PRODUCTION NOTE

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A Public Opinion Survey of the Evansville Public Library

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In the spring of 1953, students of Evansville College completed a survey of public opinion on the public library system of Evansville, Indiana. The survey was made by the spring quarter classes in "Marketing Research" and in "Principles of Marketing," and was directed by the instructor of those classes, Claude H. Slusher, associate professor of marketing at the college. The survey had been requested by the library; it was performed by the college as a public service and at no cost to the library. This is a report of that survey and its results.

The procedure which was followed is described first, and then the sample of respondents is analyzed. Finally, the poll data are presented and reviewed. The objective of the survey was to ascertain the use made of the library facilities by the adult citizens of the community, and to assess the importance of the public library system to them. At the same time an attempt was made to uncover deficiencies and possible improvements in the library services then being given. Slusher was in general charge of the survey. He had the advice and assistance of various members of the staff of the public library.

Procedure

The procedure used in the selection of the sample was as follows. First, the city was divided into eight geographical sections according to the area city map prepared by the United States Census Bureau in 1950.1 Second, a random sample of about one thousand interviews was decided on. Third, from the number of blocks in each area it was possible to determine the proportion of the one thousand calls which were to be made in that area (Table I, col. d). Fourth, in deciding the number of calls to be made in each block, the total number of dwelling units (40,819) in Evansville was divided by the total number of blocks (1,851).2 The result was an average of twenty-two dwelling units in each block.

Fifth, it was decided that one out of every three dwelling units in each block was to be visited. The result was an average of seven calls per block. If there were less than twenty-two houses in a given block, the deficit was made up in the following block. Thus by dividing seven into the number of calls to be made in

1
2
each area, the number of blocks to be used in that area was determined (Table I, col. e). Sixth, the houses to be visited were chosen at random from the dwelling units listed in the city directory of 1951. Using the street address section of the directories, every thirteenth block in each area was selected and then every third house in those blocks was chosen to be visited. This factor of thirteen was secured by dividing the number of blocks to be used in each area into the total number of blocks in that area. The one exception was area H where every tenth block was used. Table I shows how the total number of 987 personal interviews was determined.

Table I

Determination of the Number of Blocks in Each Area Needed to Secure a Thousand Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Blocks in Area</th>
<th>Per cent of Total Blocks</th>
<th>Per cent of Calls</th>
<th>Number of Blocks* to be Used per Area</th>
<th>Number of Planned Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,851</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* On the basis of seven calls per block (one dwelling unit out of three).


Since there was a deficit in the proposed number of personal interviews which were to be made, nine staff members of the Evansville Public Library were asked to make twenty-five telephone interviews each. The Evansville telephone directory of 1953 was used, and 225 telephone numbers were chosen at random. These 225 calls plus the 987 house-to-house interviews made a total of 1,212 interviews finally planned for the survey.

A questionnaire, relating to important points about which information was desired, was jointly drawn up by Slusher and the library staff members. The questions were designed so that they would require little effort by the interviewee. A copy of the survey interview questionnaire appears here as Appendix 1.
The actual interviewing was scheduled to take place from the first of April to the last of May; 919 returns were in by that date. All of the interviewers were men, and none had previous polling experience. The questionnaires, with a set of instructions on how to conduct the interviews, were distributed to the interviewers at the final briefing. The students were directed to ask the questions as they appeared on the interview form, but were urged to use tact when asking the more personal questions. It was estimated that each interview would take approximately ten minutes to conduct. When there was no answer at the original house number, the students were directed to go to the next numbered house on the block. Thus the necessity of call-backs was obviated. In all, a total of 157 interviews were secured on the telephone by the nine staff members of the library. Insofar as possible the telephone survey was conducted in the same manner as the house-to-house survey. Once the telephone interviews were received, they were combined with the house-to-house interviews and treated in the same way.

The interviewees were to include only persons who were fourteen years of age or over, who were not elementary school students, and who were local citizens and residents in the sense that this was their home address. Only one member of each family was to be interviewed and that was the person who answered the door, if he was of the specified group. Again this eliminated the necessity of call-backs by the interviewers.

On some occasions the interviewers ran into difficulties. At times when a man answered the door or telephone, he would refer the interviewer to the woman of the house. The substitute had to be accepted even though it did mean an increase in the number of women interviewed. This was one reason why the number of women interviewed was so much greater than that of men. Another difficulty was that the students chose their own time of the day to do the interviews, and this was usually in the afternoon when most men were at work.

