



Qualitative Marketing Research, Neurosciences, and Transdisciplinarity

Georges Guelfand, 10 rue du docteur Lancereaux 75008 Paris, France, Email: guelfandg@aol.com

doi: 10.22545/2015/00067

Qualitative studies often refer to the notion of the unconscious and neurosciences reveal to us the existence of a neuronal unconscious. But unconscious is not only neuronal, and the qualitative method does not offer ways to measure the mental reactions in individuals. In qualitative, we decipher the unconscious conditioned by our social, historical, and cultural environment; we read how the consumer projects himself onto the objects of the world; we tap into creative imagination; we can pull everything apart and reconstruct it; and we take part in the strategic objectives of a brand. For example, to construct a Brand strategy, we have to think differently; to break the beliefs; to think in a contradictory way. Qualitative is about going beyond the concrete facts and the measurements, which allows to think out of the box; it is about control and emerging meaning. In a world increasingly saturated with objective information, qualitative has a symbolic function that helps overcome the deadlocks of rationality. Qualitative is a transdisciplinary discipline.

Keywords: Neurosciences, transdisciplinarity, qualitative research.

1 Evolution in Qualitative Studies: Always More Targeted, More Challenging and More Technical Yet Fundamentally the Same?

Two different phenomena have changed our studies: new technologies and the Big data.

1. The new technologies : Internet, social networks, iPhone, iPad... but also all the new applications created everyday all those new technologies have deeply modified the human relationships, the way you communicate in the society, by creating a hyper connected consumer. One billion videos viewed daily on Facebook.

- The qualitative has changed with those innovations by creating methods of interview that are more direct and more interactive online, on the go, diaries, blogs, communities...
- It has also changed by developing the methods that are adapted to those new relationships : ethnology, creativity, semiotics, video research and symbolical imagery...
- New principles have been created, either in the meeting rooms, in situ or on line This is the example of the Panorama group that changes

the focus group. The principle is to take different contradictory targets who will confront together in the same room, or on line. It will generate solutions to the study problems.

2. The Big data : A second phenomenon has changed our procedures: the creation of larger data bases. The amount of data created every two years is about as much as since the beginning of mankind.

Those data bases help the companies to manage the markets: they establish new segmentations and new typologies, always more and more successful. Beyond the classic criteria of age, occupation, income level, consumption we have to respect criteria that are more and more precise and complex in order to build our experience plans – ways of life, family structures, social networks, purchasing behavior...

The new technologies help us meet those new requirements and help us in our analysis by getting more and more realistic and operational.

3. And qualitative research in all that ? New technologies and Big data have changed our procedures and our techniques, yet they did not change the fundamentals of qualitative research, i.e.

- Avoid the pitfalls of a purely rational and declarative discourse
- Using images to help consumers express unconscious thoughts and the feelings
- Creative imagination to transform their expectations into real solutions

The question is: Are neuro sciences going to change our qualitative methods by inducing new procedures or are will they go as far as to change the fundamentals?

2 Neurosciences and the Fantasy of the Unconscious

1. 80% of the brain activity is unconscious:

An iceberg is a picture that is often used to say that 80% of the brain activity is unconscious. But does this mean, that the unconscious is merely neuronal ? And is it possible to access this unconscious only via neuroscientific technologies ?

When I was a young man, as a clinical psychologist, I went to London in order to question the statue

of Sigmund Freud about this...and what did Freud tell me? He said that the human psyche is divided not in 2 but in 3 different regions unconscious, pre-conscious, conscious. He told me: everything that is unconscious might become conscious : in a dream of course, but also in free association of ideas , the Freudian slips, the play on words, and also in artistic creation - advertising is the best example .

Freud was right, the unconsciousness always finds a way to show itself to us, even if we are not conscious of such activity.

Renowned neuro scientists , such as Gerald Edelman or Antonio Damasio , have underlined the importance of the Freudian discovery. “The ideas of Freud about the unconscious sources of behaviors were premonitory. He stressed the importance of the unconscious processes that shape our behavior” G. Edelman.

To conclude this first chapter:

- There different expressions of the unconscious
- ...and we can access it via language but not any type of language

2. And how does the qualitative help us access the unconscious of the consumer? Via language of course, and in particular figurative language, which we can explore with:

- hedonical scales,
- verbal and graphic techniques,
- techniques using free association, but also creative techniques using analogies and symbolic imagery ...That is what Gerald Zaltman*, marketing teacher in the Harvard Business School underlines when he talks about “figurative language” and when we talk about “symbolic imagery” : “the metaphors help to retrieve the unconscious thoughts, and help them to become conscious where they can be analyzed”.

