Case Insight 3.1: Ipsos MORI

Billie Ing, Leora Unsdorfer, Alex Gilby

Hi, my name’s Paul Baines, I'm Professor of Political Marketing at the University of Leicester and co-author of the Fifth Edition of Marketing, by Oxford University Press.

In this next clip, we speak to Billy Ing, Leora Unsdorfer and Alex Gilby of Ipsos MRI, about how they developed a research programme for their client, Unilever.

We’re born, we’re creative, that’s our job.

An occasion like this just helps you to be more disruptive and more innovative in your approaches.

It feels it’s a very creative place, it’s full of stimulus.

I think the most interesting thing is exploring countries that maybe, you know, I haven't got the chance to actually go there.

This what’s happened when someone’s found a way to take a lead and then work based on belief and conviction you that you develop over a period of time to make that happen. I think the next two days are going to be super-exciting, thank you.

Ipsos have been in existence for 40 years and currently operate in more than 80 markets globally, we have six specialisms so marketing, loyalty, connect, public affairs as well as online and offline operations, Unilever are one of the world’s biggest companies, who currently have more than 400 brands in their portfolio worldwide.

For Unilever, Ipsos work right through their innovation funnel, so looking at testing from ideas through to concepts, full mixed testing and product testing, as well as strategic understanding work to help their business grow.

The brief that we received from Unilever was actually originally focused on just one of their brands, Domestos and they asked us if we could film people cleaning their toilets in Italy, in order to create innovational ideas for their Domestos brand.

But we actually challenged Unilever and said to them, “Look, people don’t think in categories like you do so why don’t we broaden this out and have a look at household cleaning across the entire home, and therefore uncover innovation opportunities for your entire household care portfolio, and in six markets rather than just Italy?”.

By challenging their brief and not just focusing on cleaning behaviours of the toilet but focusing on a wider range of cleaning behaviours throughout the entire home, this approach meant that it generated a huge amount of insight. One of the key challenges of that, this project was actually to leverage that insight and create actionable innovation ideas from it, which we could then take forward into quantitative validation with our panel.

We hypothesised that culture would be a really important part of cleaning rituals around the world, therefore taking an ethnographic approach, which means we’re led by participant behaviour, so we observe families in their environment for an entire day, would lend itself to uncovering unmet needs within the home.

So we spent a whole day with families, so we looked, we went to six different markets and spoke to six different families within each of those markets and we spent a day with them, understanding cleaning rituals and behaviours throughout the home. We didn’t just do this but we also wanted to understand the family and get under the skin of who they are as people, which is really important from an innovation perspective because you need to think about who the people are when you're communicating with them.

So this whole process led to huge amounts of data, I think over 200 hours’ worth of footage was recorded through this ethnographic approach. We then came back to London and we spent hours and weeks looking at this data and uncovering what the insights might be.

Everything you're going to see over the next two days is based on a big piece of ethnographic research. Ethnography is a research technique that’s based on empathy and observation, it’s classically described as walking a mile in someone’s shoes.

It came from the feeling that it wasn’t just about the habits and routines but actually what they do and how they clean is as embedded into their culture as much as anything else. From then, it was a case of we have such rich material, how do we bring that back to the team and how do we make it as useful as possible?

The next challenge that we had was how do we turn those insights into real actionable innovation ideas for our client across four brands? Over to Leora to tell us more.

So we went back to the drawing board and we thought, how can we create a situation where the marketing teams from around the world in Unilever can actually engage with the research that we’ve done, get something out of the insights and be able to create actionable ideas moving forward?

So thinking about it, we thought, “We have this footage from all around the world, instead of having the marketing teams go visit those markets and see the consumers there, why don’t we bring it all together for them in one nice location?”, so that’s exactly what we did.

We ran a three-day workshop and it was, we called it the Art Gallery and generally a workshop is a place where the research agency and the client will come together and you have a goal at the end of it, so our goal was to create actionable ideas, so ideas for product innovation, ideas for communications and so forth.