Some sixty Evansville College students participated in the survey. When all of the interviewing was completed and the 1,076 questionnaires turned in, Slusher and the students in his "Marketing Research" class tabulated the results by hand. Then a report of the survey and its results was prepared by Slusher and his students and sent to the library. All further work was done by the library.

For the final tabulation a code was prepared for transferring the questionnaire responses to IBM cards. Two people had to agree on the coding of each questionnaire before the IBM card was punched. Only 1,032 of the questionnaires were complete and could be coded and have IBM cards punched. Responses that dealt with opinions (such as the second part of 5a, b, c, and 6a, b, c) were few and were tabulated by hand.
The Sample

The representativeness of the sample was tested after the questionnaires were turned in and tabulated. The first basis treated was that of sex. Evansville's total population of fourteen year-olds and over in 1950 was 46 per cent male and 54 per cent female, but the sample of respondents was 21 per cent male and 79 per cent female. The chi-square formula was applied with the result that the probability was less than one out of one hundred that a difference in sex distribution as large or larger than this, between the sample and the universe from which it was drawn, would occur by random error alone. In other words, there were significantly more women than men interviewed, and it was something other than chance alone that caused this to be so.

The next basis of comparison was that of race. The white and non-white population of the universe and of the sample was exactly the same, 93 per cent white and 7 per cent non-white. However, information on race was not available for 170 people in the sample (16 per cent of the total).

The third basis dealt with was that of age. Table II shows the comparison of the number of persons in each of four age-groups in the sample and in the universe. It should be noted that the age groups of the sample and the universe do not coincide. The chi-square formula was applied (using six degrees of freedom), with the result that the probability is forty out of one hundred that a difference in age distribution between the sample and the universe, as large or larger than that found, would occur by random error alone. This simply means that the sample was representative of the universe in regard to age.

Education was the next basis treated (Table III). The probability is only three out of one hundred (using four degrees of freedom) that a difference as large or larger than that found, in the distribution of persons by extent of formal education in the sample and in the universe, would occur by random error alone. Since the more conservative limit of what constitutes representativeness is a P value of five, this sample is considered not an accurate representation of the universe from which it was drawn, in regard to the amount of schooling.

The last of the bases on which the representativeness of the sample was tested was that of occupation. Table IV shows how far off the sample was in this regard as compared with the universe. The probability is less than one out of one hundred (using fourteen degrees of freedom) that a difference in occupational distribution between the sample and the universe, as large or larger than that found, would occur by random error alone. Even when housewives were omitted (and two-thirds of the sample thereby lost), the P value was still less than one that the differences in occupational distribution could occur by chance alone.
Table II

Representativeness of the Sample in Terms of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 to 18</td>
<td>32 (3%)</td>
<td>7,940 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 to 30</td>
<td>214 (21%)</td>
<td>21,930 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 50</td>
<td>504 (49%)</td>
<td>37,025 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 and over</td>
<td>270 (27%)</td>
<td>28,675 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,020 (100%)</td>
<td>95,570 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The class limits of the age groups of the sample and of the universe are shown in that order.


Table III

Representativeness of the Sample in Terms of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>311 (31%)</td>
<td>38,465 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>565 (57%)</td>
<td>34,800 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>124 (12%)</td>
<td>9,465 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,000 (100%)</td>
<td>82,730 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source for universe data: Same as Table II, pp. 173, 184.
Table IV

Representativeness of the Sample in Terms of Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial &amp; Professional</td>
<td>38 (4%)</td>
<td>7,097 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical &amp; Sales</td>
<td>49 (5%)</td>
<td>11,706 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>28 (3%)</td>
<td>4,933 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>37 (3%)</td>
<td>7,477 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Skilled</td>
<td>23 (2%)</td>
<td>14,124 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>41 (4%)</td>
<td>4,359 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewives</td>
<td>694 (67%)</td>
<td>29,120 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown &amp; Miscellaneous a</td>
<td>113 (11%)</td>
<td>12,102 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
<td>2,510 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,032 (100%)</td>
<td>93,428 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Includes students, retired persons, self-employed and those whose occupation was unknown.

Source for universe data: Same as Table II, pp. 207-212, 194.

In summary the sample is representative of the universe from which it was drawn on only two bases, and unrepresentative on three counts. There is, of course, a sizable assumption that these characteristics (sex, race, age, education, and occupation) are relevant to people's experiences with and opinions on library service, but insofar as they are relevant the sample is not representative. The answers given by these respondents, and analyzed below, are therefore to be considered only as the answers of a thousand adults and not necessarily representative of the whole community. In any future such polls, it would be desirable to use a more rigid sampling procedure, for example, designating who is to be interviewed at each address and requiring call-backs to secure their answers.

