“Show and Tell” Focus Groups Tell “Baby-Boomer” Values

Baby-boomers are a large consumer target for many products and “show and tell” focus groups are providing the needed insight into the core values these boomers hold close to their heart.

The show and tell focus groups work in this manner. Participants are asked to bring in three or four items that represent their ideal environment. The items can be pictures or souvenirs, it does not matter as long as the participants are able to explain why they chose the items and how they fit into their ideal environment. A few examples might be: A father brings in a good luck fishing lure that his father gave to his grandchildren as a present or an elementary teacher bringing a copy of the book she has finally decided to write. Group discussion is then centered around these items. What qualitative research has uncovered about the baby-boomers can be describes into five specific themes:

1. Quality family life is a major concern. The ability to have a positive impact on the lives of their children is extremely important as is a tight-knit family unit that is supportive of each other.

2. Long-term friendships help round out their identity outside of the workplace and home. Keeping in touch with friends is an integral element of the boomer lifestyle.

3. Taking the time to get away from the hassles of everyday life in the form of “getaway vacations” with family and friends helps to maintain firm understanding of what is important in life and recharge dying batteries.

4. Spiritual and physical fitness are important in leading a full, well-balanced life.

5. No such thing as a mid-life crisis. Life is too short to dwell on successes or failures.

This type of research is invaluable in designing advertising and promotional campaigns. It provides the necessary foundation for appealing to those values that are most
important to the boomers and to those values which are most likely to stimulates their buying behavior.
Feelings, Nothing More Than Feelings

Qualitative research in the form of focus groups and individual depth interviews is used to discover what sensory feelings are important for customers. Such feelings cannot be uncovered by quantitative research. Depth interviews are conducted one-on-one and allow extensive probing of each respondent. Thus, it is possible to uncover underlying feelings (as well as values, beliefs, and attitudes.) Several examples show how identifying consumers’ sensory feelings is crucial in designing products.

• Ford:

Ford decided to redesign one of its Taurus models. They remodeled the dashboard buttons, the rear fenders etc. They decided to change the door latches. However, there was a problem with the sound it made when somebody closed the door. It sounded weird. The latch made two thumps which gives the impression to the user that something is going wrong even if there is no problem at all. Although the consumer is not aware of his own perception, he is very sensitive to sounds a car makes.

• Whirlpool:

Whereas one might think that the perfect product would not make any noise, the case of Whirlpool denies it. Whirlpool launched a new refrigerator, a quieter one. However, customers called the company to complain about “the softer, water-gurgling sounds” of the model. People had the impression that the new refrigerator was the noisiest they had ever heard whereas it was the quietest ever manufactured.
• IBM:

IBM focused on a new button in the middle of the keyboard that was to replace the mouse. Since people spend hours working on a computer, comfort for the finger used to touch the button was crucial. It took them nine years to "create the perfect cushion for a finger."

• Estee Lauder:

The cosmetic industry provides a lot of examples of qualitative research since cosmetic products refer to woman intimacy. For example, Estee Lauder changed the shape of its blue compact so it appeals more to the customer. The shape was redesigned by rounding the edges to make it softer and thus create a link with the round shape of the woman body.²
Focus Groups Make the Introduction of Plymouth Breeze “a Breeze”

Before the Plymouth Breeze was introduced in 1996 extensive, focus groups were conducted among the target customers: young people between 20 and 40, especially women. This qualitative research helped the company better understand the psychographic profiles of individuals and their lifestyles, their activities, interests and opinions. The research revealed that during this period of life people experience dramatic changes (graduation, career, wedding, family), and that their purchasing criteria change with those different stages of life. In particular, focus groups helped to generate several hypotheses including:

H1: As people’s lifestyles and needs change, so does their preferences for cars.
H2: As people make more money they are willing to pay a higher price for cars.
H3: People have negative perceptions of the sales pressure involved in the car buying process.

These hypotheses were verified by survey research and formed the basis for launching the Plymouth Breeze. Single and young families are the target customers of the new car. The Breeze complements perfectly the existing product range.

It enables:
* a linear progression of vehicles that complements the lifestyles needs and changes as found in the focus groups. Neon, a subcompact car is aimed at young people, that have just graduated from school or started working. On the other hand, Voyager is a family car.
Research showed that 45% of subcompact car buyers purchased a compact car after, and compact car buyers eventually purchased minivans. As a result, Plymouth’s product range was missing a compact car, and Breeze filled this gap.

* a linear progression of price that corresponds to the evolution in financial possibilities of the target customers;

* a consistent image that corresponds to the tastes of the target market.

