

1 World Research

Marketing Solutions

Issue 8: Design insights made easy and TrendSetters approach for designs

Insights are described for marketing as a deep understanding of your target consumers' attitudes and beliefs. The production of insights is generally complex. In this issue, we are explaining different means to assess designs and explaining our objectives to offer these directly to designers. We will conclude with on how to assess future designs.

1WR.NET was established in 2000 in the UK by senior researchers and offers ad hoc International research solutions. 1WR.NET uses common methodologies, techniques and standards through its inter-agency platform comprising project management, data collection and reporting means.

Design insights made easy

Design insights comprise a number of methodologies and techniques depending on the design stage and the given objectives. At an early stage, semiotics may be used to understand a new market, while qualitative projects may establish means to address a new product concept and formulate design implications and help select the most suitable paths for design communication. At a final stage, generally requiring prototype or rendering making, quantitative surveys may be conducted to appreciate customer reactions or interactions. Such feedback is more analytical, and provides valuable insights to designers when properly exploited.

>Design appreciation: A successful design is measured based on its objectives. Its

design execution reflects the brand strategy or product positioning, and customer uptake or perceived communication are often considered performance indicators, especially when compared to previous, alternative or competitor designs. Insights need to separate, on one hand, performance indicators that assess whether objectives are met (i.e. preferred most, seems like better quality for money, is easy to use, is more enjoyable), and on the other hand, diagnostics that explain the first. Performance indicators are often quantitative, whereas diagnostics can comprise especially more qualitative parts. To illustrate this notion, a design lifting may be produced to highlight its fair trade approach and at the same time retain existing brand customers.

A new product and its package may be assessed as more convenient for consumption *on the move* or *at work*. A home appliance may be designed to be easy to use, easy to clean and child safe. A consumer electronic product may be designed to enable non-computer literates to intuitively record. A new game may be designed to be exciting and fashionable although related to global issues. Such design projects are diverse by their objectives, but also their end-users, requiring specific and adapted methodologies

>**Main ideas that lead us orient insights more directly to designers:** Most designers rarely benefit from customer insights to reorient or improve their graphical, industrial and software designs. A majority rely on professional magazines, their peers, colleagues and managers for orientation and support. These transversal sources are valuable as they are objective

in relation to the given creation process. However, they rarely address the end-user experiences. Final beneficiaries can determine a customer end-centric approach. This can also be useful for industrial designers that are more distant from end-user environments. Design is influenced by technological developments (new software capabilities, new components) and hype (trends and fads).

>**Insight barriers:** The limitations to use insights are numerous. Insights require specific expertise to orient and select appropriate services and methodologies; reading capabilities to turn the results into actionable recommendations; planning, time; often physical mock-ups or prototypes that require further planning.

>**The qualitative approach:** Qualitative research in design generally explores a domain or delivers a diagnostic. It is applied to a small set of customers, who

Qualitative research main sub-divisions with their strengths and weaknesses			
	In-depth interviews	Group interviews or group discussions	Projective techniques
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides extensive information on the relevant design issues. - Permits investigations into unexplored areas. - Provides unanticipated and insightful information on hidden feelings, motivations and the like. - Offers the flexibility necessary to employ creativity in the investigative process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits of interaction between group members useful for creative activities. - Lower cost than individual in-depth interviews. - Respondents are less "up-tight" compared to a one-on-one interview. - Group dynamics yield rich imagery (triggered by tested designs) which can be used by designers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to uncover information on attitudes, interests, and motivations that the respondent is unable or unwilling to provide through direct questioning. - Techniques "tailor made" according to given problem or question area
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires highly skilled moderators, generally professionally trained psychologists. - Significant moderator bias may be introduced in the process of collecting and interpreting data. - Expensive and time consuming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty in assembling groups of special intent respondents, e.g., responsible for IT purchases. - Data is highly qualitative, subject to moderator's interpretations, therefore needs highly trained moderators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very subjective interpretation of data. - High cost. - Needs highly trained moderators.

are not drawn statistically but chosen to understand different segments or specific targets of a given market, yielding some contrast. Companies often use qualitative studies to understand the consumer targets they are interested in, to accompany and adjust their product developments (and sometimes their strategy). Statistically significant results are not expected from qualitative studies. Qualitative conclusions are based on consumer imagery and intuition, and therefore easily understood by designers. Qualitative research seems opposed to quantitative research, but in practice, both are often used complementarily one after the other.

