

CONDUCTING INTERNATIONAL CONSUMER RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

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Marketing to children remains firmly in focus for public policy makers, be it in relation to advertising High Salt Sugar and Fat (HSSF) food and drink (Moore 2007), the effects of internet advertising and advergames (Nairn and Hang 2012; Panic et al. 2013), or corporate use of children as brand ambassadors selling to their friends (Nairn and Mayo 2009). Recent years have seen the UK government banning advertising of HSSF products in and around TV programs of particular appeal to children; the Advertising Association banning members from using children as brand ambassadors; and food and drink companies in the US and Europe producing voluntary codes to restrain the advertising of less healthy products to children (CFBAI 2015; EU Pledge 2015). These issues are not only important for national governments and industry groups but are increasingly within the remit of the biggest global NGOs who provide internationally aligned impetus for regulation change. For example, the WHO (2010) recently provided strong recommendations to all nation states on food and drink marketing to children, and the United Nations (2014) has recommended that its member states “prohibit all forms of advertising to children under 12 years of age, regardless of the medium, support or means used, with the possible extension of such prohibition to children under 16 years of age” (p. 23).

Marketing research with children is thus paramount and pivotal in informing public policy at a global level. Yet, international research projects with children are fraught with difficulties which must be overcome if the marketing research community is to provide timely and reliable evidence to policy makers. At the most fundamental level research with children is not the same as research with adults as children occupy a favored social position across the world. This has been formally recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1990). As researchers, we have to acknowledge that “Children are not small adults; they have an additional, unique set of interests” (McIntosh 2000, p. 177).

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to describe specific challenges faced when doing international public policy research with children (aged 12 and younger) and adolescents (aged 13–17), and to provide suggested solutions to these challenges. Throughout, we suggest possible solutions, given that we do not think there is one “right” way to “do” research design, ethics, and data collection, or any definitive solutions on how to involve children in research. The inspiration for this chapter stems from an international public policy research project underway by the current authors in multiple countries (Belgium, China, France, Poland, the UK, and the US). The general approach taken here is to present and describe a particular challenge, followed by a possible solution, followed by another challenge and possible solution, and so on. Thus, the chapter is a handbook of sorts, to be consulted by those engaged in similar public policy research projects.

We present a time-line of challenges faced by international research teams working with children. The first challenge is to gain ethical approval from different institutions across the world. Second, an internationally comparable sample frame must be drawn up. Third, sampling equivalence must be established. Fourth, data collection must be standardized and, fifth and finally, the methodological challenges of working across cultures must be addressed.

Challenges and Possible Solutions

Challenge #1: The Research Approval Process

The first challenge when conducting international projects involving children and adolescents is the difference both between and within countries with respect to gaining permission from University Ethics Committees (Markham and Buchanan 2012; Tsaliki and Chronaki 2013). This process is often referred to as the “ethics approval process.” The process ranges from extremely demanding and restrictive constraints in many US institutions to no process at all, such as in some French business schools. There appears to be little international agreement across higher education institutions as to either the content or process of ethics approval for research with children and adolescents. This can lead to difficulties in collecting matched national samples. Five important issues are described here:

- 1 Most universities in the US have an Institutional Review Board (IRB) comprised of a group of professors who approve or reject research projects on ethical grounds. Institutions might establish specific branches (i.e. The Office of Research Ethics and Compliance) to administer university-wide compliance with federal, state, and university policies regarding the conduct of ethical research. In Poland, researchers comply with the Polish Academy of Science code of ethics. This is a government institution covering all of Poland (rather than institution-specific, as in the US). Similar to the US, however, before conducting research on children and adolescents in Poland, researchers have to apply for permission to their own University Research Ethics Committee (appointed by the

Council of the Faculty), consisting of faculty with extensive research experience. The application must include a description of the research purpose, its participants, methods, tools, procedures, and parental consent forms (as in the US). Contrast this with many French universities, which have no IRB or ethics approval process whatsoever.