It is obvious that if 80% of the brain activity is unconscious, this does not mean that its contents is locked forever into the unconsciousness.

Where neuro sciences give an interpretation of brain activity, Qualitative gives an interpretation of consumers words and behaviors.

3 Beyond the Unconscious: Creative Imagination

1. Consumer imagination as a creative and prospective tool at the service of marketing.

Let's talk now about the big difference between these two disciplines, which will – according to us – lead to different evolutions in the future.

We introduced creative techniques, like for example synectic, in 1969 in France.

The techniques of creativity use the power of imagination to overcome purely rational thinking, the level of opinions, in order to access a more spontaneous form of expression. Those forms of expression are much less influenced by social and cultural stereotypes, thus allowing for generating truly innovative ideas.

2. The example of Tonigencyl For example, in 1971, we conducted the first creative motivation study for Colgate Palmolive. The idea was very simple: we transferred the projective techniques used in clinical psychology to qualitative research, turning them into tools at the service of creativity.

Let's take the example of a new toothpaste concept research. One respondent within the group will be assigned to play the role of the mouth receiving the toothbrush. The imaginary toothbrush enters the mouth, rubs the teeth, the toothpaste begins to foam. Then, all of a sudden, the toothbrush starts to massage and caress the gums, who will shiver with pleasure! This is the beginning of Tonigencyl in France : the first toothpaste especially developed for sensitive gum.

3. The creative forces of Qualitative We surely know by experience, that we are all able to create beyond our social cultural and media references. Qualitative research is a place for imagination, creation, improvisation. The objective of our studies and tests is the creative transformation of a given stimulus, imagining it from always different angles, shaping it to meet our ultimate needs and to trigger our desires.

4 Client's Demand Towards Qualitative Research Have Changed

In the light of the progress made in science and technology, the function of Qualitative has changed.

A qualitative advertising test today is no longer limited to understanding the likes and dislikes, the elements of appeal and rejection and the purchase intent. Today our tests must answer more strategic questions, to help marketing and consumer insight teams within the companies to do their job.

Let me give you a last example of new qual as it is done today: the new Nestlé Extrême commercial –

In order to pre test this movie, we started out with many hypotheses based on a lot of different stimulus material: a storymatic, several scripts, several boards, several pictures of the model and the historical commercials of the brand. This TV Copy is on air now, and its very successful.

As you see, times have changed, from Tonigencyl to the new Extreme campaign, but not the fundamentals and the way we explore things in qualitative.

This type of questions clearly show the limits of a purely neuronal approach:

- The large number of variables to be tested
- The somewhat heavy procedure this would entail
- The nature of the questions asked
- And of course, the costs

For the time being, eye tracking, neuro imagery or any biometric methods will be somewhat difficult to use for evaluating complex marketing mixes and answering strategic questions.

5 Conclusions and Perspectives : Where does That Lead Us ?

1. First conclusion: let's try to see how neuroscience and qualitative can complement each other (see Table 1).

2. Neurosciences will enhance performance and relevance of quantitative: more precise and faster measures and diagnostics – For us, from

Table 1 Neurosciences and Qualitative Comparison

Neurosciences will explore	Qualitative will explore
<p>(the unconscious conditioned by our brain...)</p> <p>In neuroscience, we gain access to the unconscious conditioned by our brain</p>	<p>Whereas in qualitative, we can explore the unconscious conditioned by our social, historical and cultural environment</p>
<p>(Effects of the object...)</p> <p>In neuroscience, the answers we get are behavioral, by measuring the impact of a piece of stimulus on the consumer</p>	<p>In qual, we explore how the consumer projects himself (his desires, his past, his culture, his social background...) onto the object.</p>
<p>(brain activity)</p> <p>In neuroscience, we can measure the brain activity</p>	<p>In qual, we tap into creative imagination</p>
<p>(Perceive and build reality)</p> <p>In neuroscience, the object can be adapted and improved</p>	<p>(Deconstruct and reconstruct reality)</p> <p>In qual, we can pull everything apart and reconstruct it.</p>
<p>(Increasing measuring performance)</p> <p>Neuroscience has reached an amazing level of precision in the measurements, more reliable and faster.</p>	<p>(Increasing strategic relevance of recommendations)</p> <p>In qual, we take part in the strategic objectives of the brand.</p>

all what we have just said, it is clear that neuro technologies will change the world of quantitative studies, more than the qualitative studies.

The big institutes, including the greatest communication agencies try to develop, as fast as possible, products coming from the neuroscience.

