

MOBILIZING AN ENTIRE NATION: THE UNITED STATES 2010 CENSUS

BUSINESS SITUATION

A Challenging Decade of Silence and Change

The U.S. Census happens only once every decade. This massive undertaking determines the number and demographic composition of people residing in the United States and its territories. The census is mandated by the Constitution, and by law everyone must participate. However, legality doesn't equate with likelihood. Participation rates in Government surveys have been declining for decades. In 2000, for the first time, the Government utilized paid media to encourage participation.

On the surface, our assignment for the 2010 Census seemed rather simple — get people to complete and return the short, ten-question census survey. But we didn't have to convince just "people;" we had to convince "ALL the people." Our challenge was unlike that of any commercial advertiser in history. We had to mobilize a diverse and sprawling nation of hundreds of millions to perform the same single action over a very short four-week period. That meant rallying the entire nation — citizens and noncitizens, English speakers and speakers of 58 other languages, both the willing and the apprehensive — to voluntarily take the time in a pervasively digital world to complete the census form by hand, and then go and drop it in a mailbox.

Aside from the sheer scale of this operation, a multitude of additional factors stood in our way. In the decade from 2000 to 2010, many events shaped and defined the obstacles for delivering high participation rates including: declining survey participation;¹ all-time-high government mistrust;² heightened privacy and immigration concerns;³ an increasingly diverse population with greater numbers of non-English-speakers and noncitizens desiring anonymity;⁴ the largest new generation ever to the census;⁵ a sharp rise in the hard-to-locate due to unprecedented foreclosures and displacements from a faltering economy and natural disasters;⁶ and greater media fragmentation, making it harder than ever to reach "ALL the people." With no paid communications in-market for the past ten years, since the census is conducted only on a decennial basis, and with no momentum on which to build, these threats made success even more difficult and uncertain.

The Real Price of Nonparticipation

The failure of people to participate in the census would have serious repercussions. For the Government, it would mean falling short of goal and spending billions of taxpayer dollars to hire and deploy additional census workers to go door-to-door to track down and count people who do not respond by mail. For the people, it would mean unfair distribution of benefits. Without FULL AND COMPLETE participation, the census cannot accurately represent the human composition of the nation for fair distribution of funding to communities for schools, hospitals, roads and more, as well as fair representation.

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Long before the contract to develop and implement the communications campaign for the 2010 census was awarded, the Census Bureau with the approval of Congress established the following goals for the campaign:

- Engagement: Reach everyone in the U.S. and its territories, citizen or not, English speaking or not, make them aware and encourage all to participate.
- Participation: Deliver 67% mail participation, a similar goal to that in 2000, despite the many new and significant obstacles and threats.
- Savings: Have the campaign pay for itself, which totaled \$357 million for 2010.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

An effort of this magnitude and accountability certainly had to be rooted in rigorous research. To achieve the level of rigor demanded, it was imperative to develop a *research system* that would provide the continuity of learning and measurement required to create the linkages, builds and refinements necessary to be successful in a one-time, short-term effort such as this.

In-market success hinged on going beyond the Census Bureau's demographics to understand the full spectrum of mindsets towards the census, including motivators to trigger and barriers to overcome to drive differing mindsets to engage and participate in the 2010 Census. This learning would:

- Serve as the foundation for developing strategy and messaging to motivate the largest, most diverse audience ever in the history of advertising
- Provide the key metrics by which, and the lens through which all communications are evaluated for refinement and optimization prior to launch in-market
- Derive the early indicators of participation against which the campaign is tracked, for real-time detection of problems and rapid resolution while in-market

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

Strategy and Message Development

Again, our mission was to generate mass participation in the census, mobilizing every household in the entire U.S. to fill out the census and mail it back within a brief four-week window. As demographers, the Census Bureau had modeling and analytics about "who" to target and "where" to find them, but as marketers, we had little insight into "what" to say to stimulate participation. So, we set out on the daunting task to understand the attitudes of an entire nation towards the census to create a first-time companion attitudinal segmentation to the Bureau's demographic segmentation.

