



## **QUALITATIVE/ QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH INTEGRATION – THE JOY OF SEX**

### **Background**

Qualitative/ Quantitative advertising research integration is not a new topic but it is taking on increasing importance. Clients are succeeding in getting integrated creative work – finally – so it will not be long before they turn their attentions to getting integrated research. In fact it is surprising that not more clients are demanding it.

Equally it is surprising that only a very few research companies and practitioners offer it. As it can be a competitive advantage, there must be barriers preventing it from happening. This paper sets out the various barriers and shows how they can be overcome. Further, we point out the varied and surprising benefits integration can offer clients.

By integration, we mean qualitative-only researchers working with quantitative-only researchers, such that each side's findings make sense in the context of the other's and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts through the addition of a different perspective and a different approach. The client gets 'research they can rely on', in other words the research findings are consistent or capable of having apparent differences reasonably explained. Through such consistency comes seamlessness which in turn results in learnings and insights being applied all the way down the line.

### **Barriers to Integration**

One of the first barriers is the chestnut that qualitative and quantitative researchers are quite different from each other and don't really understand each other. Much like, it is



alleged, men and women. In point of fact it is not an unreasonable analogy.

Qualitative and quantitative researchers may be members of the same species, but we are like different genders within this. Broadly speaking, qualitative is more feminine in approach, dealing in chat, emotions and touchy-feely issues, as well as being pretty flexible. By contrast, quantitative research is more masculine in approach, dealing with hard numbers, data processing, a relatively rigid approach and generally a more rational outlook.

Following on from this, there is often a sense of fear which pervades the process.

Qualitative researchers are typically not overly keen to get involved with quantitative research since the quantitative findings are almost invariably less positive, which puts the qualitative researcher into a defensive mode. Despite their general humility, good qualitative researchers have egos too; they are being paid for their moderating and interpretative skills, after all. So they offer up their own thoughts and ideas in the debrief, which they will often believe in quite strongly. Naturally therefore they do not take well to these thoughts and ideas being in some way rebuked by quantitative research and the relationship can be combative rather than co-operative.

Some also have less of a facility with numbers than the quantitative researchers do.

Conversely quantitative researchers fear that they may be forced to slant their findings in such a way as to account for the prior qualitative research.

Temperamentally the two sides of the research world are dissimilar. It is not unknown for quantitative researchers to think of qualitative folks as airy, flighty and overly-interpretative. Qualitative researchers wear sandals and spend their time doing clay modelling. Whilst they have been known to think of quantitative researchers as uninspiring and pedestrian pedants in hobnail boots who spend their time doing not much and who stop work at 5.30pm. Clearly such attitudes are not conducive to good integration.



Thus the easy get-out clause pops up its head. It states that qualitative and quantitative research are different forms of research, often using different forms of stimulus material, in very different environments and so we should not expect them to correspond. This is the argument of the ignorant and/ or lazy researcher. If the pieces of research were done well, we simply do not believe that qualitative and quantitative findings are ever irreconcilable. It might take some time, some thinking, some interpretative analysis but the research can always be reconciled.

After all, the qualitative and quantitative research do in the end both ask consumers pretty similar questions. So to that extent research integration is rather like ensuring the long-term survival of the race. Unless we go forth and multiply, there is a risk that we will become less and less useful to clients.

There are broader reasons too. The UK has more companies offering qualitative research than in any other country in the world, more companies claiming to specialise in qualitative research than in any other country in the world, and of these specialists, more companies who claim to specialise exclusively in qualitative research than in any other country in the world. One might thus hypothesise that we would find qual/ quant integration harder than any other country in the world, as we are much less used to offering it as a combined service.

Also of course advertising development is a rather fraught process, and maybe some clients or ad agencies don't wish to make it more fraught by overlaying integrated research onto it. All too often researchers get the sense that ad agencies are merely trying to get through this next stage of research, whatever it may be, in the hope that the issues arising can be miraculously resolved in production. Along the way more and more little difficulties get stored up, and in general they get thoroughly exhibited at the final hurdle, the quantitative research process. This is the point of course when a great deal of time has been spent on the advertising development as well as, most likely, a good deal of money. Surely it would be more sensible to go into final



quantitative research truly confident rather than secretly worried? It is precisely because advertising development is so delicate, sensitive and difficult that there is a clear role for integrated research.