3. A major risk for qualitative: become a servant of neurosciences –

One of the greatest advantage of neuro technologies used with small samples is their rapidity and the reliability of their results. Be it online or face to face, we now can combine the neuronal and qualitative experience. Then, the mutual contributions of those two disciplines are obvious and they will get richer and richer, through

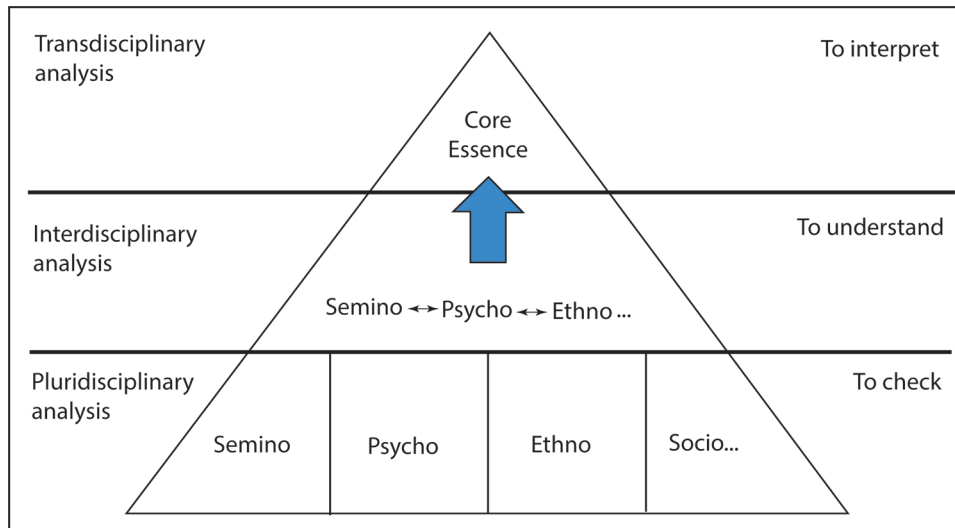


Figure 1: Trans-boundary model.

the progress of technology.

But qualitative must not remain a pure servant of neurosciences : The appeal for science shouldn't imply that brands try to tame a consumer who is becoming more and more free and cheeky, informed and involved, and more and more willing to create a dialogue with his brands' stakeholders.

6 Qualitative Research and Transdisciplinarity

Eventually, this thinking about qualitative and neurosciences show that the qualitative research is a transdisciplinary method ; a method deployed through and beyond any discipline. Let's take the brand fundamental study, in order to understand the "Brand Essence", also known as "Core Essence", "Proprietary insight", or "Ultimate concept". A "brand essence" is a sentence that encapsulates in a few words every analysis data that will be translated into actions to be led, on different levels: the relationship system to establish between the consumer and the brand ; the word codes to use , the principles of communication to carry, the actions to lead in order to promote the products and to innovate. This work will help defining the strategical lines, the priority targets and their need states ; it will also help writing the brand architecture, and briefing Agencies and R&D.

In order to reach that Ultimate idea from which we will translate the different actions, we will have

3 degrees in qualitative research (see Figure 1):

- The first degree is multi disciplinary : it's about setting up the disciplines that need to be used (semiotics, semantics, linguistics, ethnology...) and this depending on the reality levels that will be studied (communications, packagings, products, behaviors...).
- The second degree is inter disciplinary : it's about crossing and overtaking the strengths and weaknesses of the brand, the stakes and challenges it will have to face in the competition environment.
- The third degree is transdisciplinarity: it is about control and emerging meaning, all about the wording for brand essence.

Reaching such a conceptualization needs to make a qualitative work: by understanding all the analysis data from the 2 first levels, the qualitative worker will use their network, and their own personal human experience to overtake the pure belief. They will need to think differently; to break the beliefs, the prejudices about the brand and the markets. Actually they will have to think in a contradictory, not binary way ; they will cross intuition and reason, ideas and feelings, true facts and imaginary facts they will place emotion inside reason. When sensitivity meets rigor then the good insight will reveal itself, from the brand uniqueness.

No one can give a single definition of what an "insight" or a "brand essence" or an "ultimate idea"

is ... we tried to show that such definition is impossible. But we also tried to say what is the necessary research to reach a good concept.

Transdisciplinary is first a human experience for the good of a project.

One consequence : with the Big data era, and the reign of “datascientists” who are organizing the new world trade, we will need experts who will translate data and information in order to understand the trade objects, and to innovate. We will need more and more translators to inspire creation of new concepts, new wording, new symbols; to embody the brand (for instance: logo Nike , Apple, Google, Mc Donald’s ...), new individual and society practices.

But such an ambition could only be satisfied if there is an union between the leaders whose mission is to pilot the brands, within the companies, and that new profile of qualitative researcher, that we described all about human experience and culture. We will need the experts helps, and we will need more and more complex data , that they collect, to contribute and help the change. And we do have that need because our mission, beyond analyzing the consumers, and their needs, is to analyze the problematics, (about the brand or about communication, use, product, service ...), in order to meet in an operative way, to the company marketing and strategical purposes.

