

THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS FOR MARKETING  
IN LATIN AMERICA: PROSPECTS,  
DEVELOPMENTS, AND PREDICTIONS

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The purpose of this study is to forecast the likely future development of the marketing environment and marketing institutions of Latin America. The specific research objectives are to: (1) Identify the key factors or characteristics contributing to the development of the marketing environment in Latin America; (2) Establish the most probable time period in which these characteristics will be operative; and (3) Identify the major obstacles inhibiting the realization of these characteristics.

The information on which the analysis of the research questions is based was obtained from a modified version of the Delphi survey technique. The study successfully completed two rounds of questioning conducted among a group of 30 cooperating experts. The panel of experts was drawn from eight countries of North and South America and contained both published academics and businessmen with specialized knowledge of Latin American marketing. Twenty-four of the thirty participants are either university professors or former educators turned businessmen. Consequently, the view of the future presented in these results comes primarily from the "ivory tower," even though most participants are active in business and consulting.

The survey instrument designed for the first round consisted of 14 characteristics or "states of nature" thought to be critical to the future development of the Latin American marketing environment. Each "state of nature" contained scenario statements describing potential developments in the macro-environment of marketing. The participants were asked to indicate the probability of each characteristic existing in each of several future time periods. Participants were also asked in an open-ended question to identify the major obstacles inhibiting the achievement of each state of nature.

First round results indicated the need to view Latin America regionally, rather than as a homogeneous area. Thus, for the second round, responses were requested separately for three major areas: the Central American Common Market (CACM), the Andean Group, and Brazil. Finally, results of the first round were returned to participants and they were asked to re-evaluate their responses in light of the additional information obtained.

Second round results reveals that the overall judgment of the respondents is that the decade of the 80's is likely to be a period of especially rapid change for marketing environments and institutions in Latin America. The average responses of the panel for all seven scenarios taken together indicate that their cumulative probability estimate of the scenarios occurring by 1990 is well over 50 percent. Further, the greatest increases in cumulative probability take place between the base year and 1990. The increases in cumulative probability are all greater between 1979 and 1990 than between 1990 and 2025. Although this may reflect a forecasting bias to concentrate on the near run future, the overall indication is one of rapid change in the next decade.

Conclusions on the basis of this survey information must be considered with several limitations in mind. First, all forecasts of the future represent subjective and highly probabilistic individual judgements. Although the Delphi technique may have contributed to more considered evaluations by providing the responses of other experts as input into final predictions, the overall reliability of any forecasting technique, especially for periods outside the immediate future, is necessarily less than perfect. Thus, these results can best be interpreted as suggestions of likely trends rather than definitive conclusions. Secondly, the size of the panel was relatively small and may not be completely representative of all expert opinion at a statistically significant level.

These limits notwithstanding, three central conclusions seem reasonable based on the results. First, the overall forecast of marketing's contribution to economic development seems optimistic. The attainment of some specific marketing situations which contribute to economic development seems highly likely by 2025. Further, in some cases high probabilities occur in the near future.

Second, substantial variation by regions in Latin America is noted. Probabilities for Brazil consistently start higher and increase to higher levels than probabilities for the Andean Group and CACM. This underscores the necessity of treating any approach to economic development in Latin America at least on a regional, and not global, basis.

Finally, survey results suggest some priorities for economic development programs and research. Depending on the strategy selected efforts could be directed to those situations offering the highest probability of occurrence in the near run future with the thought of attacking areas offering the greatest likelihood of quick results. Alternatively, efforts could be directed to situations presenting the greatest obstacles, and hence lowest probabilities of occurrence.