- 2 Directly tied to the IRB process just described, there are a limited number of experts on research with children and adolescents, which can lead to difficulties in getting such research approved. It can also lead to later difficulties during the review process as projects move towards publication. During these later stages, researchers might find it difficult to meet reviewers' concerns, given a lack of understanding regarding the difficulties of working with children, particularly in an international context. While conducting our study, at the initial stage, the researchers went through significantly different experiences. [Tables 22.1](#) and [22.2](#) summarize these differences in terms of the ethics review process across countries.
- 3 There is difficulty encountered in obtaining consent and assent. As stated by the CITI Program (2015), which guides many review processes in the US, the consent process starts with recruitment, since it covers information about the study itself. All recruitment materials, including e-mails, fliers, and so on, must be approved by IRBs (in many countries) before their usage. Local regulations in many countries require IRBs to guarantee that appropriate practices are employed to protect the rights and welfare of vulnerable subjects (such as children and adolescents) from coercion and undue influence during the consent process. Appropriate practices include assessing the decision-making capacity of participants, gaining consent from both parents (rather than just one parent for some studies), and assuring that incentives are not coercive, among other things. Another aspect related to informed consent is child/adolescent assent to participating. Hicks (2015) defines assent as "a child's affirmative agreement to participate" and states that "the absence of

[Table 22.1](#) Ethics review process across countries

	<i>Need permission from Ethics Committee?</i>	<i>Personal interview or correspondence?</i>	<i>Length of process?</i>	<i>Committee demands changes in process?</i>	<i>Child experts on board?</i>
US	Y	Personal/email	Relatively lengthy	Y	N
France	N	–	–	N	–
UK	Y	Email	Variable	Y	N
Belgium	Y	Email			N
China	N	–	Relatively lengthy	N	–
Poland	Y	Personal/email	Relatively short	N	N

[Table 22.2](#) Research approval process practices across countries

	<i>Ethics training</i>	<i>Parental consent</i>	<i>Child consent/assent</i>	<i>School permission</i>	<i>Additional permission for school access (i.e. district office)</i>
US	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
France	No			Yes	No
UK	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium	No			Yes	No
China	No			Yes	No
Poland	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

dissent should not be construed as assent when the child is old enough that assent is meaningful. Generally, parental permission can only override a child's dissent when the health of the child is at stake." Several factors should be considered in the development of the assent procedures, such as the type of research activity as well as the age and maturity of the participants involved. In fact, the assent process with children should be similar to the informed consent process with adolescents, whose abilities are similar to those of adults. In the ongoing global research that inspired this chapter, we had to apply the consent and assent processes differently, depending on the country in which data were collected. The general process in the US is as follows: The researcher sends consent forms to the parents. Once parental consent is obtained, the researcher may initiate interaction with the participants. However, before initiating actual data collection, the researcher must obtain the child's assent. If the child does not give assent, the child should still be given a prize for doing the study, in an effort to avoid coercing children to participate for a prize. In France, however, the researcher does not need to go through the same lengthy process with multiple checkpoints. French schools require only parental consent. In the UK, it depends on the ethics committee in a particular university.

- 4 Gaining access to schools to collect data from children and adolescents presents substantial differences in processes across countries. For example, in the US, after IRB approval, gaining permission from schools can differ within the country. Gatekeepers that provide school access have different expectations and procedures to follow, even though they may work under similar guidelines and policies. Schools belong to specific districts in their town or city. In order to gain school access, researchers are often expected to get permission from the district first, followed by permission from the principal in each school. Thus, a researcher might not be able to collect data at all schools in a district, even though district-level permission was obtained (the opposite can also occur, where a researcher can get permission from a school principal, but the district will not grant permission). In other cases, a school district may require permission from the principals prior to granting district-level permission. In Poland and the UK, only school permission is required (i.e. no district-level permission is necessary).
- 5 Finally, individual researchers are often required to undergo ethics training. However, there is no uniform process in place within or across countries. Universities in the US appear to use one or more of the following training providers: The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and/or the course offered by Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research (PRIM&R). The CITI Program offers a substantial amount of web-based training, and is available in Canada, India, Japan, Korea, and Latin America. However, it is a commercial program purchased at the discretion of each University, and is therefore not uniformly applied across the US. Furthermore, it also appears to be less popular outside the US, where different countries have more or less rigorous processes, often not requiring training for individual researchers.