Analysis of the Data

In this third section of the report some of the results of the poll will be analyzed and discussed. A tabulation of the answers received appears here as part of Appendix 1. As a result of inadequate answers, question 4c had to be discarded.

Question number 1 was "Do you believe that a public library system is essential or necessary for the City of Evansville?" And 98 per cent (1,013) of the persons interviewed said they regard the Evansville Public Library as being essential or necessary for the City of Evansville. When the answers to this
question are compared with the answers to question number 2, "Do you feel that the public library system is essential or necessary for you personally?", it can be seen that fewer of the people who think the library necessary for the City of Evansville also think the library essential or necessary for themselves personally. The 398 persons who answered "No" to question number 2 represent 39 per cent of the total respondents, while only eighteen people (2%) in answering question 1 did not think the public library system essential for Evansville. This same difference in thinking was found in an earlier study by the National Opinion Research Center. 6

Those answering "No" to question 2 were not different from those who said "Yes" in occupational distribution (save that more students said "Yes" than "No," and more retired people said "No" than "Yes"). Those who were younger more often said "Yes" than "No" and those who were older (51 and over) more often said "No" than "Yes," but not by a degree which was statistically significant. A few more men and a few less women said "Yes" than "No," but the percentage distribution was essentially the same by sex and by race. When distributed by education, however, (Table V) there is a clear and statistically significant difference (P=.02); as the level of education rises, the per cent of respondents who said "No" to question 2 declines in comparison with the per cent they constitute of the whole sample. These data agree with those reported in other studies. 7

There were 332 persons (33% of all respondents) who said "No" to question 3, "Have you ever used the Evansville Public Library system for any purpose?" Seventy per cent of these people said "No" or "Don't know" in answer to question 8, "Would you use the library more if the availability of parking facilities were more favorable?" The majority of these 332 people (80% in each case) said "Yes" to question 9a "Are you satisfied with the locations of the libraries in Evansville?" and 9b "Are the present library hours satisfactory for your needs?" On the other hand, 86 per cent of them were not aware of special library services (films, records, and interlibrary loans), as indicated by their answers to question 11.

Table V

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Answered &quot;No&quot; to Question 2</th>
<th>Grammar School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of All &quot;No&quot; Answers</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of All Respondents</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although 98 per cent of the people interviewed felt that the library was essential to the city, the question arose as to whether or not these people actually used the library. The answers to question 4a, "When did you last use an Evansville Public Library?", showed that only 434 people had made use of the library during the past year. This is 42 per cent of the total number of people who were interviewed for the survey. Not all those who said they thought the library was essential or necessary for them personally (question 2) demonstrated this was so by their reported frequency of use (question 4a), since only about two-thirds of them had used the library even once in the past year. There were 700 people in all who could remember ever using the library. Central and Vanderburgh County Libraries (in the same building) were used last by 352 (51%) persons as compared to 348 (49%) persons who used the branches and Willard Library last. A later study of 138 high school students also showed that half of those who use the public library go to Central and half go to the branches.

Questions 5a, 5b, and 5c drew favorable responses approaching 100 per cent of those who said they ever used the public library. This is in harmony with what has been found elsewhere, and again too most of the dissatisfaction was over the alleged lack of books.

Question number 8, "Would you use the library more if the availability of parking facilities were more favorable?", received 403 (39%) "Yes" answers, 573 (56%) "No" answers, and 56 (5%) "don't know" answers. This would seem to show that inadequate parking facilities have little influence on the use of the library. These answers were cross-analyzed with regard to questions 3 (Have you ever used the Evansville Public Library System for any purpose?) and 4a (When did you last use an Evansville Public Library?).

Of the 403 persons who indicated that the availability of better parking facilities would lead to an increased usage of the library insofar as they were concerned, 99 of them had never used the library facilities previously, and 107 of them, although having used the library before, had not used it in twelve months prior to the survey. Therefore, of the people who said they would use the library more if parking facilities were improved, 51% had previously made little or no use of it.