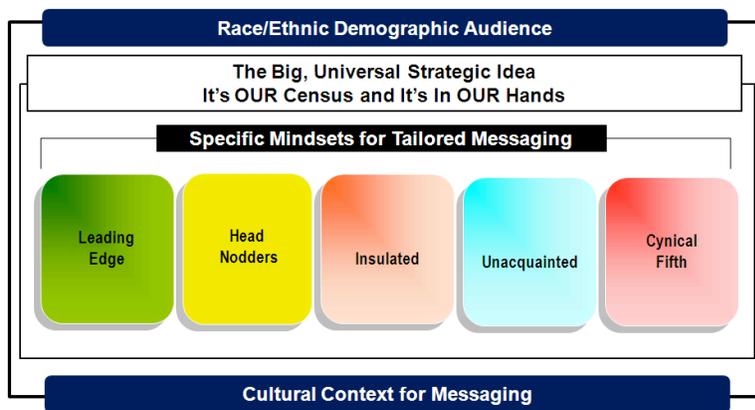
To accomplish this, we designed and conducted qualitative exploratory research⁷ that was then expanded upon and quantified with customized segmentation research dubbed the Census Barriers, Attitudes and Motivators Survey (CBAMS).⁸ CBAMS was executed in multiple languages among over 4,000 people across the U.S. by landline, cell and in person. Our efforts extended beyond the easy-to-reach, general population to include such hard-to-count groups as ethnic enclaves (e.g., American Indian reservations and high-density Hispanic, Asian and Black communities), the economically disadvantaged and those living in remote, rural areas. The comprehensive questionnaire covered 30 different question areas disclosing perceptions, barriers and motivators towards census participation. Extensive multivariate work, including, but not limited to, simultaneous and stepwise regression and Q-Type factor analysis, was executed. What emerged was a mindset structure that cut across the Bureau's demographic clusters, allowing us to develop a universal and highly relevant "big idea" supported by tailored messaging designed to compel each of the specific mindsets. Due to the diversity and inclusiveness of the sample, we were also able to determine which mindsets were most prevalent within each race/ethnic audience to focus our efforts and to gain the insights needed to deliver communications served up in culturally relevant contexts.

From “U.S. Government” to “US” — The Big Idea

This strategic phase of research revealed that in order to mobilize an entire nation, we'd have to get people to mobilize other people. Not only did people universally distrust the Government, they universally felt better suited to make decisions for themselves, relying on one another in an increasingly “social” world. So how could we get people to support an initiative from the very body for which they had developed so much mistrust? The research directed that we would have to reframe the census from a Government initiative to a civic call-to-action. We would have to show people just how important they are to the process. The census couldn't simply be seen as an obligation, but needed to become a movement in possibility, community and individual agency. It would no longer be the U.S. Census, but “OUR CENSUS.” This simple, but powerful change in subject would be the catalyst for transforming a Government initiative into a people's movement — “It's OUR Census and It's In OUR Hands.”

However, transferring the mantle of the census from the Government to the people would present its own challenges. We learned that we couldn't just transfer power; we also had to guide and direct it along the way. Awareness and empowerment alone would not be enough. They had to result in action and the key to this action lay in the distinct mindsets that emerged in CBAMS. But, each mindset required unique messaging in support of the platform strategy of census ownership:

- **Head Nodders:** Highly vulnerable. The most likely to be swayed, positively or negatively, based upon others' perspectives and opinions about the census. The key to their ownership of the census is to constantly tap into their desire to do their part in what seems “good and right,” e.g., saving taxpayer dollars, helping their communities get their fair share of \$400 billion in funding and benefits, etc.
- **Insulated:** Familiar with the census, but indifferent, having neither seen nor fully understood the impact of it on their lives, families or communities. Ownership of the census accomplished by linking their participation (or lack thereof) to the availability of specific quality-of-life benefits such as hospitals, schools, police, daycare and senior services, etc.
- **Unacquainted:** Often linguistically or culturally isolated. Unaware of the census, its purpose/benefits, when/how to participate, and who should be counted. Ownership achieved by allowing them to feel unthreatened, embraced and critical to the census through emphasis on confidentiality, education, information and assistance, including in-language materials and help.
- **The Cynical Fifth:** Suspicious, jaded and anti-institution. Reluctant to provide too much personal info, believing it will be misused. Rather than take a defensive stand, communications must instill ownership by striking an emotional chord, focusing on the census as a higher-order responsibility (common good, survival of culture, impact on future generations, mandated by the constitution) and by demonstrating just how noninvasive and quick/easy the census actually is.
- **The Leading Edge:** Highly informed and committed to participating. See filling out the census as a duty and privilege, and propensity to encourage others do so, too. Ownership is solidified through their involvement as advocates.



As the lead agency, armed with this understanding of the mindsets and cultural contexts, along with the pre-existing demographic profiles, we led our partner agencies in the development of creative stimuli for pre-testing.

Message Refinement and Optimization

The primary purpose of pre-testing was to ensure that all 2010 Census messaging resonated with the respective mindsets for each race/ethnic demographic audience — specifically, that it provoked personal ownership of the census, enhanced knowledge and understanding as necessary, relieved any fears or apprehensions, was culturally relevant, and exhibited strong potential to prompt participation. We tested upwards of 200 pieces of creative stimuli among approximately 1,800 respondents representing the critical mindsets (recruited using a mindset classification tool statistically developed from CBAMS) for each of the race/ethnic audiences — Diverse Mass (mix of races/ethnicities consuming English-language media); Black (African American, Black African, Black Caribbean, in-language Haitian, Bi-Racial Black); Hispanic (in-language Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central/South American, Mexican, Dominican, Salvadorian, Caribbean and English-speaking Hispanic); Puerto Rico (in-language Puerto Rican urban/rural and Dominican); Asian (in-language Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Cambodian, Korean, Japanese, Asian Indian Bangladeshi, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani and Non First Generation English speaking); Armenian and Iranian; Russian, Polish, Arabic (in-language); American Indian; Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian (Hawaii) and Other Pacific Islanders; Greek; Portuguese — as well as those displaced by natural disasters and foreclosures and their hosts.

A quali-quant approach was employed⁹, supported by a team of in-language and in-culture moderators. Using handheld devices in a theatre-style setting, audiences evaluated the creative stimuli by responding to a battery of questions reflecting the attitudes, motivators and barriers identified in CBAMS as most closely linked to participation. After this quantitative portion was completed, a qualitative discussion was conducted among a smaller, select group of participants to provide further insights, and guidance for refinement and optimization.

It was through this pre-testing that we developed many powerful aspects of the campaign such as: the strongly resonant messages, “10 minutes/10 questions” and “we can’t move forward until you mail it back”; the highly motivating executional approach leveraging the “march to the mailbox”; the many culturally relevant ways to address confidentiality. The research also resulted in more than 400 pieces of creative in 28 languages (59 including the website) that comprised the campaign.

Real-time Optimization

With such aggressive goals and only a four-week window to deliver results, it was critical to identify the *early indicators of participation in the census* and monitor them continuously throughout the campaign to determine if efforts were on track. Waiting on *actual participation rates* would make us too late in the process to course-correct. CBAMS gave us the ability to statistically derive the *early indicators of participation*. Custom-designed, ongoing national tracking surveys were implemented to monitor these lead-time attitudes and perceptions along

with awareness to reveal where, among whom and why the campaign was underperforming, to take advantage of opportunities for real-time, rapid adjustments to messaging and media. This ability to predict and then course-correct using these *early indicators* was critical to the success of the campaign, allowing us to re-strategize and adjust along the way to maximize participation.

