

What level of maturity is necessary in a company to run Qual research?

Summary of an interactive workshop of 45 minutes with industrial market researchers at the Succet 23

Succet • October 2023

What is qualitative market research about?

“Qualitative market research is great for creating and forming hypotheses. By using this wording, you can explain what qualitative research is about quite well to your internal stakeholders, especially if they tend to have a very rational way of thinking.”

Comment of a workshop participant

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO TALK ABOUT TODAY?

- 1 About the correct understanding of **the specifics of qualitative research**
- 2 About the **process of qualitative research**
- 3 About **problems that may arise** at each stage and how to deal with them
- 4 **Sharing experience** of problem-solving practices in practice
- 5 Discuss **your cases** with difficulties in qualitative research
- 6 Together we will decide what are **the most important things** to always keep in mind when conducting qualitative research

Before you start thinking about conducting qualitative research in your company

BE SURE YOUR INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS KNOW WHAT QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

About “how many consumers think/ support/ need....”? **NO!!!**

About figures/ percentages/ “2 consumers said that...”
NO!!!

Large samples (100/ 500/ 1000 or more respondents) to have reliable data?
NO!!!

About representativeness and sample error?
NO!!!

Reports include figures, tables and graphs
NO!!!

About market share, size of your target group or volume of your sales growth?
NO!!!

Before you start thinking about conducting qualitative research in your company...

BE SURE YOUR INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS KNOW IT WILL BE ABOUT...

... “why consumers think/ support/ need this...”

Qualitative research is needed when you want to discover the unknown and gain a deeper understanding of your target audience

... a sample with a small number of respondents that fits the criteria of your target audience well

Qualitative research is about people and their behavior, emotions, feelings and beliefs

... a written report that presents ideas, opinions, models, needs, expectations, problems related to your product/ service

2 The process of qualitative research

The qualitative research (and quantitative research too) process consists of 4 stages

1

PREPARATORY
STAGE

2

FIELDWORK
STAGE

3

ANALYSIS AND
REPORTING
STAGE

4

LIFE AFTER
RESEARCH:
IMPLEMENTATION
STAGE



For you, as a client, this is the most time-consuming stage and very important for research, as it creates the basis for obtaining valid results

PREPARATORY STAGE



1



At this stage you should:

- 1st Identify the unknown
- 2nd Define the right problematic & the research objectives
- 3rd Write a good briefing
- 4th Choose the target audience
- 5th Choose the methodology (did you think of semiotics?)

**!!! Don't forget about the specific of qualitative research:
it is about **WHY** consumers think/ support/ need...
not about "how many"**

In the preparatory stage, internal market researchers are often confronted with too high expectations on the part of their internal stakeholders



It is quite difficult to identify the unknown

You only know what you know after the research is done. And if you don't truly identify the unknown, internal stakeholders often complain afterwards saying their questions are left unanswered.

Having the right question is also key for choosing the right method and, thus, for a successful research

Often, the marketing department asks for a quantitative or conjoined study. When asked what they want to find out, they present a long list of questions.

That is why a research request template can be useful. Internal stakeholders fill it out, but it is the market research department that decides which is the appropriate methodology to use.

Internal market researchers who do not have their own budget are careful when proposing methodologies like semiotics that require a certain maturity



Inexperienced stakeholders are quickly overwhelmed by methodologies they do not know

Methodologies like semiotics require a great deal of educational effort and can seem like horoscopy to immature stakeholders. If there is a certain openness, semiotics can be embedded in a wider approach.

Under specific circumstances, internal stakeholders are more open to take a risk

The reduction of overall costs to show marketing what results a methodology can deliver without them having to pay full price can be eye opening.

At the end of the financial year, there might be some budget leftover that can be spent for pilot studies. The results often convince even skeptical stakeholders.

1

A QUAL RESEARCH IS REQUIRED WHEN...

... there is a lack of knowledge
of your market/ consumers/ brand

... you want to facilitate the launch of
a quant research & sharpen the
questions

... there is a need to brief a design
agency better

... you want to know how people
understand your advertisement

... you want to receive new ideas
about your product portfolio

... etc.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Trying to find information through qualitative research that **cannot be obtained** through this method (think back to the previous slides)
- ▶ Looking for information **without understanding** how you will use it and **why you need it**

FOCUS AND TRY TO CLEARLY DEFINE YOUR PROBLEM ...

... what problem/ task
do you really have

... why you need to solve this problem/ perform this task
now and how much time & money you have to do it

... what you need to know to solve this
problem/ perform this task

... make a list of research objectives, simplify the
issue to a few main topics and organize your
questions

... how can you get this information: through
internal research, an independent research
company, studying current reports

... etc.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Trying to solve **ALL problems** in one study: too many questions / concepts / goals / markets, etc.
- ▶ Setting unrealistic or too strict **deadlines**

BE CLEAR AND FOCUSED!!!
Qualitative research is about
depth more than breadth

HOW TO MAKE THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FULLY UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMATIC?

3 Define the contours of the unknown & the problematic

Clearly define the questions, to give a direction to the nature of the answers needed

Be clear about the aim and the objectives of the research

... etc.

Explain the context and the future implementation of research

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Sending **hundreds of abstract questions** or remain very **vague**
- ▶ Giving a research agency **only very short time** to prepare a proposal
- ▶ Expecting a qualitative study for 100 euros because "**qualitative research is cheaper than quantitative research**"

A good brief is a matter of your reputation and shows respect for your contractors!!!

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT TARGET AUDIENCE?

Gain a clear understanding of the audience to which your research objectives relate: your customers? competitors? Industry experts? Your employees? All of them?

Select the most important target audience / audiences that you need in the first place / can be reached within your time and financial capabilities

Go for the most important criteria for selecting respondents (brand use/non-use, age, gender, location, and in some cases, lifestyle and social class)

... etc.