As a conclusion about the transdisciplinary behavior that leads our work, we need a symbolic thought , not an intellectual one , to try communicating about what is the function and mission of the qualitative method.

7 Concluding Remarks: Is Qualitative the Twelfth Camel?

To conclude, I will try to make you understand the role of transdisciplinary qualitative – which role it can play in a world increasingly saturated with objective information. Hoping that your reactions will as well be neuronal as inspirational.

Here’s the story: A father, feeling his end, made arrangements to settle his estate. His herd of camels would be divided among his three sons in the following order: the first son should receive half of the camels, the second son should receive a quarter and the third one a sixth. When the father died, his sons faced a major problem : sharing proved to be impossible, since the herd was exactly eleven camels.

They couldn’t find a solution, so they went to see the khadi, a wise man. After listening to the three sons, the wise man reflected a bit and then finally said: “Take my camel, do your share, and, if God will, youll bring it back to me.” Very surprised, the three sons took his camel and left. However, soon after this, they understood how smart the khadi was: to share twelve camels was very easy – each one received his assigned share – the oldest son received 6 camels, the second son got 3 camels and 2 camels went to the youngest.

Eventually, you see, transdisciplinary qualitative is nothing else than this twelfth camel.

- Qualitative is about going beyond the concrete facts and the measurements, which allows to think out of the box.
- It is a qualitative leap that allows to solve a quantitative problem.
- Qualitative has a symbolic function that helps overcome the deadlocks of rationality.

Bibliography

1. Arnould e.j., Price L.L., 2006. Masked-oriented ethnography revisited. *Journal of Advertising Research*.
2. Brasel A., Gips J., 2011 “Gives your wings” for better or worth. *Journal of consumer psychology*, Vol. 21, No: 1.
3. Badot O., Filser M., 2006. Re-enchantment of retailing, in Caru A. & Cova B; *consuming experience*, London & New-York, Routledge, 165-169.
4. Damasio A., 2010. *Self comes to mind. Constructing the conscious brain*. Pantheon Books.
5. Decade Science Update, 2010. Perceived value. The added value of marketing for consumary.
6. Dewey j., 1963. *Qualitative thought, philosophy and civilization*; New York, Capricorn.
7. Edelman G. M., 2006. *Second nature, Brain, Science and Human Knowledge* Yale University Press.
8. IRIS, 2012. *Imaginaire et perception*; Centre de Recherche sur l’Imaginaire, No. 33.
9. LUPASCO St., 1974. *L’énergie et la matière psychique*; Julliard.

10. Nicolescu B., 2013. Transdisciplinarity theory and practice. ATLAS Publishing.
11. Paivio A., 1977. Imagery, language and semantic memory. *Int. J. Psychology*.
12. Prins S. & Messerli A., 2013, Panorama Gruppen. Innovationsprozess. Happy Thinking.
13. Shusterman R., 1994. *Sous l'interprétation*. Editions de l'éclat.
14. Sampson P., 1998. *Qualitative Research – Through a looking glass*. ESOMAR, News monograph.
15. Thom R., 1990. *Apologie du logos, Histoire et philosophie des Sciences* Hachette.
16. Weisberg R., 1992. *Creativity beyond the myth of genius*. W.H. Freeman.
17. Zaltman G., 2003. *How customers think*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston.

Copyright © 2015 by the author. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



Georges Guelfand has degrees in Literature, Sciences, Clinical social Psychology, with a background in psychoanalysis.

After creating and managing the qualitative research company INSIGHT, being Associate Managing Director at IPSOS and Managing Director at Synovate France, he is currently President at G&G consulting, and Managing Partner at HAPPYTHINKING PEOPLE France.

He regularly speaks at the University Paris-Dauphine, in Business Schools, and as a trainer in companies.

Georges Guelfand wins the Excellence Award ESOMAR for Standards of Performance in Market Research : The John Downham Award 2013.

Mondial congress of Esomar 2014 : he is guest speaker with Gayle Fuguitt, CEO & President of the Advertising Research Foundation New-York, on “Neuro-sciences and qualitative research”.

He is author of collections of poetries, articles, and of books: “Les TRIBUS EPHEMERES”, Ed. EPI 1973; “PAROLES DIMAGES”, Ed. Gatan Morin, 2000; “IMAGES WORDS : Projective techniques applied to marketing research”, Ed. Textes & Prtextes 2003; “LES ETUDES QUALITATIVES fondamentaux, mthodes, analyse, techniques”, Ed. Ems, 2014 .
