containing instant coffee. Content analysis was done on the written descrip-

tions. However, the researcher included only those items from Haire's findings which were specifically expressed as such. For example, tabulation of characterizing the woman as 'lazy' is based on only the exact word used by the respondents and not any other

word or phrase which in a y mean the same thing. In addition, other items which were most frequently mentioned were also extracted.

The following table summarizes the results as percentages of total respondents in each category.

**Table 1**  
*Description of a woman who would shop with*

	Instant Coffee List (n = 123)	Regular Coffee List (n = 131)
Lazy .....	12.3	3.8
Poor Planner .....	15.4	11.4
Good Planner .....	1.6	6.1
Thrifty .....	23.5	26.6
Good Wife .....	4.8	11.4
Poor Wife .....	0.0	3.8
Likes to Cook .....	4.1	6.1
Does not like to Cook .....	12.3	2.3
Busy .....	28.7	9.2

The findings can be summarized as follows:

1. 12 percent of the people described the woman buying according to a shopping list containing instant coffee as lazy; 4 percent of the people described the woman buying according to identical list but containing regular coffee as lazy.
2. 15 percent of the people described the woman with instant coffee list as poor planner whereas 11 percent of the people described the woman with regular coffee list in this way. On the other hand, 2 percent described the woman with

A clear picture emerges from a close look at Table 1. On all the categories that Haire used (shown above the dashed line in the table), there is a small percentage of respondents who still consider an instant coffee user as somewhat lazy and poor planner. However, there is an overall reduction in the proportion of negative comments compared to Haire's study. (16 percent vs. 52 percent on laziness; 30 percent vs. 63 percent on poor planning; 4 percent vs. 16 percent on poor wife.) Simultaneously, there is an overall increase in positive comments (50 percent vs. 20 percent on thriftiness). Furthermore, these changes in the positive and negative comments are distributed between instant and regular coffee users in a manner that minimizes the violent differences found in Haire's study.

Haire also found that some women felt it necessary to "excuse" the woman who bought instant coffee by suggesting that she lived alone or that she had a job. In our study, one item which seemed as an "excuse" was characterization of the woman as busy; 9 percent described the regular coffee woman that way whereas 29 percent described the instant coffee woman as busy. The interesting aspect, however, is that the connotation in "busy woman" seemed complimentary rather than just an excuse when we look at other related phrases and explanations for her business. It appeared, in fact, that the instant coffee user was a woman on the go, with numerous

outside civic and community interests. Her outside interests were viewed as something that put her a notch above the "old-fashioned" homemaker who was tied down to the routine affairs of the household. The instant coffee woman was involved in the dynamic world around her, a woman trying to make the most of her life, and while she was not always a good homemaker, she was also not a poor wife. None of the respondents considered her as poor housewife. This image of modernity associated with instant coffee woman is perhaps the most startling departure from Haire's findings.

To summarize, it would appear that while the negative attitudes toward instant coffee are not completely wiped out by the progress of time, they are relegated in importance and also mentioned much less frequently.

#### IV. Other Findings.

More interesting are other reactions, not directly related to coffee that the shopping list elicited from the respondents. In Table 2 below, these comments are summarized in three broad categories. The single most topic on which comments were made by the respondents is the dietary nature of the products included in the shopping list. On the one hand, there were negative reactions (fat, excessive starch, not a balanced diet) because of products such as hamburgers, potatoes (particularly five pounds of that) and bread (particularly two loaves

Table 2  
Percent of Respondents who were given

	Instant Coffee List	Regular Coffee List
1. Dietetic Comments (fat, excess starch, diet conscious, balanced or unbalanced diet) . . . . .	48.2	38.8
2. Brand conscious . . . . .	25.1	25.3
3. Fresh vs. Frozen vegetables . . . . .	8.9	9.2

of that). On the other hand, there were some positive reactions (diet conscious, balanced meals) because of inclusion of carrots. This is an interesting finding in view of the fact that since 1965 there has been a sharp consciousness and concern on the dietetic aspects of food items particularly with the introduction of "polyunsaturate" and "low calorie" products.

A second most-frequent topic is the obvious brand consciousness of the woman who shopped according to the list. The list contained four brand names attached to products out of the seven products (actually only five products because carrots and potatoes are sold also unbranded which brought out reactions to the effect that the woman was brand loyal and did not shop or compare. The positive reactions included "buying quality goods" because of the presence of only national brands. Finally, a small percentage of women in both the groups commented on the purchase of fresh instead of frozen vegetables. Most rationalized that the woman apparently did not have a freezer to store frozen foods.

All the three categories of com-

ments reflected the contemporary concern and consciousness of the housewife. She shops only once a week or less in a supermarket buying a good deal of frozen foods. She thus finds the shopping list as atypical, an emergency stop-gap. She is also very concerned about the calorie-intake of the members of her family, and finds some items on the list as excessive in fat or starch content. Finally, she prefers to buy both national and private label brands, and considers inclusion of national brand names on the list as being excessively and unnecessarily brand loyal or brand conscious.

It is also interesting to note that there are virtually no differences in the reactions of the respondents in the two groups on the three categories presented in Table 2. This suggests that the two samples, though drawn based on convenience, may have been similar in their attitudes towards shopping grocery products.

To conclude, projective techniques seem a useful way of obtaining insights into consumer behaviour and in some instances may reveal things not expected by the researcher.

Footnotes.

1) Managers from both General Foods and Nestle Company have stated in personal communications that instant coffee drinkers, in fact, prefer its taste over regular coffee, and hence convenience is not the only reason. However, when it comes to advertising that to others, most instant coffee drinkers express differently.

References.

1. Haire, Mason (1950) "Projective Techniques in Market Research", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 14, pp. 649-656.
2. Hill, Conrad R. (1962) "Another Look

- at Two Instant Coffee Studies", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 1, MacFarlane, J. W. and T. J. Dudenham, R. D. (1951) "Problems in the Evaluation of Projective Techniques" in H. H. and C. L. Anderson (eds.) *An Introduction to Projective Techniques* (New York: Prentice-Hall), pp. 33-57.
4. Newman, Joseph (1966) *Advertising Management and Creativity*, (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Terrill).
5. Westfall, R. C., B. J. W. and Campbell, D. L. (1957) "The use of Structured Techniques in Motivation Research" *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 21, pp. 134-139.