

Research Across Ethnicities: From Silo To Synthesis

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Many marketers who want to appeal to diverse racial and ethnic target audiences have cut back their efforts because of budget constraints. Limited funds go to “general market” campaigns, while marketing plans aimed at black audiences, Latino audiences, etc. get reduced or put on hold or never get started. Short-term, this risks revenue. Long-term it can also mean losing established brand-consumer relationships. In this article I suggest a research approach that identifies the purchase drivers across diverse audiences so that one, cohesive marketing strategy will be effective across those audiences.

The approach is the Zebra Team Strategy, where synthesized qualitative research findings become the basis for synthesized marketing. The strategy differs from traditional silo market research as the basis for silo marketing, e.g., market research which divides market segments into general market silo, core user silo, black silo, Latino silo, Asian silo, teen silo, and the like. The benefit of silo market research is to identify the needs, beliefs, and values of each silo sufficiently to engage them in the advertising targeted to them. In the Zebra Team Strategy, there are no silos. The focus is on the synthesis that is identified in qualitative developmental labs.

Synthesis means that racially and ethnically diverse respondents decide jointly the shared needs, beliefs and values that trigger their purchase interest. They may walk into the research facility with one set of assumptions and walk out with perceptions that are different and feel even truer to them. We’ve seen examples of reaching such deeper perceptions in the qualitative insights discovered in silo research. What’s new is accomplishing the same kinds of results among ethnically and racially diverse respondents.

Decide Together what They Mean and Feel

Synthesis does not simply mean commonalities. Many commonalities between different segments may be identified in market research, but that doesn’t mean they’re the commonalities that actually trigger purchase interest or motivate action. Often marketers

try to figure out commonalities through deductions behind the one-way mirror. This lacks the synthesis, insights and nuance of having respondents decide together what they mean and feel.

Finding commonalities can work for attribute research, as for example, identifying preferred attributes across segments. But looking for commonalities across different communities with different life experiences is, by that very fact, too much on the surface to get to the core of brand-consumer relationships and to the strong, emotional motivators.

Researchers frequently recruit for an “ethnic mix,” but they don’t pretend that this means capturing the needs, beliefs and values of the ethnicities involved. They don’t say, “Now I know how to penetrate these separate markets.” Rather they are mostly looking for ethnic red flags to their primarily white market appeal.

Synthesis also does not mean diversity training, i.e., focusing on how people of different ethnicities treat each other. Our focus is on attracting people across different ethnicities via the right brand, product and/or advertising strategies.

The goal of the Zebra Team Strategy is to identify the synthesis of beliefs, needs and values that trigger purchase interest and/or brand loyalty. Findings can be the basis for quantitative testing for synthesized marketing.

Approaches may vary, but a typical method is a day-long developmental lab of two ethnically different sets of respondents - e.g., six general market respondents and six black respondents – meeting in separate areas of a large room. Led by a moderator, each group simultaneously discusses the same section in the shared discussion guide, with the moderators probing for greater insight and depth. After each section is discussed, the two groups get together, and the moderator team leads a joint discussion of the respective findings. Probing still deeper on what is meaningful and important to each group, the moderator team both explores those levels where the disparate views become synthesized, and explores those perceptions/premises that hinder synthesis. Drawing equally on diversity dynamics and emotional “deep dive” techniques, the process toward synthesis

evolves as the respondents follow the pattern of returning to their separate group for homogeneous discussion, then coming together for synthesis.

**Example of Synthesis Research:
Middle-Class Condos Planned in a Poor Neighborhood**

Issues:

- Local Residents, mostly black, have concerns and objections
- Potential Condo Buyers, mainly white, have expectations and requirements
- Developer wants to address and reconcile the different issues to ensure project successfulness

Goal: Representative Respondents are brought together to help guide the developer

Part I: General assumptions about the condo concept discussed

Black residents and white target buyers meet in separate groups to discuss their assumptions about the condo concept and reasons behind those assumptions

Residents and target buyers come together in facilitated discussion

1. They review the assumptions and reasons for them
2. Drawing on respondents' stories and projective techniques, the moderator probes those reasons to get to the key emotional and rational drivers (which, in fact, may have little to do with the condo building at this phase of discussion, and much to do with stereotypes and past experiences)
3. Group discussion: where can we demonstrate our respect for those key emotional and rational drivers, in reference to thinking about a condo building in this community. They are reminded: "this doesn't mean compromising your beliefs or changing your mind; we're talking about things deeper than that." This level of discussion becomes the basis for synthesis.

Part II: Specific Recommendations

Black residents and white target buyers meet in separate groups to further discuss/ brainstorm ideas for 1) applying what they've agreed on and 2) meeting their own additional needs regarding the condo building

They come together in facilitated discussion

And so the process continues. Each time the groups separate they're serving both their needs as well as those of the other group that have been revealed. It's a process of continuous synthesis.