Possible Solution: More transparent communication across University Ethics Committees is needed, particularly with respect to approving research involving children and adolescents. In addition, a universally shared international process would be invaluable. This could enhance the probability of obtaining comparable international samples, increase transparency (and, thus, lead to higher standards), and provide IRBs with objective guidance. Such a process would also provide for greater protections of children and adolescents, and potentially enhance the reputation of academic research involving children and adolescents.

However, which process should be chosen? Looking at the history helps us to understand how some codes of conduct were established. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) established children's rights to participation (Article 12) in 1989 (Nairn and Clarke 2012) in issues that involve them, and there now exists a growing body of research on children stemming from anthropology, psychology, and sociology, among others (Nairn and Clarke 2012; Powell and Smith 2009). This has led to the introduction of new government policies. For example, in the UK, the Children's Act 2004 specifically commands the Children's Commissioner to consult with children – in other words ask their opinions through research (Section 2:4). Children's participation is an important component in the areas of education, health policies, and social care (Nairn and Clarke 2012; Prout 2005). Equally important to children's participation is children's protection. The UNCRC yields the coexisting right to be protected (Article 3; Nairn and Clarke 2012). The challenge to find the right balance between children's active participation and protection was at the center of intense debates in the mid-1990s (Morrow and Richards 1996; Nairn and Clarke 2012), and continues to date. One answer to this difficult issue may lie in the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct. This is already used by commercial and social researchers outside the University environment, and might usefully be adopted internationally by academic researchers. It rests on three core principles: wellbeing, voluntary informed consent, and confidentiality. The child's wellbeing must be the overriding concern, both physically and emotionally. Voluntary informed consent implies that children are able to understand the purpose and scope of the study, which may require age-related adaptations. Confidentiality should always be maintained, as in most research practice. In summary, a standardized international process for conducting research with children and adolescents is highly recommended.

Challenge #2: Defining an Internationally Comparable Sample

Having gained permission to carry out research with children from the university, the school, the parents, and the children, the next step is to establish a sample that is internationally comparable. Of interest to a great deal of consumer and marketing research with children is socioeconomic status (SES), as purchasing power is closely related to disposable income and social position. A popular definition of SES describes it as a relative position of an individual or family within a given social structure, reflecting access to economic and social resources (Mueller and Parcel 1981). SES calculations typically include measures such as parental education level, parental occupational prestige, and household income. However, countries can differ enormously in the levels of wealth and living conditions provided for residents. Thus, SES comparability may be difficult to assess.

The average level of education is a case in point. In our study, the percentage of adults who have completed secondary education ranges from a high of 90% in Poland to a low of 72% in Belgium (see [Table 22.3](#); OECD 2015). Similarly, the average length of time spent in higher education ranges from 18.9 years in Belgium down to 16.4 years in France and the UK. It is also important to describe the problems that arise from studying children who are exposed to different educational systems and as a result, develop different kinds and levels of knowledge proficiencies. [Table 22.3](#) details several factors that differ cross-nationally, including age at which school begins, levels of education (with associated ages for each level), age at which compulsory education ends, total years in the system, and proficiency levels in mathematics, reading, and science literacy. For example, knowledge proficiencies range from a high of 521 in Poland to a low of 492 in the US (OECD 2015). Such educational

Table 22.3 Differences in educational systems across the six countries

<i>Education system</i>	<i>Belgium¹</i>	<i>China²</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>US³</i>
Age, school starts	6	6–7	6	6	5	5–7 ⁴
Levels of education	3	3	4	3	4	3
Age, compulsory education ends	18	15–16	16	18	17	16–18
Total years in the system	12	9	10	12	11	10–13 ⁴

¹ Compulsory Education in Europe 2014/2015, www.eacea.edu/en; The structure of the European Education Systems 2014/15, Nov. 2014; http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/facts_and_figures.en.php#diagrams

² Education in China, Oct, 2010, KPMG, Hong Kong; kpmg.com/cn; Compulsory education Law of the People's Republic of China; www.moe.edu.cn

³ Structure of U.S. Education; www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-structure-us.html; Education commission of the state free and compulsory school age requirements in the United States, Jun, 2015; www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/18/68/11868.pdf

⁴ Depending on the state.