To address the issue of sales pressure, Plymouth opened Plymouth Place, some 1000 square-feet show-rooms in regional shopping malls, where people can have information on Plymouth without sales pressure, because no sales can be done in those show-rooms. The company also created a Plymouth Place Web to respond to the openness of customers to shop at home (also identified by focus groups). This new strategy is working. On the two test markets, Plymouth sales have increased by 16% and 36%.17
EXAMPLE

Projecting the Unprojectable Projects Loss

A sophisticated insurance direct marketer conducted focus groups. The results were translated into clear-cut mail order marketing strategies. However, every single conclusion that grew out of the research flopped. What happened? The insurance company made the mistake of trying to project the unprojectable.20
Probing for Intelligence

In a study designed to come up with new credit card features, respondents merely listed features of existing credit cards when questioned in a structured way. Then depth interviews were employed to probe the respondents. For example, the interviewer asked respondents to ask themselves, “What is important to me? What problems do I have? How do I wish I could live? What is my ideal world?” As a result of this method, consumers relayed information they had previously been unaware of and several new credit card features surfaced. The study uncovered the need for an “intelligent” credit card that could perform such tasks as keeping track of credit card and bank balances, investments, and emergency telephone numbers.25

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Insert Picture of Credit Cards From Second Edition, Chapter 5, page 175
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In this study the researcher was investigating attitudes toward airlines among male middle-managers.

Laddering. Each airline attribute, such as wide body aircrafts, was probed to determine why it was important (I can get more work done), and then that reason was probed (I accomplish more), and so on (I feel good about myself). Laddering indicated that managers preferred advanced seat reservation, wide body aircraft, and first class cabin seating which resulted in greater physical comfort. This enabled them to get more work done while on the flight, leading to a sense of accomplishment and higher self-esteem. This technique showed that an advertising campaign, like the old United Airlines campaign of “You're The Boss,” which bolsters the self-esteem of the managers is worthy of consideration.

Hidden issue questioning. Respondents were questioned about fantasies, work lives, and social lives to identify hidden-life issues. The answers indicated that glamorous, historic, elite, “masculine-camaraderie,” competitive activities, like Grand Prix car racing, fencing, and World War II airplane dog fighting, were of personal interest to the managers. These interests could be tapped with an advertising campaign like the one by Lufthansa German Airlines featuring a World War I-type “Red Baron” spokesperson. That campaign communicated the aggressiveness, high status, and competitive heritage of the airline.
Symbolic analysis. Questions asked included “What would it be like if you could no longer use airplanes?” Responses like, “Without planes, I would have to rely on letters and long distance calls” were received. This suggests that what airlines sell to the managers is face-to-face communication. Thus, an effective ad might be one that guarantees that the airline will do the same thing for a manager as Federal Express does for a package.

Information revealed by these techniques can be used to effectively position an airline and to design appropriate advertising and communication strategies.26
Soaps Look for a Fresh Way to Work Consumers into a Lather

In studies of bath soaps, respondents invariably say that a good soap makes them feel “clean and fresh” after a shower. However, they often have difficulty explaining what that means to them. Copywriters trying to find a new way to talk about freshness in their advertising do not find such data helpful. Hence, the respondents were probed via depth interviews about all the things “clean and fresh” meant to them: the times they felt this way, their mental pictures, the moods and feelings connected with it, what music and colors come to mind, and even what fantasies it evoked.

Escape from ordinary life was one of the main themes that emerged from the depth interviews -- getting away from the cramped, rushed city to being free, relaxed, unhindered, and surrounded by nature in the country. The words and images sparked by this theme offered new ideas for creative advertising resulting in a successful campaign which was refreshingly different from competition.28
Dealing With Dirt

Word association was used to study women's attitudes toward detergents. Below is a list of stimulus words used and the responses of two women of similar age and household status. The set of responses are quite different, suggesting that the women differ in personality and in their attitudes toward housekeeping. Mrs. M's associations suggest that she is resigned to dirt. She sees dirt as inevitable and does not want to do much about it. She does not do hard cleaning, nor does she get pleasure from her family. Mrs. C sees dirt too, but is energetic, factual-minded, and less emotional. She is actively ready to combat dirt, and uses soap and water as her weapons.32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STIMULUS</th>
<th>MRS. M</th>
<th>MRS. C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>washday</td>
<td>everyday</td>
<td>ironing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fresh</td>
<td>and sweet</td>
<td>clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pure</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>soiled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scrub</td>
<td>don't; husband does</td>
<td>clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>filth</td>
<td>this neighborhood</td>
<td>dirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bubbles</td>
<td>bath</td>
<td>soap and water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td>squabbles</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towels</td>
<td>dirty</td>
<td>wash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings suggest that the market for detergents could be segmented on the basis of attitudes. Firms (like Procter & Gamble) that market several different brands of
detergents (Tide, Cheer, Gain, Bold, etc.) could benefit from positioning different brands for different attitudinal segments.

Insert Picture of P & G Detergents From Second Edition, Chapter 5, page 179
“Gimme a Double Shake and a Lard on White”

The light and healthy craze seems to be dying down for one segment of the population. In response to direct questioning consumers are hesitant to say they want food that is bad for them. However, this finding emerged in a picture response test in which the respondents were asked to describe a picture depicting people consuming high fat food rich in calories. A significant number of the respondents defended the behavior of the people in the picture explaining that the increased stress in everyday life has caused people to turn from tasteless rice cakes to comfort foods, loaded with the ingredients that make life worth living.

Many marketers have capitalized upon this finding by introducing products that contain large amounts of salt, fat and calories. Haagen-Dazs has recently introduced a new line of deluxe ice creams canned Extraas. The flavors include the new Triple Brownie Overload packed with fresh cream, sugar, chocolate liquor, butter, pecans and egg yolks. The Extraas line has increased Haagen-Dazs’ market share from 5.9% to 7.9%.