>**Qualitative research for design:** Some design problems ask for approaches that are more flexible than what standard inquiry techniques can provide, using structured questionnaires. We can list a number of usual application areas, but in fact, the qualitative approach is convenient whenever statistical analysis is not required such as:

- to understand a market, or consumer segment;
- to explore a foreign market you are not familiar with;
- to get basic background information when you don't know anything about a problem or product; to identify and explore a new concept and design alternatives;
- to reduce a number of options to a smaller set of candidates, during a preliminary filtering procedure.

Qualitative research is also conducted through online techniques that increase speed and facilitate multi-country studies (see Qualitative research main sub-divisions with their strengths and weaknesses table on the previous page)

> **Semiotics for design:** While most qualitative techniques and approaches primarily focus on participants or customers, questioning and observing them, semiotics takes a different approach. Customers are not viewed as independent self-determining agents,

making their own choices, but rather as constructed products of culture, largely determined by the popular culture within which they live. Semiotics moves the market researcher's focus towards the cultural context of the customer, including both popular culture and marketing context. It combines knowledge and research techniques from linguistics, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies and the visual arts. It is based on a detailed analysis of language and images that entangles how meaning is conveyed as well as what that meaning is. To sum up, semiotics is the study of signs in the context of consumer experience.

Examples of how semiotics can help design decision-makers are:

- Mapping out a new market or a whole field of cultural activity, understanding communication and design codes
- Seeing the opportunities to position new brand and designs
- Evaluating in-store developments and harmonising the different aspects of marketing communication
- Diagnosing problems with brand or design communication
- Providing models and guidelines for successful brand, design communications, indicating the key signifiers within the relevant context
- Understanding the process of encoding and decoding more precisely, to minimize the potential for misunderstanding the offer and demand.

Semiotics can play a major role in the development of a wide array of marketing communications. Semiotics investigates the subtext of communication. The questions directed at the text, sounds and images of design could be:

- what are major signifiers (i.e. the material signs; what it is)?
- what is signified (i.e. the conceptual signs; what it mean), are they creating and to whom?
- how does the design work on a symbolic/metaphorical level and on a product/metonymical (literal) level?

- what codes (i.e. bundles of signs) does the design use?
- how does the design measure up to the brand's historical codes and those of its competitors?
- is the design using a dominant (every day mainstream), emergent (leading edge, culturally dynamic) or residual (old fashioned, lacking in energy) set of codes?
- what kinds or discourses are apparent, e.g., post-modernism, feminism, spirituality, etc...?

There are four core areas of criticism of semiotics: reliability, qualitative data set, logic of interpretation and consumer theory.

>Observational research for design:

Not all research requires questionnaires. The two basic approaches available for collecting market research data are communication and observation. Either or both of the approaches may be used in exploratory, descriptive or causal research, under laboratory or field conditions. Comments used by the respondents during trials can be recorded and included in the data collection and exploited. Observation/monitoring examples:

- Observing customers in a supermarket to determine how they go about selecting a product.
- Recording, with the aid of a video capture program, the Internet habits of a selected sample of households.
- Conducting periodic shop audits to track brand shares of various products.
- Observing traffic patterns of a proposed Internet site
- Recording eye movements in design testing
- Evaluating prototype toys by observing children at play.

Strengths include greater objectivity, control of biases resulting from respondent-investigator interactions; ability to obtain a very detailed record of behaviour; control of respondent unwillingness, memory decay and other related problems.

Weaknesses include inability to provide information on such variables as consumer intentions, past behaviour, motivations, perceptions and the like; possibility of introducing investigator bias, when the observing and recording of behaviour is dependent on the subjective judgment of the investigator; generally time-consuming and expensive; problems in interpreting some observational data that employ electromechanical equipment, e.g., pupil dilation, galvanic skin response, etc.

>Quantitative research for design: In person surveys for design are used in the field (home/shops) or in tests in central locations (CL). In street interviews, respondents are intercepted while they are shopping down town or in shopping centres. They may be questioned then and there in the street or generally taken to a specific test facility (central location-CL, hall test, in the US mall test, see also 1WR mobile solutions in [Marketing Solutions issue 7](#)). For testing new designs, test facilities are ideal to allow respondents the time and context to view prototypes in a controlled environment. Internet surveys offer several advantages. Skip patterns can be programmed and performed automatically as in Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) or Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI). It is possible to validate responses as they are entered. Stimuli such as graphs, images, videos and links to other Web pages may be integrated into or around the survey. With its increased use in households as well as in business, Internet is becoming the most feasible and popular way of conducting surveys. But big disadvantages undermines its advantages, especially regarding sampling, response rates and panelisation of what is often called "opted in" or "professional" respondents. With the Internet and CAPI in a central location, the respondent sits in front of a computer terminal and answers a questionnaire on the screen. Several user-friendly electronic packages design

relatively simple questions for the respondent to understand. Help screens and courteous error messages are also provided. The colourful screens and on-and-off-screen stimuli can all contribute to make the interview process interesting and stimulating.