Table 22.4 Differences in socioeconomic status across the six countries (OECD, 2015)

<i>SES</i>	<i>Belgium</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>US</i>
Percentage of adults (aged 25–65) who have completed secondary education	72	–	75	90	78	89
Average length of time spent in higher education	18.9	–	16.4	18.4	16.4	17.2
Average household income	28,307.00	–	28,799.00	17,852.00	27,029.00	41,355.00

differences may lead to differences in understanding assent forms and study instructions, and interpretation of stimuli, among others. Thus, they imply a need for careful selection of grade levels across countries.

Occupational prestige also varies across countries, particularly with respect to agriculture and services (Treiman 1977). Finally, differences in household income are particularly problematic to address, ranging from USD 41,355.00 on average in the US down to USD 17,852.00 on average in Poland (see [Table 22.4](#)).

Possible Solution: Data must be harmonized to compare cross-nationally, and there are two strategies for this: (1) input harmonization (i.e. harmonized concepts included in questionnaires); and (2) output harmonization (i.e. using pre-existing regional data, and amending them to harmonized format). For input harmonization, the International Social Survey Programme Database (ISSP; www.issp.org; Braun and Uher 2003) is a program of collaboration on important topics in the social sciences across countries. Researchers from the ISSP pay special attention to the development of reliable tools. They develop relevant and meaningful questionnaires for all countries involved through extensive pretesting, a reliable way to construct good questionnaires. For output harmonization, original questionnaires are used to find matches within index categories in available databases.

There are many resources to help gain a better understanding of cultural and socioeconomic differences across countries. The World Values Survey dataset (WVS 2015; www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp) indicates value orientations among adults across countries. The aim of this database is to study and monitor changes in values and attitudes in

Table 22.5 Resources to help gain better understanding of cultural and socioeconomic differences across the countries

No.	Sources	Type of information	Countries
1	Survey Programme Database (ISSP)	important topics in social sciences	worldwide
2	WVS the world Value Survey	value orientation	worldwide
3	ESS European Social Survey	education, family, identity, income, living conditions, religion	EU countries
4	ISCO-8 the Internal Standards Classification of Occupations	occupation	worldwide
5	SILC the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions	income and living conditions	EU countries
6	ISCED-12 the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education	education concept, education mapping program	worldwide
7	HBSC: the Health Behavior in School-Aged Children	children's health, well-being, living conditions	worldwide

socioeconomic, sociopolitical, sociopsychological, and sociogeographical domains in the lives of people from all over the world. Good sources of cultural values differences for Europe include the European Social Survey (ESS; www.europeansocialsurvey.org; Kolsrud and Skjåk 2005) and the European Value Survey (see Table 22.5). These are academically managed databases, giving comparable information for all EU countries on education, families, identities, income levels, living conditions, and religion. For occupational prestige, harmonized measures can be found in the Internal Standards Classification of Occupations (ISCO-8; www.ilo.org/public/english/stat/isco/index.htm; International Family of Economic and Social Classification). ISCO-8 can serve as a good basis for comparisons of statistical data about occupations across countries. For income differences in the EU, the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC; www.eui.eu/Research/Library/Researchbuilds/Economics/Statistics/DataPortal/En-SILC.aspx) includes harmonized data on income distribution, living conditions, and poverty. A good source of information about educational differences is the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), part of the International Family of Economic and Social Classification. ISCED 2012 includes internationally-agreed-upon concepts of education, and education mapping programs across countries. One final resource is the Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC) dataset, which includes a Family Affluence Scale (Batista-Foguet et al. 2004). Finally, researchers must standardize assent forms, instructions, and stimuli to ensure that same-age participants, regardless of reading levels or knowledge proficiencies, can understand and respond in comparable ways.