Accept some flexibility (and surprise) in the choice of the target(s)/ profiles

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ If you have **no idea who the target is**, make the agency responsible for defining the target
- ▶ Insist on finding a **specific profile** that may not exist/ not be representative of the market reality
- ▶ Select **too many targets** for research in too short a time and without the necessary funds

Valid data in the report starts with the right targets consulted!!!

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT METHODS AND SAMPLE?

Focus groups, in-depth interviews, home visits, observations are the base of qualitative methods. The choice depends on the target and research objectives

Discuss with the agency about offline or online modalities. The choice depends on the target and research objectives

2-3 focus groups or 12-15 in-depths interviews/home visits will be enough for 1 homogeneous target ... etc.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Choose a **method** that is **not adapted** to your target
- ▶ Insist on conducting **offline research** for multinational studies with low target audience reach
- ▶ Choose **online research** for a target audience with low internet usage
- ▶ Insist on **too small/ too big** samples

Directing the methodology & sizing the sample will not only bring validity but save you time & money!!!

Methodologies: A word about semiotics

Semiotics is used to **decode explicit & implicit messages** and to recognize what others can only guess



What we see



What it means

Obviously, BLUE does not always mean fresh!



Semiotics is a very strong tool, but completely unknown at most German companies

Unlike in France, the private sector and academia are much more separate in Germany. While semiotics in Germany is mainly an academic subject, there are also many semiotics students with an interest in business in France.

Therefore, it cannot be sold too aggressively to internal stakeholders. It requires more educational work to show what a powerful tool semiotics is, for example by emphasizing examples like Crystal Pepsi or green ketchup.

FIELDWORK STAGE

2



At this stage you should:

- 1st Attend the focus groups/in-depths interviews etc. (and also have the courage not to recommend this to anyone in the company/ in any case)
- 2nd Communicate with the moderation team/ contractor during fieldwork
- 3rd Have a short informal debriefing after fieldwork

!!! FIELDWORK IS A GREAT POSSIBILITY TO SEE AND FEEL YOUR REAL CUSTOMERS. YOU DON'T HAVE THIS WITH QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH 😊

Fieldwork stage: 1. Attend the focus groups/ in-depth interviews

HOW TO USE THIS TIME EFFICIENTLY?

... Be careful not to be biased: do not form an opinion after attending 2 or 3 interviews

Never forget to get an overview & the whole picture...

... Understand the function of each methodological module (an online diary is not an in-depth interview...)

Adapt your stimulus/ guideline after 1st group/ interview if it is really necessary

... etc.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Draw a conclusion **before** receiving the analytical report
- ▶ React emotionally when hearing **something unpleasant** (it often happens!) about your product/ brand/ ideas >> it is not personal!

Be curious and enjoy the process!!!



An neutral market research department that can act independently of marketing is crucial!

Pros

Marketing teams like the ethnographic touch. Attending fieldwork live makes the results more tangible. Internal stakeholders better understand the final report if they saw some interviews during fieldwork stage. However, they have to be briefed properly beforehand.

Cons

Some agencies do not allow their clients to participate in interviews to prevent them from drawing their conclusions too quickly. If the marketing team is not neutral but biased/ emotionally involved, or different teams with different briefings attend, they consider individual statements to be universally valid results.

2

WHAT RULES ARE THERE?

Don't expect the question "WHY" → the questions are formulated in indirect ways. "Why" is used only in some specific cases

Accept detour questions → not directly the topic but necessary to get the answers

... etc.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Make aware there is a **difference between** a research objective and a question asked
- ▶ **Interrupting the moderator** too often and asking too many follow-up questions; this has a very negative impact on the interview/ group

Respect the moderator and trust his/her experience!!!

3

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

Exchange and cross views with the moderation team and your team involved into the research

Give clear instructions about the further analytical report: structure, expected insights

Make sure you are on the same track as the moderator

... etc.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ Expect from the moderators the **answer to all your questions**
- ▶ Expect to have **conclusions/ solutions fast** when the first impressions are equivocal/ require more clarification and interpretation

Briefing helps to have a clear understanding of the results and avoid misunderstandings later with the analytical report!!!

ANALYSIS AND REPORTING STAGE

3



At this stage, it is time to relax since
you should **do almost nothing**:

Prepare/ align your stakeholders
Think about the circle of people concerned/
potentially interested by the results
Fight to obtain a sufficient time slot
Prepare your words of introduction (why was
this research initiated in the first place)

Do your stakeholders remember they shouldn't be expecting
results that tell yes-no-%? 😊



AVOID THE FOLLOWING MISTAKES AT THIS STAGE:

- ▶ **Too tight deadlines:** not enough time for the analysis
- ▶ Insist that all key information should be placed **on 5-10 slides**
- ▶ Be grateful for information on topics/ aspects that were **not in your initial brief**
- ▶ Demand **recommendations** – but not to make decisions in your place

**The report is food for your further work,
not your marketing plan!!!**

It is essential to allow sufficient time for reporting: good reporting does not only talk about the solution, it also explains how to find the (next) solution



Clients should rather spend less time in the fieldwork stage and invest more time in the presentation of the results

Better listen to a detailed review for 2 hours than build your decisions on a biased view based on a few interviews you attended and only give the final report 30 minutes.

Pre-reading is not always helpful

It allows for more time for questions, and it sparks the discussion during the presentation.

But you lack common grounds because everyone understands the contents differently.

A close-up photograph of a squirrel with brown and grey fur, sitting and eating a nut. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow.

Life after research: **IMPLEMENTATION STAGE**

**We'd love to hear you.
How do the results live on
inside your organization?**

4

Thank you for your attention