We designed the Census Attitudinal Tracking Survey (CATS)¹⁰ to monitor the *early indicators of participation* on a pre-basis and then throughout the flight of the campaign among 900–1,000 online respondents weekly, once again using the mindset classification tool from CBAMS. The Census Bureau also engaged similar telephone polling via Gallup¹¹, readable daily, as a companion effort. The key variables monitored were awareness, engagement, favorability, familiarity, relevance, intent to participate, intent to recommend specific perceived benefits/harm of participating, confidentiality, misuse of data, ease of participating and several others. In addition, an exploratory module consisting of up to five questions was updated periodically to capture public reactions to current events related to the census. Social media tracking¹² was also used to monitor conversations about the census. These robust tracking tools provided the input necessary to course-correct in the face of unanticipated market events and ensured our ability to meet our participation goal.

For example, CATS informed our decision to commence with the Motivational Phase of advertising two weeks earlier than planned. During the Awareness Phase, we noticed key early indicators of participation — intent, quick and easy, awareness of when — plateauing much earlier than expected. By moving up the Motivation Phase, we were able to regain upward movement on these measures to ensure we maximized mail-back participation.

Another example...engagement with the Census had hovered around 73% for weeks three through six of the Awareness Phase. In both CATS and the Bureau's tracking study, there was a significant minority who reported that they *hadn't seen/heard anything recently about the census*. Data analysis showed they were more likely to be Insulated, female, with children, living in urban areas, and over-indexing in the West. This subgroup's lower intent to participate and recommend scores made it imperative to address their lack of engagement. The creation of highly targeted radio messages for Insulated, urban families was developed, and the engagement metric reached a high of 95% during the subsequent Motivation Phase.

CATS also identified that our efforts weren't impactful enough against a group of Insulated and Cynical Fifth Spanish-dominant Hispanics who continued to believe that the Census would *take too long* to fill out. Additional OOH with "10 minutes/10 questions" messaging was strategically placed in heavily Hispanic local markets utilizing shopper billboards, one-sheet posters placed in check-cashing stores and mobile boards. Almost immediately, the percentage of those thinking it would take too long dropped significantly to only 17%.

In addition to the three examples presented, our tracking efforts led to a dozen rapid actions that optimized the 2010 Census campaign while still in-market. Of course, the Census Bureau also tracked *actual* mail-back rates right down to the census tract level. This data was reviewed daily and provided the real proof that our campaign and course-correction measures were working and that we were on track to meet our goal.

BUSINESS RESULTS

The 2010 Census campaign exceeded expectations, resulting in a highly successful census:

- The campaign reached and engaged everyone, with overall public awareness of the census peaking at 93–100%.¹³
- Mail participation significantly exceeded the goal by 7 percentage points, reaching 74%¹⁴ despite the daunting and unprecedented challenges faced.
- The Census Bureau returned \$1.9 billion to the Government, with the campaign paying for itself more than five times over.¹⁴

Footnotes

¹Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Bias in Household Surveys, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 5

²Source: Pew Research Center

³Source: Ponemon Institute

⁴Source: USA Today Analysis of Census Data

⁵Source: U.S. Census Bureau

⁶Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

⁷Clarion Research as subcontractor to Drafftcb

⁸ICF Macro and Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) as subcontractors to Drafftcb

⁹The Maya Group as subcontractor to Drafftcb

¹⁰Applied Research and Consulting, LLC as subcontractor to Drafftcb

¹¹Gallup Public Opinion Polling as subcontractor to the U.S. Census Bureau

¹²Radian6 through Weber Shandwick as partner agency to Drafftcb

¹³93% based on Gallup Public Opinion Polling; 100% based of Census Attitudinal Tracking Study (CATS)

¹⁴U.S. Census Bureau data for the 2010 Census effort