Challenge #3: Sampling Equivalence

Samples across countries need to be comparable. There are seven important sampling equivalence issues:

- 1 In cross-cultural research, in general, researchers can take an etic (context-free) or emic (context-bound) approach (Buil et al. 2012). The etic approach uses standardized measures and a standardized approach across samples. The emic approach, conversely, develops specific measures for each unit of analysis (which can compromise data equivalence).

Possible Solution: An alternative described by Douglas and Craig (cited in Buil et al. 2012, p. 227) is the adaptation of the etic approach so culturally specific differences can be taken into account and incorporated in the general measurement instrument, or the adaptation of the emic approach so specific differences in each culture are summed and combined to become a general measurement instrument. In the global study that inspired this chapter, we took the adapted etic approach, constructing a standardized measurement instrument that took cultural differences into account that was used in all countries. For example, when assessing levels of social media usage, we altered the type of social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to correspond to the most popular methods in a particular country.

- 2 Selecting the unit of analysis needs to be carefully considered. In much cross-cultural research, countries are often considered the unit of analysis. Yet culture can be conceptualized at different levels, including national, regional, or ethnic (Engelen and Brettel 2011). Because members of a nation share a common history, language, political/legal, and educational environment, they are believed to possess a distinct “national character”; that is, a distinct and stable pattern of behavior, personality characteristics, and values (Clark 1990; Luna and Gupta 2001). Some marketing studies have empirically shown the predominance of national culture over other cultural levels (regional, age, education) or subcultures (ethnic groups) (Singh et al. 2003). For instance, in a study conducted in 13 countries, Schwartz and Ros (1995) found that national culture explained three times more variance than within-country determinants (age and education). More recently, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) also concluded that national culture was the level of culture that exhibited the strongest heterogeneity in major values.

Possible Solution: When countries must be the unit of analysis, it is important that they are comparable on factors that might impact the research topic (e.g. the topic should be equally important in all countries), or mediating and moderating factors should be taken into account.

- 3 When aiming at sampling equivalence, researchers encounter conflicting aims: comparability versus generalizability (Buil et al. 2012). To make comparisons across countries (and, thus, samples), it is important to obtain sample comparability. This implies that samples are homogeneous in terms of relevant factors in the context of the research topic. However, homogeneity may have negative implications for the representativeness of the sample. Representativeness implies that statements can be generalized to the population from which the sample was taken.

Possible Solution: Balancing comparability and generalizability is a dilemma in cross-cultural research, and has major implications for the sampling method used. To obtain generalizability, researchers should use probabilistic sampling methods, while non-probabilistic sampling methods lead to greater comparability. Which methods are ultimately used should be guided by the goals of the research project.

- 4 If probabilistic sampling is used to enhance generalizability, random sampling is required. However, a number of issues may arise in the context of cross-cultural research, such as sampling frame, sampling method, and sample size (Ólafsson et al. 2013).

Possible Solution: A list of potential participants should be made available, from which participants can be selected in a random manner. Since such lists are not readily available, particularly across countries, a frequently used method is cluster sampling. With this method, natural groups of children are used as selection units, and within these units, a random sample is recruited. For example, a list of schools available in each participating country can be used for random selection of schools (representative for region,

educational level, etc.), followed by random selection of individual participants from the schools selected.

- 5 If non-probabilistic sampling is used to enhance comparability, quota sampling may be required, which involves obtaining comparable samples in terms of relevant variables (Buil et al. 2012).

Possible Solution: The Buil et al. (2012) method was used in the global study that inspired this chapter – children with comparable socio-demographic backgrounds in terms of age and SES were included. However, such a method does not allow for generalizations from the sample to the general population. As previously stated, the ultimate goals of the research project must be considered to determine whether to emphasize comparability or generalizability. Another method for enhancing comparability (but not generalizability) is to use online, international panel data, which allows for screening on initially determined characteristics (e.g. SES). Online questionnaires are not suitable, of course, for all topics or for younger children. For young children, taking a questionnaire online can be difficult, due to limited reading and writing skills.