The basis for success is getting beneath the specific issues to the emotional and rational drivers that make those issues important. By addressing the drivers, people's needs get met.

Why a Full Day. Such different communities, that scarcely have anything to do with each other, are not going to find common ground in a two-hour focus group. The goal is to acknowledge the different realities and work in a non-provocative way through to the common ground. That entails listening to people's stories in order to stimulate, rather than restrain, a new way of talking about and looking at what is meaningful. The participants need the time to progress through new territory and internalized learning. The moderators need the time to:

- o Keep everyone on track and at the same time validate the different realities. The discussion guide is only the framework for integrating personal experience
- o Get out of the way. The information, energy and solutions are with the group
- o Push respondents to move beyond their original assumptions.

Example: laddering across segments. Category: distilled spirits. A distilled spirits brand used silo research/advertising to market to separate silos of male core users, female core users, and black male occasional users. The assumption was that separate advertising was necessary per segment since the usage practices and preferences of each segment were so different.

In fact, however, the respondents shared aspirations to be admired for the traits that are associated with the brand and related factors. This made possible an advertising strategy focused on the brand identity as conferring certain admired personality traits.

Moreover, follow up research revealed that the latter approach was more meaningful to respondents than the siloed focus had been, because **“this shows us as we think of ourselves, not just as we are.”**

Laddering and sensory and projective techniques get respondents to their deeper, emotional drivers, and sharing experiences across ethnicities gets us to the shared emotional drivers.

Benefits

Synthesized marketing research can reveal deeper drivers than traditional usage-and-attitude silo-ed marketing. It can mean focusing on the meaning of the brand itself at a stronger, emotional level. It can mean ads based on personal stories and testimonials of diverse groups of people, as opposed to homogeneous subjects.

The price value is in getting at least as much result from marketing as ever, but at a fraction of the usual cost. Instead of focus groups by segment, followed by multiple

marketing efforts, there is the development of one cohesive marketing strategy with optimized marketing effort.

Examples of application

Advertising/Communication Campaigns. Concepts become deeper and more cohesive because they reflect the perceptions of people moved beyond their original assumptions to new shared awareness. If the result of the synthesized marketing is at least as good as multi-silo marketing, you're ahead financially because of the reduced savings from synthesized marketing. Inevitably, synthesized marketing has a higher return than the downsized marketing that neglects or has minimal insight into non-white consumers.

Organizations trying to attract ethnically and racially diverse employees, residents or audiences. Experience shows that alternately appealing different ethnicities to attract everyone leads to resentment and even accusations of tokenism. Fund-raising has long been a racially segregated endeavor. A leading cultural center, worried about declining financial support, decided not to target black prospects because research showed they were not as susceptible to the center's image and ways of doing business as the usual white prospects were. In contrast, synthesis research gets to the rational and emotional drivers across racial divides that can energize an institution to grow.

Even if the desired synthesis is not achieved, the organization will have gained such rich insight from the level of cross-cultural dialogue that the resulting marketing will have greater cross-cultural credibility than otherwise.

Race Riots: Us vs. Them

The required skill set for black/white research is:

- 1) Core team of one black and one white qualitative research strategist
- 2) Expertise in helping consumers reach and articulate the emotional drivers in their brand/product/usage process
- 3) Expertise in engaging and reconciling ethnically diverse groups of people.

The Zebra Team is led by Barbara Rugen and Deborah Spradley of Cincinnati, both P&G Approved Moderators who have conducted over 1,000 studies in brand development,

marketing strategy and innovation, applying qualitative, usability and ethnographic approaches and proprietary techniques.

Following the race riots in Cincinnati in 2001, Deborah and Barbara trained in cross-cultural facilitation as part of the city's race relations initiative. Barbara became the lead facilitator for the 148 interracial neighborhood sessions, handling the dynamics of bringing blacks and whites together in frank discussion about the racial division and possible solutions. Deborah facilitated interracial discussions for Cincinnati Can. Barbara also trains companies and schools in Public Deliberation, a methodology to foster communication between people in "us vs. them" situations; she has consulted on public deliberation for the Kettering Institute and presented on the methodology at the national conference of the Community Development Society. Both Barbara and Deborah have facilitated and trained facilitators for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, which holds sessions to reduce racial tensions and to help visitors process their reactions to the more troubling exhibits at the Center.

Deborah heads Spradley and Associates, Inc., following 16 years at Procter & Gamble where she held a variety of product development and marketing management positions, and was a leader in developing and teaching the benefits of qualitative research for in-house training and development. Barbara heads Audience Impact Research, a qualitative research consultancy for over 25 Fortune 500 companies since 1996.

You can learn more about getting the insights that feed the synthesized marketing plan from:

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