HOW INTEGRATED QUANT ⊕ QUAL IS

DEMOCRATIZING
RESEARCH

> "THE WORLD HATES CHANGE, YET IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT HAS BROUGHT PROGRESS."
>
> – CHARLES KETTERING

It is common practice in our industry to view the research world as a two-sided coin; one side quantitative, and the opposite side qualitative. Meet someone new at a conference, and chances are the first question you answer establishes which side of the world you inhabit. "I'm in Quant", or perhaps "I'm a Quallie" are likely two of the most common phrases uttered in exhibit halls across the globe. Stereotypically, quants might follow up that introduction with "I'm a numbers person", and quals typically fire back with "I'm a people person".

Over the years, the split disciplines of quant and qual have allowed us to develop deep, rigorous knowledge and practices for our chosen professions. We have refined our respective crafts and honed our collective skills based on the understanding of what our side of the industry was designed to provide. We've gotten really good at executing our piece of the puzzle and haven't had much reason to step outside our comfort zones.

The old boundaries that historically divided our world are beginning to blur, as technology is enabling researchers to cross the lines of quant and qual, and are see dramatic results for their clients by integrating both insights. Quantitative practitioners have begun to realize how qualitative data can enhance their own findings by adding depth and narrative to their results. Qualitative experts are seeing how access to quant data and methods can quickly validate new insights, or dramatically reduce project field times. And for the end-client, this shift to integrated quant+qual insights provides them richer data with less time between research events. And sometimes even less cost.

⊙ A SUBTLE WIND OF CHANGE IS BL

▶ WHY NOW

What element of our industry has changed to allow researchers to begin accessing methods and tools previously considered out of reach? The answer is simple; today's digital research, technologies, tools and methods have altered many of the fundamental principles of research.

Historically, qualitative research was conducted almost entirely face-to-face; researchers were required to spend countless hours flying from venue to venue interviewing a select group of individuals recruited for each specific project. Then, during the last decade, we witnessed the rise of the first generation of online qualitative platforms; these platforms shifted the playing field by removing the restrictions of geography and time. Participants from all walks of life, scattered anywhere in the world, could quickly join an online discussion with a moderator thousands of miles away. Projects could be recruited, fielded and analyzed without the time-consuming travel and logistical steps that had been a hallmark of traditional qualitative. These first-generation platforms led to the rise of online qualitative as a powerful new method in the toolkit of qualitative researchers around the world.

LOWING THROUGH OUR INDUSTRY

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH RICH CUSTOMER STORIES

In the old world of separate, multi-phase research projects, it was common to design projects where a first phase of qualitative develops new ideas or uncovers fresh insights, which are then validated with quantitative, then qualitative is used to further explore the unexpected or refine ideas. This "wash-rinse-repeat" workflow illustrates how quant and qual are used in combination, but the realities of the traditional world are that these phases used to be separated by weeks, or even months of field time.

PROBLEM

One of our clients has developed an integrated methodology that provides both quantitative and qualitative insights – simultaneously—and give new depth to their ongoing customer satisfaction surveys. The end client, a major hotel chain, runs monthly satisfaction surveys with their frequent travelers, and uses qualitative to "connect the dots" by commissioning tactical face-to-face research when new service delivery issues are identified. However, in the fast-moving world of corporate travel, the end-client struggled with the 2-4 month turnaround time to field the qualitative phase, and in many cases chose to skip the qualitative in favor of running more quantitative research.

SOLUTION

To bring qualitative back into the mix, the research team developed an integrated methodology that intercepts respondents during the course of the survey. Using a piece of technology called QualLink™, the online survey instrument was linked to an online discussion platform. Two groups of customers are targeted; those that gave consistently high feedback scores to their latest experience, and those that gave consistently low scores. Each of these segments is invited to an online community lasting two days. In this discussion, the research team has the opportunity to ask more in-depth, detailed questions regarding specific highpoints and low points of the participants' most recent travel experience.

QualLink
A Service of 20|20 Research

OUTCOME

During the course of this study, respondents were asked to record a short testimonial video reviewing their latest stay with the hotel chain. These videos became critical pieces of insight, providing a rich narrative to describe the results the client received in the quantitative phase of the project; actual travelers elaborating on their hotel experience and explaining their customer satisfaction scores—not weeks or months after the fact, but mere days after they checked out of the hotel. The videos, verbatims and conversation that occurred in the online qualitative exercise provided the specifics that helped "connect the dots" to explain trends in the raw customer satisfaction scores and helped them begin to implement needed changes.

▶ EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?

Will this shift to a more democratized approach to research methods be a swift revolution, or a slow, progressive evolution that plays out over many years? The answer to that question is entirely up to us, the researchers.

In some ways, we've developed an industry that's really good at executing "our thing", but we lost sight of the fact there are learnings to be had in the region between quant and qual, where both of those disciplines participate in the same learning plan to uncover new insights or solve new problems in research.

The truth is, there exist many research problems for which the answer is not simply "quant" or "qual"--- but both. And in a good number of those cases, there are massive benefits to be had for the end-client through the integration of both disciplines together.

With today's technologies and integrated research platforms, we can provide simple and effective qualitative data collection that redefines how qualitative insights are generated. We can now tap into new sources for qualitative feedback, open up qualitative insights to more clients in more ways, and develop fresh new research approaches that simply weren't possible before. Today's new crop of digital qualitative tools has democratized the "who, when, and how" of qualitative research.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Isaac Rogers is Chief Innovation Officer for 20|20 Research, a global provider of online qualitative tools and support services for researchers. Since joining 20|20, Isaac has been instrumental in the development and launch of five cutting-edge qualitative research tools and is responsible for charting the course for the next-generation of 20|20's international online research platforms. Prior to joining 20|20 Research, Rogers' career included roles in business intelligence consulting, e-commerce and government technology contracting. As a former client-side research purchaser, he also has seen qualitative research from "both sides of the glass," which allows him to deliver unique insights to the products and methods developed by the company. He holds an MBA from Vanderbilt University.