- 6 Researchers need to consider how to improve participation rates from schools (or other organizations). It is important to stimulate approval from such entities, by explaining the importance and implications of the study (not only for scientific value, but also for society). The ability to place the research project in a larger context may increase participation rates. However, at the same time, there may be some risk associated with such a strategy. For example, in the ongoing global study that inspired this chapter, for the data collection in China, decision-makers were concerned with the implications of the study. We were measuring materialism levels, and they were wary of the possibility of comparisons between countries regarding children's materialism levels. Thus, researchers should be aware of positive, but also potentially negative consequences of cross-country comparisons.

Possible Solution: It is important to emphasize that no statements will be made about the results from individual participants, nor about the results within one school/organization. It is also important to recognize the limitations of the study, and not to over-emphasize the implications of the study (Laws and Mann 2004). In addition, donating something in return for participation may increase participation rates. For example, researchers can promise the school/organization to return after data analysis and present the results, or to give a short educational training to participants on the research topic. Schools appreciate this, and this stimulates their willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, it is important to maintain a strict schedule, and communicate this clearly. This increases the chance that schools will contact the researcher if there is a problem involving data collection. It is also a good idea to send frequent reminders.

- 7 Researchers need to consider how to improve parental consent rates. Researchers must explain the value of the study thoroughly, so parents can appreciate why their children are being asked to participate. Finally, researchers need to consider how to improve assent rates from the participants themselves. Incentives can be used to stimulate assent from child and adolescent participants (although they should not be coercive). For many studies, participants spend large amounts of time on the study that they could have spent in other ways (Laws and Mann 2004). Thus, it is important to consider compensating participants for the time spent on the research. In addition, incentives can greatly increase participation levels. Incentives can be either financial or non-financial. However, giving financial compensation can have negative implications (Ólafsson et al. 2013). For one, financial incentives can change the relationship, as participation is no longer fully voluntary, thus forcing participants to complete the study even if they no longer feel comfortable doing so.

Participants can more easily withdraw from a study when receiving no compensation (although our experience with very young children indicates that they don't really expect any sort of reward, but still enjoy participating). Financial incentives may also cause participants to comply with what they think the researcher is wanting from them (i.e. socially desirable responding or demand characteristics; Laws and Mann 2004). Incentives could also negatively impact data quality if children are no longer, or at least less, intrinsically motivated to respond (Collins et al. 2008; Ólafsson et al. 2013). They may complete the study more quickly, and with less consideration, than when receiving no compensation. Further, financial incentives may bias the sample, as those who need the money more may be more likely to participate than those who do not. However, the opposite can also happen – that is, if no compensation is offered, those who need money may choose not to participate, thinking that their time will be better spent in other activities (Laws and Mann 2004). All of these issues, of course, are within the remit of the IRB and are thus linked with our recommendations for finding an internationally agreed set of guidelines.

Possible Solutions: Researchers should send parents an individual letter where the purpose of the study is clearly explained. In addition, positive attitudes of the school principal and the teacher towards the study can help convince parents of the value of the study and the importance of their child's participation. Researchers should also consider the distinction between seeking active versus passive parental consent. With active consent, the researcher explicitly asks parents to return the letter to indicate their approval of their child participating in the study. With passive consent, parents only need to return the letter if they do not consent to their child's participation. Research has shown that participation rates increase dramatically when using the passive consent method (Kristjansson et al. 2013). Finally, regarding children's assent, an alternative to individual compensation is compensation to the school/organization. If using this approach, compensation should be independent of the number of participants, and the researcher should emphasize that participation is completely voluntary, and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Cross-cultural study complications may arise when compensation levels are different across countries. Researchers should be very sensitive about establishing compensation equivalence. Non-financial incentives may provide a good solution for many of the previously mentioned issues, particularly in cross-cultural research. Giving a small gift (e.g. a neat pencil or a small toy) can give children the feeling that their participation is highly valued, and they are being thanked for their work. In addition, it can stimulate participation while not being overly coercive. However, children who choose not to participate should be given the same gift to avoid any negative consequences.

