


The logo for iModerate, featuring the word "iModerate" in white lowercase letters with a registered trademark symbol, set against a red speech bubble shape. The background of the slide is a dark grey and black geometric pattern of overlapping squares.

iModerate®

TODAY'S HYBRID RESEARCH: IT MIGHT NOT MEAN WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS

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Researchers have conducted hybrid research since someone first added an open-ended question to a quantitative survey. It's a tried and true, almost traditional way of doing research. But as consumers, data and methods evolve, so does hybrid. In today's research landscape, hybrid it has the power to do, and be, much more than you might think.

WAIT, WHAT IS HYBRID RESEARCH AGAIN?

That is a good question. The hybrid of five years ago doesn't bear much resemblance to the hybrid of today. But let's start at the beginning.

In its simplest form, hybrid research just means mixing methods. Among market researchers, most commonly this means adding a qualitative element into a quantitative survey. The quant is the primary instrument, and projectable outcomes are still the goal, but a little qual is added to give it some flavor, some nuance, or that coveted "voice of the consumer." For many of our clients, this means adding online one-on-one conversations or webcam interviews to the end of a quant survey to explore key ideas in greater depth, probe on survey answers, or just hear the clarity of the consumer's own words. In other cases, hybrid can mean blending focus groups and surveys, in-person research with online journaling activities, video IDIs and Pinterest boards, or in-home usage with social media data. You get the point.

But as the world of research—and of data overall—has changed, so have the ways in which we can mix research methods. Today, a significant chunk of the research our clients conduct can loosely be defined as hybrid, whether it's straightforward quant + qual; more elaborate, phased or longitudinal initiatives; or even a blend of passive data (think social media) followed by a qualitative exploration.



CASE STUDY: IN A NEW LIGHT



When a major hotel chain wanted to understand more about members of its loyalty club and how different rewards and perks motivate them, the solution was direct conversation with members...with a twist. At the end of a traditional survey, respondents recorded short video answers to a handful of open-ended questions. Although some of the learnings were difficult for the brand to accept, the fact that they were seeing video of these concerns coming straight from their program members' mouths clearly validated that the findings needed to be addressed.

OK. BUT WHY IS HYBRID SUCH A BIG DEAL NOW?

As researchers engage in a never-ending battle to support their brand's quest for share of mind and wallet, every new piece of insight has the potential to provide a competitive advantage. It's no longer enough to do some research and call it a day—the quest for consumer understanding has become a 24/7/365 job and doing it right requires a comprehensive approach. Why? Because one-dimensional data is incomplete.

Luckily, we can all agree that we don't lack access to information—some might even say we're drowning in data. But as big data matures, brands are realizing that relying purely on “big-data driven decision making” is dangerous. Even though data dependence feels scientific, rigorous, and modern, too often it gives a flat, static view of what are actually dynamic, diverse and evolving human beings. Big data is powerful because it's driven by numbers, but companies are realizing that it can be a little risky and even lead to false assumptions if it is not rounded out with a qualitative perspective.

The upshot? The companies that win are the ones that have a 360-degree view of their consumer and their competitors. There is no better way to get this view than to blend methods for a complete picture of your customers.



CASE STUDY: WELL-ROUNDED DATA



A well-known manufacturer needed to understand more about one key aspect of its business and the customers who use that category of product. To address this need they took a multi-step hybrid approach blending straightforward quant questions with open-ended questions analyzed with text analytics, one-on-one conversations, and at-home video diaries. All of these data streams were integrated into a single, comprehensive story that inspired new product ideas and optimizations, identified new ways to message to their key audiences, and revealed areas where competitors were encroaching. Aside from the diversity of data, this approach is powerful because the outcomes wove together iteratively, with the learnings from one phase fine tuning the questions for the next—resulting in precision, complexity and accuracy of insight that could not have been achieved with a single approach.

WHAT DOES HYBRID DO FOR ME?

Of course, no one is mixing methods just for fun. This approach is gaining ground because it works and provides the insight and perspective necessary if a company wants to find white space, spur innovation, identify threats and outline opportunities for improvement.

But how does using a hybrid approach really improve things? Here are a few examples:



IT BRINGS IN THE REAL WORLD

Quantitative data, while powerful, often feels sterile. It can be hard to sit in a conference room and really connect with the human beings whose behavior is being broken down into percentage points and pie charts. A hybrid approach resolves this by bringing those human beings into the room. Whether through quotes that explain why the numbers say what they do, or a video clip breathing life and vibrancy into a hard-to-interpret learning, a qualitative element gives quantitative data the urgency, texture and humanity necessary to spur action.



