

# The value of second sight in qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork

Qualitative researchers performing fieldwork focus intently on consumers' actions and their answers to probing questions. In their eagerness to extract the meat of the moment, even the most experienced researchers may overlook telling visual and verbal details. Eyes shifting away in response to a certain question. A changing tone of voice. Other family or focus group members smirking in reaction to a respondent's explanation. A rug stain a homeowner hopes a researcher won't notice. A hand clenched in frustration when a shopper can't find the brand she wants.

In addition, there is always a semi-anxious sub-chatter going on in the back of a researcher's mind when he or she engages the respondent. "Am I getting this consumer's real feelings

about the product? Maybe I'm coming on too strong. Are my questions beginning to bore her? What else can I do to open her up?"

Anxieties like these are the mark of a sensitive, tuned-in researcher. But they can divert attention and reduce the objective appraisal of what a researcher is seeing and hearing - be it in a consumer's home, in a focus group, even online.

That's why a second pair of eyes and ears belonging to someone who was not present during the fieldwork can be helpful. Someone who can replay the videos as many times as they need to catch all the visual and verbal nuances. Who can take a fresh, uninvolved look at the videos of each ethnography interview or focus group without external or

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internal distractions, without having to think about their own effect on the respondent. Someone who makes their own objective appraisal of what the camera sees and hears. In other words, second sight.

Second sight is performed by another researcher or can even be done by the client. In one of our recent food-category projects, it was the client, going over the interview DVDs, who noted the unusual preponderance of high-quality cooking equipment in the kitchens of a particular consumer segment - a meaningful indication of the special importance of food in their lives.

A secondary perusal of body lotion ethnography discovered that women were using the product not just to heal or soften their skin. They would spend time massaging their bodies while they

## snapshot

This article cites several examples of how another researcher's viewing of video from ethnographic or focus group fieldwork can uncover previously overlooked insights.

sat in front of their TV or listened to music. The lotion was part of their relaxing ritual. It made them feel the way they felt when they were immersed in a bubble bath - away from the cares and obligations of the day. A new benefit for an old personal-care category.

Looking over the behavior of consumers pushing a newly-designed lawn fertilizer spreader, a second researcher noticed that they hesitated or stopped whenever they needed to manipulate the release lever. After watching a number of consumers acting similarly, he realized why: The release lever was on the left side of the handle and most consumers were right-handed. It was too awkward for them to use without stopping. A simple change of the release lever position to the right side was suggested to the client.

Studying the self-made videos of seniors on a long car trip, a second researcher noticed that a number of participants in the study happened to praise the last amenity they received at a motel - the continental breakfast. The researcher also noticed that these same travelers usually picked the same

motel chain as their previous choice at their next stop - even when they had to travel a little out of their way. It became clear that a satisfying continental breakfast was one of the strongest determinants of motel choice.

A hidden camera, set up in a large drug store, recorded a woman looking unsuccessfully for a particular toothbrush brand. A second-sight researcher picked up on her clutching her hands in anger. The observation ultimately resulted in larger, more prominent graphics for the brand involved.

### Arrive at new insights

The second-sight researcher should develop a collegial relationship with the primary researcher, exchanging his or her observations and insights. Feeding off each other, they may both remember details that reinforce the findings. Together, they may even arrive at new insights neither would have come to alone.

Sometimes the objective, second-sight researcher can pull together the disparate threads of various interviews into an overriding theme that the pri-

mary researcher, immersed in the detail of each interview, may not have been able to step back and see. In more than a few cases, we have seen second-sight researchers help the primary researcher to arrive at a project's conclusions and suggest a strategic recommendation.

Yes, second sight research may add more time to the project. But if the secondary researcher receives copies of the interview videos while the fieldwork is in progress, the extra time involved can turn out to be negligible. And implications perceived by second sight can be shared with the primary researcher and incorporated into the interviews that follow.

A second pair of eyes and ears may also may involve a little more money. But teamwork between the objective and the immersed researchers can multiply the value of the observations, the validity of the findings and the focus of the recommendations. Whenever it has been part of a project, we have found second sight to be more than worth it in the richer insights and often more actionable conclusions delivered to the client. IQ