Strictly Financial

Qualitative Longitudinal Research

Using qualitative research to track attitudes and behaviours over time

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Our insights
and observations

Specialist qualitative research
for the financial industry

strictlyfinancial.com

Exploring change

In order to remain competitive in today's world, companies need to be fully aware of their target customers' needs and attitudes, and able to respond appropriately in order to capitalise on any emerging trends.

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But attitudes and behaviours are not stable - they can (and do) change as new experiences or knowledge are accumulated.

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Monitoring shifting behaviours and attitudes can be tricky – new thinking often takes time to emerge, and identifying the strength of trends and whether/ when they will reach critical mass (or tipping point) is a real skill.

At Strictly Financial we have seen increasing demand for qualitative longitudinal studies (QLR) to help our clients monitor trends. The advantage is that we can observe cause and effect relationships and establish a sequence of events. Qualitative longitudinal research collects and compares data over time, thus providing insight into how underlying attitudes and beliefs are developing.

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We are able to identify the underlying causes of changes in attitudes or behaviour and identify influencers that may be widely separated in time.

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Why use a Qualitative Longitudinal Study

Identifying and monitoring the strength of, and change in, attitudes and opinions over time can be a bit haphazard in traditional, single dip, qualitative research (even where dips are compared). By employing the planned regularity of QLR, a behavioural and attitudinal 'timeline' can be robustly developed, thus suppling real insight into whether and at what speed new opinions are being formed, or old beliefs challenged.

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The main advantage of using a QLR approach is that of 'flexible consistency'.

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The programme of work has a definite and regular schedule and defined set of ‘core’ topic areas for investigation, but equally has the ability to adapt to changing needs or circumstances over time, and is agile enough to be able to respond to unexpected events as they occur.

QLR is best suited to longish but fast changing events. For example:

- Social/ regulatory change - ongoing monitoring of changing behaviours following significant shifts in legislation. For example, monitoring the landscape of financial advisers post RDR, or changes in pension behaviour of consumers following the introduction of pension freedoms
- Political change – for example, during an election campaign or Brexit - swings in opinion based on political rhetoric or emerging decisions and how this may impact on behaviour
- Economic change – for example, shifting ‘social norms’ and financial behaviours following major economic events – recessions or, more recently, the move by the Bank of England to increase interest rates for the first time in 10 years
- Brand relaunch – for example mergers and acquisitions where it is important to monitor acceptance of the ‘new’ brand amongst existing customers, or a total rebrand where it is important to check the communication of the brand personality and values
- Organisation or cultural change – for example, when a company or division is going through fundamental shifts – such as demutualisation or introduction of new processes (e.g. the impact that AI may have on working practices or morale)

In all these cases, we are seeking to monitor how people are responding to the changing environment and whether and when new ‘norms’ become established.

Strictly Financial’s approach to QLR – a blended methodology

Any longitudinal study needs to be flexible and able to adapt to changing environments and requirements over time. In our experience, the most successful qualitative trackers use a menu approach, allowing selection of the most appropriate methodology at any time.

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Our QLR approach is adaptive and agile enough to respond to changing client needs and circumstances.

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We have designed our QLR around a central approach, providing core feedback on a regular basis, but also including flexible 'add-ons', which enable quick ad hoc feedback at short notice or on specific topics as required;

- **Regular temperature gauge:** Tranches of traditional qualitative fieldwork, conducted at regular intervals. The 'dips' are timed to complement other activity or events – but importantly they are consistent and regular so that they provided a timed 'temperature gauge' of opinion
- **Opinion tracker and quick fire research:** Ongoing regular consumer online qualitative panel to 'track' opinion over time more closely, and to allow for a 'quick response' mechanism to capture the 'in the moment' reactions as events unfold. This panel is typically built from our group discussion participants and can be continually replenished by subsequent tranches of the face to face fieldwork. It is particularly effective for tracking the development and influencers of opinion during a fixed period event like an election campaign, event sponsorship, or brand campaign; or for gaining an instant response to a sudden event like a brand hitting the headlines (for good or bad reasons)
- **Ad hoc/ event based qualitative:** Flexible and relatively quick turnaround, and offering more depth than an online panel, where required this element can be deployed both between scheduled tranches of work, or to boost them. This enables a quick response to 'in the moment' developments (for example, media reporting or breaking events), and how people react to events as they occur

Combining the different elements of the QLR programme to suit each project means that we are able to obtain an uncontaminated read of opinion as required, but also to monitor how the conversation develops and opinions change over time. It is structured (conducting regular dips), but it also offers a high degree of flexibility to allow us to respond almost immediately to breaking news or client requirements.

Each project is designed specifically to meet the needs of our client and dovetail with any existing programmes of work in place. It is tailored and highly flexible.

Please contact us directly to start the conversation…

The benefits a Qualitative Longitudinal Study can bring

QLR gives a longer term view than traditional qualitative research, and provides an understanding of the development of trends by:

- Assessing differences between time periods to help build a view of the general direction of change
- Exploring when changes occur and in what order

- Identifying tipping points – single events that initiate change – or accelerations that build towards change
- Linking the micro to the macro, especially during periods of dramatic change such as social or organisational change – a longitudinal study can follow the changes and track whether, when and how they begin to have an impact
- Minimising the effect of behavioural biases – in a longitudinal study we know what the general attitudes were, or what a certain individual thought or said at a specific point in time because we have a record of it. Thus the data is less prone to respondents' failure to recall events or to distort those events through post rationalisation or other biases

Why use QLR in financial services?

Financial Services are undergoing unprecedented change. Tracking how these changes are influencing behaviour will be critical in shaping how the industry responds. This is not only about monitoring strength of opinion, but about understanding whether fundamental beliefs about the future, the industry and financial planning are changing, and if so how this is influencing likely behaviour.

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All these changes have, and will continue to have, a profound effect on what decisions consumers are making in both the short and mid-long term. QLR enables us to monitor this 'conversation' as it develops.

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Later life planning is just one example, but a good one. It is an area where change is being driven both by events (personal and external), and by underlying factors (hard like wealth, and soft like attitudes, expectations and beliefs. These various changes are occurring at different rates, and they are doing so in a market sector that has traditionally been predicated on consistency of market, attitude and behaviour over the longer term.

But:

- While retirement income products are long term and product holders often need to manage their products for a considerable period of time, their needs, circumstances, and resultant behaviours may change
- Products are bought in anticipation of a future benefit, and the purchase process itself may be protracted with stops and starts
- People are living longer, and they are financially active for longer
- World political and economic instability is driving new attitudes and behaviours
- Low interest rates and the shadow of Brexit are impacting consumer engagement with, and decisions made about, their long term financial futures

- The regulatory environment is continually changing – the advice market has undergone radical change, and products are continually evolving as a result of regulation like the tax environment, pension freedoms, etc.
- The wealth gap is widening – so how will younger/ less well-off consumers receive the advice they need when they see the advice itself as expensive?
- The constantly developing integration of 'always on' technology with people's lifestyles is encouraging a more instant and DIY approach to many product choices – will retirement products go the same way?

Many of these factors apply to other areas of financial services as well, and each sector of the market also has its own specific issues. Like the list above, the issues in all financial services sectors are driven by a combination of shorter and longer term factors.

Developing a customer focused and sustainable response to these changes will ensure that financial services companies are well placed to continue to help their client base manage their finances effectively into the future. And Qualitative Longitudinal Research can provide the insight to discern both which responses are the right ones, and when their time has come.