IT'S FASTER, CHEAPER, AND EASIER

For situations when a full qualitative initiative is desired but simply not feasible, a hybrid approach lets you add in a dose of “why” without derailing timelines and budgets, and with minimal hassle. Doing a few online one-on-one conversations or interviews after a quantitative initiative, or adding some open ends and applying a text analytics approach, can provide a taste of real-world, human insight quickly and affordably.



IT'S A POWERFUL INSURANCE POLICY

The more you know, the more confidently you can make decisions, and the less likely you are to be caught off guard by new or unexpected consumer reactions, behaviors and opinions. With today's consumers more discerning than ever—and brands competing for continually shrinking mindshare—getting robust, complete reactions to new product ideas, marketing campaigns, or competitor moves is critical.



IT MAXIMIZES RESPONDENT INPUT

Respondent quality can make or break any research initiative. As marketing and product development become increasingly targeted, finding the right audience for your study is more important than ever. A hybrid approach can be a powerful way to optimize your contact with an elusive respondent group. If you already have the people recruited and participating, why not get human insights, and not just statistical data, from them?



IT SUPPORTS DIVERSE INTERESTS

Sometimes you don't know what you're looking for until you find it. Or you get a great insight that just points out how much you still need to learn. Or you have to satisfy various stakeholders with diverging interests, all within the scope of the same initiative. In these instances, deploying different approaches to get at different outcomes can be game changing. If you need to know the top five sources moms look to for guidance when starting their baby on solid food, you might field a quantitative survey to get a list. Then if you want to know their perceptions of your brand of baby food versus your competitors, you can ask some open ends and use text analytics to generate persona information. From there, you can explore how a new mom is feeling in general and what her fears, desires and goals are. Speaking with her directly will give the most nuanced and complete understanding.



CASE STUDY: OLD FASHIONED CONVERSATIONS



Many brands add one-on-one conversations to their ongoing trackers as a way to breathe life into otherwise dry and heavy quant findings. It's a powerful—and cost effective—way for them to maximize the value they get from a large investment like a tracker, which, for all their cost, don't always have exciting or new insights to share. By adding conversations that focus both on tracked topics and ad hoc questions, they are able to maintain the longitudinal integrity of the tracker while also exploring of-the-moment topics and ideas to provide immediate ROI.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DOING HYBRID

As with all research, getting hybrid right is as much art as it is science. Choosing the right methods, deploying them at the right time and in the right sequence, and being able to adjust on the fly will play a key role in the success of your initiative. Here are a few tips to make the process smooth and productive.



DO IT WITH INTENTION

Be sure to choose each approach for a clear and valid reason. Knowing how each data set contributes to the larger story is crucial to making sure you pick the right tools for the job.



YOU DON'T ALWAYS NEED QUANT

More and more researchers are blending different forms of qualitative information, particularly when some of that information is at scale (as in social streams, call center feedback, or online ratings and reviews).



DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT

As researchers, it's easy to be set in our ways. What worked for your last objective might not necessarily be the right fit for this one.



ENSURE YOUR VENDOR PARTNERS ALIGN

Or better yet, identify a partner who is experienced at blending approaches.



CASE STUDY: MORE THAN WORDS



As more research moves to mobile devices, brands have increasing access to respondent-generated visual content. An equipment manufacturer optimized a simple mobile survey by adding a few open ends and photo uploads to illustrate the learnings—because we all know a picture's worth a thousand words. And by making it easy to snap a photo of their equipment in use, the approach saved respondents the trouble of typing out answers on their phone.



CONCLUSION

Careful, disciplined and open-minded layering of methods can provide a degree of consumer understanding that goes far beyond what single-method research has been able to yield. Whether using qualitative research as a shot in the arm for necessary but staid quantitative work, or blending multiple approaches to iteratively arrive at more complete consumer understanding, researchers should pay attention to ways that they can do more with the methods they already have.

Looking ahead, it is clear that researchers must think creatively about how to combine approaches into ever more insightful research that is greater than the sum of its parts.

ABOUT IMODERATE

iModerate, a division of 20|20 Research, is a progressive insights agency that empowers clients to take decisive, proof-based action that evolves businesses and transforms brands. The company pairs powerful cognitive techniques with the latest research methods to help brands identify nuanced intelligence that revolutionizes their thinking and gives them an edge. Since 2004, iModerate has conducted over 200,000 conversations, analyzed vast amounts of consumer commentary, and helped over one-third of the Fortune 500 discover how consumers think about, characterize, experience, and discuss their brand.

WHAT BRAND
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HELP YOU CONQUER?

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