Another example of increased sales of ‘bad-for-you’ food is the growth of the new Wendy’s burgers packed with fried chicken, bacon and loads of cheese. These burgers are outselling the more healthy, grilled chicken sandwiches by a margin of 3 to 1.

Pepperidge Farm had recently introduced its own bid for the comfort food market, no-calories-barred soft-baked cookies with about 40% of the calories coming from fat. Recently launched, the new line is already the third biggest seller for the company.
Insert Picture depicting people consuming high fat food rich in calories
What Will the Neighbors Say?

A study was performed for a commercial airline to understand why some people do not fly. When the respondents were asked, “Are you afraid to fly?” very few people said yes. The major reasons given for not flying were cost, inconvenience, and delays caused by bad weather. However, it was suspected that the answers were heavily influenced by the need to give socially desirable responses. Therefore, a follow-up study was done. In the second study, the respondents were asked, “Do you think your neighbor is afraid to fly?” The answers indicated that most of the neighbors who traveled by some other means of transportation were afraid to fly.35
Culture is a very important determinant of how qualitative research, such as focus groups, should be conducted. In focus group discussions in Britain, it is not easy to make a housewife admit she has cockroaches. To do this, the moderator must reassure her that everyone else has the problem too. In France, just the opposite occurs: the respondents start to chatter away about cockroaches within seconds of sitting down. These cultural attitudes greatly influence which qualitative research techniques should be used, how they should be implemented, and how the data should be interpreted. 39
Whirlpool Whirls Qualitative Research Around the World

Whirlpool has become a giant in the appliance world, currently doing business in every corner of the world including the US and Canada and expanding markets in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Whirlpool produces products under 12 brand names in over 140 countries.

How does Whirlpool intend to prosper in these very diverse markets? Whirlpool has heavily invested in cross-cultural market research. Through the expertise of local staff members, qualitative research in the form of focus groups, depth interviews, and various forms of projective techniques is undertaken around the world. In refrigerator research in Europe, Whirlpool found that British consumers want strong construction, French consumers want fresh fruit and vegetables, and the Spanish want fresh meat. For ovens, the research revealed that Italians want child proof features and the Spanish favor accurate timers. Overall, Germans were the only group concerned about environmental features. In Latin America gas ranges are favored because of high electric prices. Whirlpool strives to understand cultural factors so that they can take advantage of growing markets. For example Latin America’s economy is expected to grow at over five percent annually in the next decade. Whirlpool is well educated on their different consumers from their global qualitative research and well equipped to compete in a global market.40
Focus (Groups) on Mudslinging in Presidential Campaigns

The ethics of negative or "attack" ads has been under debate for some time. However, the focus has shifted from the ads themselves to the ethics of employing marketing research techniques to design the ad message. Nowhere, perhaps, is this phenomenon more prevalent than in political "mudslinging" campaigns. In particular, the Bush campaign against Dukakis has been cited. In designing negative ads about Dukakis, the Bush campaign leaders tested negative information about Dukakis in focus groups. The idea was to develop some insight into how the American public would react if this negative information was released in the form of advertisements. Negative issues that elicited very negative emotions from the focus groups were chosen to be incorporated into Bush's political advertising. The result? Painted "...as an ineffectual, weak, liberal, do-gooder lacking in common sense...", Dukakis lost the election by a wide margin. Similar (mis)use of qualitative research was observed in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections which Bill Clinton won negatively attacking the Republicans.\textsuperscript{42}
Sega of America is the arm of Tokyo, Japan-based Sega Enterprises Ltd., and is responsible for the development, marketing and distribution of Sega videogame systems and videogames in the Americas. Sega launched HEAT.net in late 1996, an online gaming service that allows subscribers to play PC games against each other over the Internet. At that time, many competitors, including Microsoft and AOL, already had fully developed sites. Sega needed to determine how to add value to HEAT.net and convince gamers to play on their site instead of the competitors.

King, Brown & Partners (KB&P), Inc., one of the leading providers of strategic market research for the development of commercial Web sites, assisted Sega through a multi-phased project using both online and in-person research methodologies. KB&P conducted online focus group interviews to identify key issues within consumers’ minds. First, they prescreened Internet users to identify respondents who were predisposed to playing games on the Internet. Qualified respondents were re-contacted via e-mail and paid an incentive to participate. Online depth interviews were conducted to uncover underlying attitudes and feelings about Web-site game. From these qualitative research and multi-phase follow-up research, Sega had detailed information on who the appropriate target market was for the site, the types of games they wanted to play, the value-added services they wanted to use, and their expectations for short-term and long-term capabilities of the site.

Based on these research findings, Sega of America launched a new premium online channel in January 1997 for Sega Saturn Net Link that combines up-to-the minute, localized information on news, weather, sports, TV programming, entertainment and many other consumer-interest topics all in one location, which add a tremendous value to net
users who play games on the Internet. Subsequently, Sega online gaming service
generated thousands of new subscribers.44