

# Engage's Barker Argues For More Enlightened Approach To Qualitative Research

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Qualitative research often focuses too much on digging deeper and deeper into the consumer psyche whilst neglecting other influences on consumer behaviour, according to one of the industry's leading experts on qualitative methods.

Andy Barker, former Head of Qualitative Research at YouGov and now director of Engage Research, the independent consumer insight and market research specialist, made his comments at the AQR & QRCA's Worldwide Conference on Qualitative Research in Prague this week.

“Not only does the market often neglect the whole range of influences on consumer behaviour, including cultural analysis, trends and the impact of other brands,” explains Barker, “but there is a reluctance to fully embrace online engagement with consumers qualitatively, often because of an unfounded fear that the lack of visual connection with qualitative respondents in some way undermines the quality of insight gleaned from online studies.”

Barker argued that the research industry, like any maturing sector, may have fallen back on established patterns of practice and may have become conservative in its approach and closed to new ideas.

He urged a greater use of eclectic sources of qualitative testimony to be used in combination to create better, 360 degree insight, with a particular emphasis on accessing consumers' online selves as this is the medium where people are increasingly experimenting and developing their consuming identities.

“This prevailing view at the moment suggests that online qualitative research is in some way superficial and its participants suspect because we can't see them in front of us and are unable to read their body language,” continues Barker. “I don't think that's true.” The whole objection to online qualitative research feels like an ageing rocker lar hip hop because rappers don't use “real” instruments.

Barker urges the research sector to become more genuinely pluralist in approach, with qualitative data used alongside personal experiences, observations, client input and previous projects.

“Great insight is rarely black and white,” he says, “we need to reflect the shades of grey. And consumers are increasingly complex and ambiguous and, as a sector, we will ignore the badly behaved, networked consumer at our peril.”

Engage Research, which works in the UK and across Europe with high profile brands across the drinks, FMCG and media sectors, offers a broad range of experience across brands, categories, markets & business issues using a wide range of research techniques in markets across the globe.

The company has particular expertise in innovation, consumer & market strategy, pricing & conjoint research.

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