Blog: Boosting Your Qualitative Market Research With Neuroscience

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Over the last few decades, scientists have been making greater and greater progress in unlocking the secrets of the brain. Understanding brain activity and how it relates to human behaviour is known as neuroscience, and marketing professionals are learning that this branch of scientific study can have enormous implications in the area of qualitative market research.

How Does It Work?

Neuroscience involves measuring brain activity in a variety of ways, using different technologies that might involve cameras, projections, electrodes, sensors, and all manner of specialised equipment. You have probably already seen colourful images of brainwaves being measured on scanning devices, but there are also measurements such as eye tracking, heart rate tracking, tracking blood flow in the brain, voice pitch analysis, and analysing electrical activity from the scalp. Sophisticated facial coding is used to identify emotional responses by examining facial expressions. And then there are 3D computer simulations which can track how the brain perceives and analyses objects and images.

How Can These Techniques Be Used in Qualitative Market Research?

The methods of measurement employed in neuroscience have many applications in qual market research, since they can help researchers learn how a person is responding to a product or its marketing. They can be used to measure a personâ€™s responses for package testing, ad concepts, or to check for intensity of reaction during key moments in advertisements. They can also be utilised for over-the-counter testing and to gain insight into purchasing decisions.

Essentially, neuroscience makes it possible to tap into the human subconscious and â€œseeâ€• things from the consumerâ€™s perspective so that you can glean a better, fuller understanding of their responses. The insights that market researchers gather from tracking brain activity and other measurements could ultimately be used to enhance brand positioning and to improve both brand strategy and design.

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Why Neuroscience?

Tracking heart rates and trying to decode facial expressions may seem too scientific to the average market researcher, but neuroscience truly does have the power to uncover knowledge not available elsewhere. By monitoring brain responses directly, it takes some of the subjectivity out of the research and makes it possible to get closer to the truth of how research participants are responding. The fact is that consumers arenâ€™t always able to accurately articulate their true responses â€“ sometimes they donâ€™t even understand them themselves â€“ but science can often reveal what they themselv cannot.

Measuring neurological reactions allows researchers to capture consumersâ€™ responses at a subconscious level, making it possible to identify the emotions involved in decision-making processes (which is incredibly valuable information for marketers). Thatâ€™s why agencies that are looking for ways to reveal deeper, more human insights should think about how they can use neuroscience to their advantage when conducting qualitative market research.

Tread Carefully

Technology is evolving fast â€“ and market researchers need to keep up. Many of the most successful brands are already harnessing the power of neuroscience to better understand what consumers are truly thinking. But the market research industry has a number of strict ethical codes of conduct that need to be adhe0.red to, and that is especially important to remember as you consider integrating neuroscience into your qualitative market research.

Remember that consent is absolutely key. Respondents must be fully prepared for what will happen, so that they can make an informed decision about their involvement. It is also important to be sure respondents are made to feel comfortable and that they remain informed during the process; they should understand that they can stop participating at any time. We would recommend providing participants with a fact sheet that explains exactly what neuroscience is and what it includes to make them feel at ease and ready to take part.

Also remember that, as exciting as the possibilities of neuroscience are, it is only an â€˜add onâ€™ to your current toolkit as a market researcher. It can help enhance focus groups, interviews, and other traditional methods, but it cannot replace them, since those methods allow participants to actually speak their minds and offer the kinds of specifics that no heart rate monitor can. But, used together, tried-and-true techniques and neuroscience have the potential to open up exciting new possibilities in market research.

Technological advancements are changing qualitative market research, to help you we've put together a guide with our best practice tips for qual fieldwork.