>**Enhancements:** For key cities, multiple CL screen interaction possibilities have been used. They enable to show concurrent look & touch screens for data collection. At an early stage, before prototype making, to appreciate look & feel simulations on prototypes and renderings.



CAPI is classified as a personal interview technique because an interviewer is usually present to serve as a host or hostess and guide the respondent as required. Experimentation is commonly used to select among different prototypes or renderings alternatives.

>**Quantitative sampling:** Regarding sampling, surveys aim to estimate the value of characteristics in the sampled population. This characteristic may be dichotomic (selects the new product or not) or takes several values (ease of use on a 1 to 10 scale). In the first case, the estimate will be a proportion (of product preferences), in the second, a mean value (of appreciation in terms of ease of use by the population). In both cases, formulas help determine a relationship between the size of a sample, the confidence interval

and the level of confidence. The confidence interval is the absolute error of an estimate. The confidence level attached to a confidence interval describes the probability of the real value to be in that interval. As the sample size increases, random sampling error decreases, but non-sampling error (non-coverage, non-response, instrument, investigator, respondent, data collection, processing biases) may, and often does, increase.

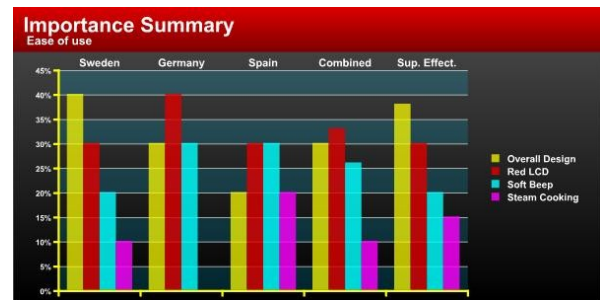
> **Measuring performance:** Indicators of performance enable to measure weather objectives are met. Significance tests are regularly used to determine this, generally for given sample sizes (design tests regularly use $n=100$). However when using insights for designers, especially with a trial and error approach, smaller samples may be sufficient (called small sampling techniques). For instance, if a new design is less preferred by the first 7 respondents and they explain the reasons, results can be shown to the designer, so she/he can review and propose an alternative. This trial and error approach can speed up requested insights, although they require appropriate coordination and planning.

>**Presenting results visually:** Presented insights alongside the different features (i.e.: colour(s), material(s), shape(s), photo/illustration(s), organisation of command(s), logotype(s), icon(s), instructions(s), help(s), other text(s), confirmations(s), etc) or as more general, overall or summative can considerably facilitate insights learning.



>**Conjoint analysis:** With Conjoint Analysis, respondents “liking” upon analytical design features are modelled as the sum of respondents’ utilities for “ease of use“ or “price range” perceptions” for a design. Conjoint offers an efficient way to optimise designs only a carefully computerized chosen series of hypothetical design concepts. Some conjoint techniques do not require large samples. The Conjoint model would, depending on respondent choices, carefully select further renderings

to be compared, and provide overall utilities (ease of use or price range) for a given design elements.



A specific R&D effort to offer insights directly to designers is being conducted in conjunction with Sigma Dos Internacional. R&D will integrate semiotics, qualitative and quantitative research with global capabilities as well as offer other innovative solutions for designers.

Assessing Future Design Directions in Advance

1WR explains how we grasp future end-consumer insights for new usages, new designs that would be appreciated in a couple of years or later.

>**Criticism:** Appropriately interviewing trendsetters (being creative, not just in design) or opinion leaders (more involved with design, able to criticize design forms and features with facility) from selected key markets can provide valuable guidance. Even if criticism is noted, these can help formulate improvements.

>**Some Profiles:**

- Artists: complementary to mass marketing efforts, cooperation with contemporary artists for local co-operations for arty opportunities;
- Interior designers: for buzz amongst consumers and also imagery towards future homes;

- Environmentalists: this has a more international dimension i.e. solutions from Asia can easily be exported to Europe if cutting edge. Objective would be to path differentiation from competitors;

- Fashion: particularly with upcoming designers;

- Feng shui/silence and related: design of so their integration is more in harmony with one's environment with a spiritual dimension;

- Social/proximity.

>**Methodology:** 1WR has developed specific methodologies related to TrendSetters that are both used for face to face and internet mediums.

See previous issues on TrendSetters

>[Marketing Solutions issue 2](#) on TrendSetters creative consultancy

>[Marketing Solutions issue 7](#) on TrendSetters' applications

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