

MARCH 2017

SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR INTERNATIONAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



When clients conduct global qualitative research, we know they need to be assured they are getting not only the most value for their investment, but also the right answers to make increasingly important globally-based decisions. Whether the study you are conducting involves two countries or twelve, we believe that there are three key criteria that will have the greatest impact on the success of an international qualitative project: a good understanding of culture, the selection of the right moderators, and seamless project management. The following provides a summary of MarketVision's perspective on these criteria.

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE

While it's true that people across the world are more similar than different, it is critical to work with a research agency that truly understands the cultural nuances in each market for your global qualitative research project. For example, in which markets can we not mix gender, religion and other demographics in focus groups? Or how might the holidays of various cultures impact the timing of when you should or should not do research in certain categories? These are just two simple examples of the impact culture can have on a research plan. What's more, culture can have a significant impact on which methods you should or should not engage in for a particular

market—and sometimes different methods need to be used for the same project. The key is to know when this applies.



A recent example of this need for cultural understanding in designing studies involved a client that wanted to investigate unmet needs for the shampoo category in key markets they were considering for a new product extension. This study involved Western markets (Germany, US, UK and Mexico) as well as some Middle Eastern markets (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt). The research design the client wanted to use globally had been developed with Western markets in mind. It included home visits and having women video-record their attitudes towards different hair care products they used. While these are great methods to employ, they were not necessarily appropriate for some of the non-Western markets (one caveat here is Egypt—a good example of a progressive Middle Eastern market where Western methods could be used). Factors that

had to be taken into consideration for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia included the basics such as:



Taking the literal meaning and interpretation of brand names or text in local languages



Depicting social situations that are culturally unacceptable



Personifying inanimate objects in a way that may not be acceptable in some markets



Not understanding a culture's need for perceived local versus international packaging and advertising and even the role men and women play in ads (liberal versus conservative cultures).

By leveraging your research agency's global expertise and understanding of area culture and by working alongside the local experts, clients can avoid these errors in interpretation.

THE MODERATOR

We believe there are great moderators and there are average moderators in the research world. As anyone who has had a seat "behind the glass" knows, you want to be working with the great moderators. And in the US, you probably know who they are. You've maybe even had dinner with them after a long night of research.

But what happens when you need to conduct research in a country where you have never worked before, or where your company doesn't have a local presence to help make a recommendation for a local moderator? Or what do you do when you need to find a moderator who specializes in a particular area—such as the need for someone with great technology experience in Korea or baby care experience in France? At this point, clients often have headed to the larger research agencies that have a global

presence. And sometimes that works.

We have found, however, that some of the world's best moderators are often found at the "boutique" agencies or, increasingly, are on their own as independent moderators (this is becoming particularly true in Asia and South America). In fact, this flexibility of being able to move in and out of networks across the globe allows for providing resources that meet both the US-based as well as any in-market based client requirements.

"I've commissioned several international qualitative projects over the years and there are some markets like South America or the far East where I have come to prefer certain moderators, who are often either working for themselves or at a small shop. This can sometimes cause problems for larger agencies, who I think are mandated to use their own moderators across the globe."

Senior Research Manager

Major oil and lubricants manufacturer

We believe that to find the 'cream of the crop' in each market, you need to be working with the local experts. The research firm you select for your global qualitative work should, therefore, not be tied to just one firm—rather they should have relationships with moderators at the big agencies, at the smaller boutiques and with the independent moderators. This person also needs to have the gravitas to ensure that every person involved in the study (from the local moderator in Lima, to the facility manager in Barcelona, to the simultaneous translator in Tokyo) is aligned and on board with the expectations for your research project.

Yet it is common practice in some firms that the client service person you initially work with at proposal stage for a global qualitative study is not directly involved in the day to day project management of a study once the kick-off meeting has taken place. Often, project



managers tend to be junior researchers who are focused on the basic logistics of your study. They can struggle to find solutions when something unexpected happens or if things are not going exactly as the senior level client service person had designed. As a client, you should be asking just as many questions about the experience of the project manager as you do about the moderator(s) who will be involved in your study.

"For my international qualitative jobs, I want to work with one person, who in turn works with all the local players and gets everything squared. This person has to know what I expect and what I need without me having to ask twice. I don't want to babysit each market because I don't trust that the project is being managed. I have had nightmare projects where my boss showed up for groups in Turkey or some other market where we're not used to doing work and everything was a mess—this made me look bad. There are a lot of details when you're coordinating a project with eight countries, and I need to work with someone who can keep it straight."

Research Director, CPG Company

Over the years, we have learned that there are some logistical factors that are simply going to make your international qualitative study run in a more streamlined manner. While the examples we provide are not comprehensive, the following should give you a good feel for whether you're working with a seasoned global qualitative research project manager:



AT PROJECT KICKOFF:

Conducting a central briefing with all countries present simultaneously —this allows any issues to arise and ensures all are working from the same starting point. (More often than not, the industry standard is for countries to be briefed individually, which allows for possible

inconsistencies). Individual meetings can take place to discuss cultural nuance when necessary. A briefing package should be prepared for the central briefing, which includes screeners, guide, objectives, stimuli to be used in field, and reporting template. These materials are discussed in detail for full alignment.



WHEN FIELDWORK BEGINS:

It is recommended that the lead researcher attend the first day of fielding in each market to ensure moderators are on the right track (at minimum this person should be watching via video streaming or phone conference in the case of focus groups or IDIs).



WHEN FIELDWORK COMPLETES:

Because clients need the answers right away, consider a single debrief with the moderators by phone (or invite the moderators to attend an in-person follow-up to brainstorm with clients on next steps). Here the client is recommended to participate to gain that initial big picture understanding of the similarities and differences by market.



AT ANALYSIS STAGE:

Work with a research company that will provide you with the detailed country reports for each market (prepared by the local moderator in the local language and translated into English). These local reports are always useful for local brand and marketing teams. Once the local reports are provided, the findings should be analyzed by your research partner to create a tight global report that highlights global similarities, and local nuances and differences, in conjunction with key recommendations.



We have touched on the three key criteria to consider when undertaking an international qualitative research program: Cultural understanding, moderator selection and senior project management. There are, no doubt, additional factors that are important depending upon the nature of your own particular study, but having these three criteria in place is a good starting point when you have a global qualitative study that needs to be seamlessly implemented.

