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NOTES ON A VISIT TO IMPERIAL TOBACCO LTD.
MONTREAL 30th JULY - 1st AUGUST 1980

This visit was made at the request of Marketing Department, ITL, to assist in the formulation of a major brand image study which is proposed for the Canadian market. The opportunity was also taken to present the results of a recent DELTA panel evaluation of some Canadian brands undertaken at GR&DC.

Imperial Tobacco Ltd. have been considering a proposal from an outside agency to undertake a comprehensive study of brand image perception by Canadian smokers based upon a repertory grid approach. Some pilot work has been undertaken using group discussions as a means to elucidate the discriminatory parameters employed by consumers to distinguish the images of cigarette brands. This exploratory phase had failed to yield a sufficiently useful set of constructs and therefore it had been assumed by the agency that the repertory grid approach was unlikely, in the event, to prove suitable for this purpose. Based upon this experience an altogether different proposal had been received by ITL which failed to pursue the original objective of the study and substituted a market segmentation investigation.

Considerable time was spent during the first day of the visit examining in detail both the original and subsequent proposals and the results of the intervening pilot study. It was concluded that the agency had too readily abandoned the original purpose of the research without fully examining the reasons for the pilot study's apparent failure to yield a useful construct set. There were a number of other shortcomings in the proposals which were also identified.

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Based upon GR&DC's experience with the application of repertory grid technique to the study of brand image, it was suggested that group discussion methods are singularly inappropriate for this type of construct elicitation. Rather, intensive one-to-one interviewing is called for. It was therefore agreed that the one-to-one approach using the method of triads could be usefully demonstrated by MO.

Four individual interviews were arranged with members of ITL staff not intimately involved with Marketing Department activities. Using a selection of cigarette packs as exemplars of brand image, elicitation of constructs through the method of triads was undertaken. This method is identical to that previously adopted by ourselves at Southampton (RD 1617 Restricted). Each interview was tape recorded and, although only half an hour was available for each session, it was possible to demonstrate the method's ability to elucidate appropriate parameters of discrimination. This was probably sufficient to convince our colleagues that, properly applied, the repertory grid technique is a powerful and efficacious method to apply in this context. Further discussion centred on the implementation of the method using trained qualitative researchers and the statistical analysis of the results of the large scale administration.

It was suggested that perhaps one hundred construct elicitation interviews should be undertaken in order to determine an appropriate set of descriptive dimensions. The large scale administration of the eventual grid will require a national, representative sample. Analysis of the data generated by the large scale survey will be undertaken using the INGRID and DELTA programs. A magnetic tape copy of these, together with supporting documentation, was taken to Montreal on this occasion.

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On the afternoon of the second day a formal presentation was made of the results of the recent GR&DC DELTA panel's evaluation of some Canadian brands. The audience comprised personnel drawn from both R&D and Marketing. The results were in accord with the expectations of the ITL product development team and, given that the cigarettes were smoked by a U.K. panel, were thought to have a high face validity. (Subsequently a report on this evaluation has been sent to ITL).

During the remainder of the time available the results of the recent GR&DC work on the influence of brand image on subjective evaluation of cigarettes was presented to Messrs. Gibb and Roubicek. This research generated considerable interest and they are awaiting receipt of the appropriate report. Regrettably, insufficient time was available on this occasion to pursue any other topics of mutual interest. Nevertheless, as far as it is possible to judge, the visit was regarded as successful, having achieved the specific purposes for which it was arranged.

M. OLDMAN

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