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Fused Research Modes Will Save You Money

How To Master The Faster And Cheaper Imperative In Stark Economic Times

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The economy is both eroding financial wherewithal to conduct market research and putting a larger burden on market research professionals to identify successful markets. While vast economies have already been realized in quantitative research using online panels, the same benefits are about to be realized in traditional qualitative research. New fusions of qualitative and quantitative research approaches have finally emerged that are economically viable alternatives to traditional and expensive approaches. Companies must harness them or resign themselves to doing less with less at a time when sharper market insights are more necessary than ever.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE MARKETPLACE IS MOVING BEYOND ONLINE SAMPLE

The economy is putting enormous pressure on market research professionals to identify successful markets. But at the same time, these market researchers face budget cuts and even staff reductions. That is the bad news. The good news is that the dynamics to deliver cheaper, faster, and better research are already in play.

New online research tools have revolutionized how quantitative data is gathered, and the story of how almost 50% of quantitative research is now gathered online in the US market is an old one.¹ Now, the same imperative that drove that dynamic is driving wholly new fusions of research modes that will go through the same acceptance arc as online panels. However, we expect adoption of these fused modes to be accelerated due to economic necessity. Merging different research modes creates new modes that could not have existed prior to the Internet. The result is faster and cheaper research that can give market researchers a competitive advantage — if they have the foresight to embrace these new modes quickly.

Research Modes Traditionally Have Been Stovepiped

Traditionally, various research modes have needed to be separate. Qualitative research was never merged with quantitative research, and researchers would lecture the uninitiated about how qualitative research was directional and only quantitative research was projectable. True ethnographic research was qualitative research on steroids but required an expensive physical presence to gather. These truisms are now crumbling in the face of the faster, cheaper imperative (see Figure 1).



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Figure 1 Types And Uses Of Research

Research mode	Description	Best use
Traditional qualitative	Focus groups and in-person or phone deep-dive interviews usually last from 1 to 3 hours.	This provides directional guidance about a market, product, or brand and identifies how target markets think about a product or service in their own words. Traditionally, it is a first step before a quantitative project.
Ethnographic	Researchers spend significant time (often days) with targets, interviewing and videotaping them as they engage with the product in their natural surroundings.	This is excellent for a deep dive to eke out primary needs and motivations of the target markets. It's the most expensive of research modes.
Quantitative	This online or offline research leverages modes that range from phone to mail and online panels.	This provides projectable (as opposed to directional) insights.
Fuse (hybrid) research	This type fuses modes of research that are traditionally separate, such as ethnographic and online or quantitative and qualitative.	This provides faster, cheaper insights and insights that are unavailable using traditional modes.

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Fused Research Mixes Modes For Efficiencies And New Insights

Spurred on by economic necessity and the mantra of “cheaper, faster, and better,” the industry will move to rapidly embrace fused research modes as they gain even greater efficiency in recruitment, research, and analysis from the Internet. These fused research modes come in three forms with different benefits and scenarios of use:

- **Light fusion takes advantage of the Internet to make traditional approaches cheaper.**
 The Internet can be used to facilitate finding samples for traditional methods. For example, companies use today’s online panels to recruit offline focus groups, or they create online communities solely to provide prospects for offline ethnographic research. For example, vendor Real Insights solely uses this approach to set up traditional ethnographic research. This represents a way to leverage the Internet to make traditional modes more cost-effective. Instead of using phone recruits, light fusion greatly reduces the cost of offline modes of data collection. Is it compelling because it is cheaper? The answer is yes, but not revolutionarily so. Costs are reduced, but the basic mode of the actual research remains unchanged — predominately offline.
- **Medium fusion uses MROCs to offer new and cheaper ways to execute ethnographic research.** The advent of market research online communities (MROCs) has created major advantages for qualitative research.² MROCs tend to replace focus groups but only provide a supplementary view to true ethnographic research because they only capture *online* interactions. Their fusion potential really comes into play when they direct MROC participants

to perform self-ethnography by videotaping offline. For example, for a study on a new beer brand, ethnography would traditionally require a videographer to follow around individuals, videotaping them at parties or at a bar in order to gather psychological insights. By having MROC members take on the burden of videotaping themselves in their use environments, members not only vastly reduce videotaping costs but also self-edit for what they believe is compelling, reducing the need to edit after the fact and upload to the community. This merging of modes for qualitative research can save hundreds of thousands of dollars per ethnographic project, cut time-to-results to a fraction of that of traditional projects, and vastly increase the geographic scope possible.³ All of the major MROC players, which include Communispace, Think Passenger, VisionCritical, and Vovici, are moving to address this capability.⁴

- **Full fusion uses the Internet to merge modes totally, with new, faster, and cheaper results.** One example of full-fusion (also known as hybrid) research comes from vendor Invoke Solutions. It fully merges online quantitative and qualitative research to create faster branding and product optimization research in a very rich, fused online research environment, collecting qualitative insights with robust quantitative projectability insights during lengthy online sessions. The results are vast reductions in budget and time-to-results, allowing companies to leave the competition in the dust by making decisions much more rapidly, especially concerning brand and product development research.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

SUCCESS REQUIRES RAPID ADOPTION OF NEW FUSED MODES

Ignoring fused research approaches will only help your competitors as they gain access to cheaper, faster, and — in some cases — different insights. What should you do?

- **Leverage online recruitment even if you are doing traditional qualitative research.** Starting immediately, whether you are conducting focus groups, trying to set up one-on-one interviews with hard-to-reach individuals, or recruiting for full-scale ethnographic research, don't let the mode dictate that you use expensive and inefficient recruitment methods. Leverage online panels to recruit, whether they come from standard panels like Greenfield Online, private panels of your customers, or panels that are set up specifically to recruit specialties — such as panels from Real Insights — even if your ultimate data collection is conducted offline. The expense reduction can represent up to 80% of recruitment costs.
- **Try full fusions for your next brand study or early-stage product concept testing.** Unless your audience simply cannot be reached online, the cost savings and time compression available from a fully fused research approach should be your default choice, leaving more traditional modes for cases where an online mode simply won't work. Look to vendors like Invoke Solutions to assist with this.

- **Push your vendor to incorporate self-ethnography capability if you already have an MROC.** Most are at least working on self-ethnography. Even if you have never done an ethnographic study before, the low costs of using such a model are so compelling that it would be foolish not to conduct one as primary research concerning your clients' motivations, whether they are consumer or business.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Online panel sample is vastly cheaper and faster than traditional modes. It gained rapid acceptance, followed by blowback from traditionalists who questioned the validity of the sample that was provided and therefore the projectability of its results for business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) research. This is now being addressed by online quality initiatives from companies such as Peanut Labs and MarketTools as well as B2B initiatives from e-Rewards and LinkedIn.
- ² These include moving focus groups from a variable-cost basis to a fixed-cost basis with much higher capacity. See the April 24, 2008, “[Will Web 2.0 Transform Market Research?](#)” report.
- ³ Regarding an example of a study of beer drinkers in multiple countries, the physical costs of such research would be enormous, and the leverage from having people perform self-ethnography would be substantial.
- ⁴ Another medium-fusion methodology involves companies such as NeoEdge Networks. NeoEdge Networks uses its gaming platforms for sample and survey gathering, specializing in gaining projectable insights for the demographic of females ages 20 to 35.
- ⁵ A traditional qualitative/quantitative product development project could take two months for qualitative research and another three months for quantitative research to deliver compelling findings. Invoke Solutions can turn such projects around in a matter of weeks at a fraction of the cost.