Of the 434 users of the library (i.e., who said they used the library sometime in the last year), 197 (45%) indicated that the presence of adequate parking facilities would lead to increased usage of the library by them, as against 237 (55%) who would not make greater use of the library regardless of parking facilities; of the 598 non-users of the library there were 206 (34%) who indicated that improved parking facilities would result in an increased usage of library facilities by them. It is surprising that such a large number of respondents answered "Yes" to question 8, "Would you use the library more if the availability of parking facilities were more favorable?" Central is the only library that is faced with a parking problem; the branches and Willard all have reasonable to adequate parking facilities.
The last question to be analyzed here is number 11, "Did you know your public library can rent certain films, recordings, or borrow books from out-of-town libraries for your personal use?" That only one-quarter of all respondents said "Yes" to this question is what might be expected in view of the fact (a) that two-thirds of all those polled had either never used the library or not within the last year, and (b) that similar results have been found in other studies.12

Summary

Methodologically the two most important lessons learned in this experience were (1) to follow through on the logical design of the sample to ensure representativeness, and (2) to use better trained interviewers than students. Substantively, the results of this poll confirmed the findings of other studies for the most part. The Evansville Public Library seems to have made a place for itself in the lives of better educated people to a greater degree than is true of its influence over people with lesser amounts of formal education. There is a halo effect to the library, and people generally think well of it but they do not particularly know much about it. Parking by itself is probably not a major factor influencing use of the library.

FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid., pp. 3, 4-22.


5. Ibid., p. 152.


8. Willard Library is an endowed library open to the public, and not a part of the Evansville Public Library.

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Form Used, and Tabulation Responses

Survey of the Evansville Public Library System

1. Do you believe that a public library system is essential or necessary for the City of Evansville? Yes 1,013 No 18 *DK - 1  
2. Do you feel that the public library system is essential or necessary for you personally? Yes 633 No 398 DK - 1  
3. Have you ever used the Evansville Public Library System for any purpose? Yes 699 No 332 DK - 1  
4. a. When did you last use an Evansville Public Library? Yesterday 11 Last Week 110, Last Month 132, Last Year 181, Other 266, DK - 342  
   b. Which library (or libraries) did you last use? Dexter 7, Harper 8, Howell 21, Central 349, Cherry 22, Vanderburgh County 3, Willard 95, Washington 14, East Side 56, West Side 95, North Branch 30, DK - 332  
   c. For what purpose (or purposes) did you last use the library (or libraries)? Research ---, Leisure Reading ---, Other ---.  
5. On your last visit to the library:  
   a. Did you find or get what you wanted? Yes 666 No 32 DK - 334  
   b. Were you satisfied in every way with the services rendered? Yes 68 No 10 DK - 336  
   c. Were you completely comfortable during your visit at the library? Yes 681 No 12 DK - 339  
   If NO is given to (5a or 5b or 5c), find out why--  
5a. (7 answers)  
5b. (3 answers)  
5c. (5 comments)  
6. What could the library do to make the services you desire more attractive or more useful? (Please list in order of preferences).  
   a. (47 answers of which 20 were for more or newer books in general or on  
   b. various subjects)  
   c.  

10. Ibid.  
12. Ibid., pp. 84-85.
7. Would the following services make the library more attractive or more useful to you?
   a. A floor plan in a convenient place showing arrangement of books?  
      Yes 776  No 215  DK - 41
   b. A television set for educational programs at Central Library?  Yes 627  
      No 355  DK - 50
   c. A study group to talk about books at Central Library?  Yes 573  No 389  DK - 70
   d. Public rest rooms available at every public library?  Yes 902  No 98  DK - 32
   e. A lounge room where smoking is permitted with available newspapers and other current materials for reading?  Yes 595  No 399  DK - 38

8. Would you use the library more if the availability of parking facilities were more favorable?  Yes 403  No 573  DK - 56

9. a. Are you satisfied with the locations of the libraries in Evansville?  Yes 911  
      No 64; if NO, what changes do you recommend?  DK - 57
   b. Are the present library hours satisfactory for your needs?  Yes 901  No 63;  
      if NO, what hours would be more favorable?  DK - 67

10. What is your opinion about establishing a snack bar at Central Library?  Yes 433  
     No 375  DK - 224

11. Did you know your public library can rent certain films, recordings, or borrow books from out-of-town libraries for your personal use?  Yes 258  
     No 703  DK - 71

Address ___________________________  Occupation ___________________________  
(See Table IV)

Age: 14-18 32; 19-30 214; 31-50 504; 51 and over 270; Sex: M 212  F 799 DK-21

Race: White 803  Non-white 59  DK - 170; Education: Attended or completed 
  grammar school 311; Attended or completed high school 565; Attended or completed 
  college 124;  DK - 32.

* DK - Don't Know, including No Answer and Does Not Apply,
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