Clients, for all that they want consistency, can act in ways which make it more difficult for it to happen. They often keep the qualitative and quantitative researchers apart: qualitative leaves through one door, after the final creative development debrief, just as quantitative comes in through another door. When asked, some of our clients suggested the following reasons why:

- clients can be nervous that integration might cause qualitative researchers to compromise their integrity, especially if they belong to the same company as the quantitative researchers. They may be swayed by considerations ranging from the need to appear consistent to bonus criteria.

- secondly, clients simply find it difficult to conceive of integrated research coming from one single company. They appreciate the temperament differences between qualitative and quantitative researchers and understand that the skills needed are different. Qualitative researchers are categorised as working for themselves or in small organisations, because there are few economies of scale or scope to be gained from size, and because temperamentally qualitative researchers do not like large, constraining organisations. Whereas quantitative researchers specialising in advertising work in large organisations, because of the resources and data-norms bank needed to create an effective study, and as such there are definite economies of scale and scope to be gained from size.

- thirdly, clients worry that if a qualitative researcher joins a large organisation the client will lose that personal relationship. Personal relationships are much more important with qualitative research (ad hoc projects, personal interpretation) than with quantitative research.



Given these concerns and views, clients' sometime reluctance to get qualitative and quantitative researchers together is not surprising. Keeping qualitative and quantitative separate is a means of retaining control; it fits with prevailing beliefs about competences; and it prevents the two sides conspiring, as it were, behind one's back.

For those in favour of integration, this is faintly depressing even if it is understandable. Ethics aside, it would be commercial suicide for researchers to start fiddling findings for the sake of consistency.

### **Bad Experiences with Integration**

However, another reason for the relative lack of integration may be the difficulties clients have experienced when they have tried it. Often clients are faced with rather less positive quantitative results, compared to qualitative, and no apparent means of explaining the discrepancies. In most such situations, it's the quantitative data which is taken as the 'true' result, leaving qualitative research looking a bit vague and wishy-washy.

Behind this lies the fact that qualitative researchers can be over-optimistic. This is partly because we are trying to imagine what 'might be' rather than what 'is' and partly because we often like to position ourselves as the ad agency's friend.

There is also the nature of the different research approaches. Qualitative research can and should separate out strategy from idea from execution. It takes a more holistic view whereas quantitative research is far more focused on the actual execution.

There may also be stimulus material effects. Different stimuli can emphasise different elements of a script. Animatics can lack the life and interest which good performance



and direction can bring; they can lack the engagement which amazing visual scenes will supply; and they don't generally do much for appetite appeal. Storyboards and narrative CD are more often used than animatics at creative development stage, and they can rather lead the witness.

There may also be something with the creative idea itself which will lead to more positive qualitative findings than quantitative findings. Some ideas really do need several viewings to be appreciated (a luxury not afforded in quantitative research) and with 'big' ideas a single execution may not do it justice. Quantitative pre-testing is at its most vulnerable is where it is researching a weak execution of a great idea, since quantitative evidence overwhelmingly shows that executions get judged on their first or second viewing - if they take longer than that to be appreciated then they rarely will be.

### **Reversing the Trend – Making Integration Happen**

It is possible for one organisation to offer good integrated research. In our case it is through being two companies. All that has changed in a physical sense since Sadek Wynberg was acquired by Millward Brown are IT and back-office functions. We still have our own independent office in London. This gives us an important metaphorical and literal distance from which to liaise with our quantitative colleagues. We believe that integration is best served by people with different specialisations who are close enough to but sufficiently distanced from each other to be able to maintain integrity and objectivity.

Our first efforts at integration were when we realised that it could not be a one-night stand. Not simply because all the effort it requires is disproportionate to the enjoyment derived from a single moment of gratification, but because consistency by definition involves a temporal element. As actual sex is just one element of a



fulfilling relationship, so literally creating a combined presentation is only one aspect of effective integration.

We believe that effective integration has four constituent elements:

- respect for the person
- understanding the other's discipline more fully
- operating as a team
- continual practice.