So we set up the, this open plan space and we sectioned it off to have six rooms to represent each of the markets that we visited. Each of these rooms represented a home in each of the markets that we visited, and when you walked in, we tried to engage people from all different senses so we had you know, the sites where we decorated the room just like a home would look like in that market, we also had the filming playing on a TV screen and insights from the ethnographic research were displayed on the wall.

We also served some food from the market or drinks, to really get you into that space and in some markets we also had something to engage your smell, for example, incense in, in the India room and we also had some clothing that people could try on and, and so forth so it was a really immersive experience where people were able to feel like they genuinely were in that market.

Welcome to Turkey, please put on a pair of slippers before you enter my home.

Please sit and have a coffee.

The first thing I want you to do is all bend over and like imagining you're cleaning your floor, and now imagine like wobbling around like this and cleaning 'cause that’s what they do and I can’t even get to that stage, it’s impossible.

We start over here to give you a sense of the outside space in Brazil for those that maybe haven't been there before and this whole idea of the, the heat and humidity and the noise and the pollution, we’ve also got the products, please don’t be shy, open them, smell them, squeeze them.

From this experience, we were able to create 250 ideas over the course of two days, and that’s quite a lot of ideas and I know a lot of them were very good but in the end of the day, Unilever can only focus on a certain amount, so we needed to distil them down into a smaller number of the ideas that we felt could carry the most brand stretch and the ideas that were most innovative.

I think the one that sparked the idea for us was probably India, so basically what we saw in a film was a woman had done her dish washing with her bar and afterwards, she was using like a paste product to make her pots shiny clean and it’s like, “Actually, we could deliver something like this”.

This will be one of the visuals that we’re doing, the idea is that it makes your dishes shine more. The visual’s very bright and basic and in order to try and show in consumer testing …

What we did was we distilled them down to 22 of the best ideas and those ideas were then taken into quantitative testing and I’ll pass over to Alex now, to explain how that’s done.

We then tested these ideas overnight with an online panel of consumers, 150 people evaluated each idea to give us a robust indication of the inherent potential of these ideas. For the overnight testing, we tested a range of different ideas in each market as the ethnographer had obviously had shown us, that different ideas were only applicable in, in certain markets, given the diverse nature of people’s homes and their bathrooms.

During the testing, not only did we understand the overall potential of each idea but also understanding the relevance, the differentiation and the believability of each idea, which are the three key drivers of in-market success. It has a global agency, means we can take advantage of different time zones where our different offices work across the globe, meaning that as the fieldwork can start in one country, many hours later in, on the other side of the world, the analysis can take place, meaning that we have the results in our in-box first thing the next day, which is very different from traditional research methodologies, where the, the time needed to get the results back to the client would be, would be much longer.

Generally, after our fieldwork is finished and we’ve analysed the results of the research, we’ll bring it to the client in some sort of report format so either that will be a PowerPoint presentation or it will be an ethnographic video and we have a debrief with the client where we share our insights with them, they’re able to engage with us and ask us questions but once we leave the room, it’s generally in the client’s hands and so we were able to really activate things very differently, through the methods that we used.

So with this methodology, we were able to create a much more immersive experience in the delivery of the research findings, we had ethnography to begin with where we were able to spend time with each of the families in the markets and we used that footage to help us in our workshop, where we were able to immerse ourselves within the research that we did and then the third step was validating it quantitatively, which brought us full circle from initial insight generation to fully validated ideas, that Unilever could use in their business.

And Unilever was particularly happy with this fusion of methodologies that we used, it was very different from the traditional research that they’re used to doing and especially, they were especially happy when at the end, they saw the scores from the quantitative testing of these ideas and they were actually the best scoring ideas that Unilever had tested the entire year.

This was one of Ipsos’ most powerful and transformative pieces that we’ve ever done and it reverberates through the walls of Unilever until this day.