Challenge #4: Data Collection Equivalence

To be able to compare data across countries, it is not only important to use rigorous sampling methods, but also to carefully control the data collection process. It is important to have a standardized procedure to collect the data in the different participating countries. A written procedure is indispensable in this case, especially given the necessity of obtaining ethical approval for the study, as it can guarantee that participants across countries included in the study are treated equivalently.

Depending on the modalities of the research, different settings can be used for the study: a home, school, clinic, or online research context. These settings have implications for

participant recruitment, and all have both advantages and disadvantages. When recruiting participants, it may be easier to gain access by working with larger institutions (e.g. schools, youth organizations, etc.). The setting in which the study will be conducted can strongly impact the results, and should be equivalent across countries (Buil et al. 2012). Questions to consider include whether participants will take part in the study individually or in a group setting, and the timing of the data collection (e.g. time of day vs. week vs. year). Differences in holiday and exam schedules should be considered when making final decisions in this regard. Further, given that school systems differ across countries, such differences should be taken into account to obtain both data and sample equivalence (as addressed previously). Other important factors include selecting a setting where participants are comfortable (Ólafsson et al. 2013), and one that provides the necessary facilities (e.g. are computers necessary? Are certain media required? Is interaction between research and participant required? How much privacy is required?).

Possible Solution: In all cases, the procedure should be as identical as possible across countries and samples, as differences in research settings can strongly impact research quality. Any discrepancies should be duly noted in the resulting manuscript and/or report.

Challenge #5: Methodological Challenges

Our view is that the methodological challenges for conducting research with children cross-culturally are similar to general methodological challenges researchers face when conducting research with children within a single country, only the difficulties are even more pronounced cross-culturally:

- 1 Measuring children's attitudes, beliefs, and values can be more difficult than measuring those of adults for a number of reasons. Young children have short attention spans as well as limited reading, writing, and verbal skills, making it difficult to use common methods such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Although adolescents have the attention span, reading, writing, and verbal skills to answer survey questions or to sit through an interview, they pose a different challenge entirely – adolescents often have little desire to talk to or to reveal personal information to researchers. Therefore, it can be challenging to track developmental changes across a wide age range. Although documenting developmental trends in behavior and values is important to any field of study, there are few studies that sample a wide age range (e.g. age 3–17), given the difficulty of developing appropriate and engaging measures for use with very young children, tweens, and older teens in a single study. Stimuli selection requires months of pretesting since the interests of children can be so different from those of tweens and teens. Yet, researchers must aim for stimuli equivalences for age-related analyses.

Possible Solution: Although retrospective methodologies show promise for identifying developmental patterns of consumer behavior (Braun-LaTour and LaTour 2004; Connell et al. 2014; Ellis et al. 2010; Richins and Chaplin 2015), these may not be suitable for investigating what is currently happening among 21st-century children, which might require more engaging methods than typical surveys.

There is a shortage of novel and engaging methods to bring out thoughtful responses from a wide age range of youth participants (Chaplin and Connell 2015). Tasks that are fun, engaging, and rely less on reading, writing, and verbal skills (e.g. “drawing what comes to mind when you think of X,” building collages, sorting, and reaction time methods) are likely to work well with a wide age range because the researcher can test a wide range

of stimuli, and can study thoughts and behaviors of young children and tweens, as well as older teenagers, while minimizing socially desirable responding. Thus, we suggest administering game-like tasks or art projects over traditional rating scales or interviews typically used with adult samples. The downsides of developing and utilizing tasks akin to games or projects – requiring one-on-one interviews with children (see Chaplin and John 2007; Chaplin and Lowrey 2010) – make it difficult to run studies with large sample sizes.

Often, using validated rating scales is preferred and/or is more efficient. When validated rating scales are preferred, we echo Chaplin and Connell's (2015) suggestion to follow Chaplin and John's (2005) sorting method to administer surveys to children, where they printed each survey question on a small card and had children sort the cards into four piles representing the rating scale (e.g. disagree a lot: agree a lot). This way, researchers are able to administer a validated scale in a way that helps keep children attentive, and elicits thoughtful responses.