The qualitative and quantitative researchers actually actively court each other in order to break down the barriers. They try to find common ground and common interests – which may of course have nothing to do with work – just so that suspicion and distrust is minimised. (It's even interesting to note how much qualitative researchers go up in quantitative researchers' esteem if you happen to be good at maths!).

We do this because the person we have at least as much respect for is the client – which sounds trite but is true. The client's needs come first. We must have a sense of shared ownership between qualitative and quantitative researcher. Shared ownership of the client, shared ownership of the brand issues and opportunities, shared ownership of the advertising's well-being and shared ownership of the research objectives and the data.

Understanding the other's discipline more fully helps each to appreciate how the other gets to where they're going, and indeed can help them. We immerse the other side, so that for example quantitative researchers will come to see qualitative groups and might even join our analysis sessions. They get a richer and more holistic view of the data and it means that quantitative researchers start to get involved in strategic discussions at a far earlier stage than normally. The benefit for the qualitative researchers is that the quantitative researchers are able to highlight potential quantitative pre-test issues to us. We might also include relevant quantitative data in



our qualitative debriefs in order to provide context. Equally qualitative researchers may input into a quantitative questionnaire, take part in data analysis, help explain quantitative findings and will attend quantitative pre-test debriefs.

By achieving these first two objectives, we are able to act more confidently as integrated teams. Increasingly there will be a quantitative researcher at important qualitative briefings, since the qualitative work is likely to later develop a quantitative component. We suggest that it gives the client greater confidence that they are and will carry on integrating well when s/he sees both qualitative and quantitative researchers voluntarily in a room together.

Internally, we have regular status meetings on key accounts, as advertising agencies do, to update each other on what work is going through and what is coming up. Good communication is imperative, just like in one's personal relationships, and as we all know it is surprisingly hard to achieve.

That's why the fourth element, practice, is so important. A relationship seems wonderful and easy when you're infatuated with someone. But in a long-term relationship, you've got to keep the sexual chemistry going. This means actively practising integration, actively looking for integration opportunities. What helps in this regard is that every ad is different, every creative development project a different challenge, so the specific integration challenges are different for every project. Experience counts, and the more we do it the more we learn what to look out for.

### **The Drawbacks Of Integration**

Assuming that the client is pleased with integration – which is our experience – the drawbacks are mainly on the researchers' sides. It is quite time-consuming, especially attending meetings which do not directly affect you, and it is administratively demanding.



More than this, qualitative researchers are now actually accountable for our findings in a way that historically they have not been. We do not think it has made us analyse our research very differently, certainly not in a detrimental sense. If anything, it has increased our integrity and our commitment to clients' brands and their advertising, since we as qualitative researchers know that we have to answer to a quantitative judgment day.

### **The Benefits Of Integration**

Those clients who have experienced it are universally in favour of it. They believe that research is now being more professional as a business. They have detected a greater sense of one-voiceness in providing more coherent, actionable solutions.

Specifically, they feel that qualitative research is now more responsible and accountable. They also feel that the quantitative research is richer and deeper – sometimes because it is peppered with qualitative insights, but just as much because the quantitative researchers have begun to develop a greater qualitative sensibility.

Rather than two stories – a positive qualitative story and a less positive quantitative story – clients now have one consistent and ultimately positive story. They have greater certainty in all our recommendations and are more easily able to proceed to finished film. Everyone is more confident that when the baby is born, he or she will be a beautiful bouncing clever thing.

Clients find that their job is made easier, since they don't have to spend time trying to reconcile differing advertising research reports. They have more time to do other parts of their job, so they end up doing their roles better. And, there is less risk of them looking like idiots in front of their colleagues as research agency A comes in and gives a rather contrasting debrief to research agency B, so they are happier.



## **The Future**

We think that integration is here to stay, and indeed grow. Not many clients have experienced it, so the opportunity is there.

There is an increasing amount of global advertising. We have recently done several integrated international projects, whereby not only is the qualitative and quantitative work integrated in each country but it is integrated at a global level too.

That is quite challenging, and gives the research directors both qualitative and quantitative an additional client liaison role more akin to the account handler in agencies. We would say though that if successfully executed it is a good way of cementing client relationships.