Although interviews are not ideal for young children who lack developed verbal skills, they do have the benefit of allowing children to describe their attitudes, beliefs, and values in their own words, unprompted. When researchers prefer interviews, we recommend the following (adapted from Chaplin and Connell 2015): (1) Gauge your participants' verbal abilities by first discussing a fun and familiar topic. If they have difficulty discussing this topic (e.g. their birthday or what they like to do with their parents), it is unlikely they will be successful at handling your study interview questions. This initial test will allow you to determine whether you need to study an older age or change your research method entirely; (2) Conduct interviews with young children at locations that are comfortable and familiar to them (e.g. unused classroom at school, camp); (3) Study non-sensitive topics to avoid children feeling embarrassed or judged by an adult; (4) Keep interviews brief and focused (e.g. to measure materialistic values, Chaplin and John (2007) asked: "What makes you happy?"); (5) To arm children with confidence, avoid questions with a right or wrong answer and be clear to children that there are no right or wrong answers; and (6) Finally, ask questions that allow children to feel as if they are teaching the researcher something, rather than being evaluated by an adult. A little encouragement from the experimenter, such as asking: "Really? Why?" or "Really? How?" goes a long way to show you are interested in what children have to teach you, which will encourage them to be more verbal and thoughtful in their responses.

- 2 These methodological challenges are more evident when recruiting children cross-nationally. Stimuli development for projective measures, such as collages or sorting games, become even more challenging when sampling children who are exposed to different products, brands, and experiences. Furthermore, certain measures may pass research ethics approval in some countries with less stringent guidelines for conducting research with children (e.g. France and Poland) and researchers would be ready to run the study, but when it comes to approval in the US (IRB), it likely would need to go through multiple rounds of full board review before obtaining approval. Ultimately, cross-cultural studies with children will be limited to the methods and research procedures that receive research approval from the US since the approval process is the most rigorous in the US.

Possible Solution: If American children will be recruited, researchers should begin by developing study materials and methods that will be approved by the IRB committee in the US, as it will be the country that determines whether the study can move ahead, given its rigorous Research Approval Process. It is only after the US IRB has given approval that researchers should move forward to collect data in other countries, which likely have less rigorous ethics approval processes. If researchers proceed in the opposite

direction (e.g. starting in a country with a lenient approval process, such as France), the necessary methods and procedure equivalences may render any data collected unusable if the US IRB committee does not approve the study materials and/or procedure.

When developing stimuli for more engaging tasks such as collages or sorting games for cross-cultural studies with children, it is important to pretest a range of products, brands, and experiences for familiarity, salience, and interest across cultures. Researchers should interview children to record what sort of things they like and to note any commonalities across cultures. From there, researchers should develop a comprehensive list of stimuli to be used in a cross-national sample.

General Discussion

The relation between children and the commercial world is likely to remain on the global political agenda, particularly as obesity levels rise, costing governments enormous amounts of money in health care, and as concerns about children's use of technology and their levels of materialism continue to grow. It is thus crucial that consumer and marketing researchers work together internationally to ensure a steady stream of relevant and timely evidence to inform policy. Yet, we see too little cross-cultural research on children. This is not because of a lack of need or interest in this demographic, but a function of how difficult it is to develop clean studies for young children, for wide age ranges, across cultures. It is also difficult to get ethics approval, to get schools to participate, to get parental consent, and to get children's assent. This chapter was inspired by an ongoing global study being conducted by a subset of the current authors, as they struggled to overcome the many challenges of studying children's materialism in six countries spanning three continents.

Our chapter has provided a handbook of sorts for those embarking on policy research with children; a list of challenges and solutions. We have discussed five critical challenges to conducting cross-national research with children and offered some recommendations: (1) Differences in the Research Approval Process; (2) Internationally Comparable Sample Frames; (3) Sampling Equivalence; (4) Standardized Data Collection; and (5) Methodological Challenges. Although this chapter does not cover every possible solution for each challenge, we hope that what we have shared, given our experiences in our project, will be of assistance (and encouragement) to others considering conducting public policy research with children and/or in an international setting.

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