



How does Ethnographic Observation complement itself with Big Data?

Briefly described, Big Data is a tool that gathers and processes large amounts of quantitative information in order to find patterns that help in decision making.

Thus, Big Data requires carrying out standardization and grouping processes that facilitate gathering and processing data. However, said process decontextualizes the data.

When an institution or organization requires building ties with people, it needs stories. Stories contain emotions, which is something data cannot provide. Data, on their own, cannot reflect the emotions of daily life, trust, vulnerability, fear, greed, lust, insecurities, love, and intimacy. It is difficult to build algorithms that represent the strength that unites a person with a service, product, or brand, and how the meaning of this bond changes in time.

By focusing on a smaller and deeper sample, Ethnographic Observation is able to reveal the social and emotional context of "users" and "non-users", which is essential information to determine the success or failure of a strategy, product, or service. The "data" obtained by Ethnographic Observation are focused on what is human, on the depth and singularity of the context, but above all else, the gathering process may generate unconceived ideas, show unforeseen roads, and/or explain things from points of view that have not been addressed, as the "methodology" gathers "data" by listening to people's stories and by living with them.

Big Data can be amazing at predicting patterns, but not necessarily explaining them and, much less, delivering tools to modify those patterns (behaviors), specially if these patterns belong to the social or human sphere. Ethnographic Observation is not an antagonist of Big Data. On the contrary, it complements it. Ethnographic Observation loses scale, but it gains resolution and depth.

At B Curious, we are experienced at carrying out Ethnographic Studies (Ethnographic Observation) for a wide range of companies, in different fields and of diverse sizes. Of the analyzed cases, there are two that provide good examples of how Ethnographic Observation can deliver insights, reconfigure the available quantitative information, and reveal the unexpected, what we do not know.



I. Case: Savory. Nestle.

Savory, shows how with simple contextual information we can understand the root of a business problem.

The company was experiencing sustained falls in the sale of their ice creams in Chile. These ice creams are sold in brand shops in shopping malls. Executives did not know the reason for these sale drops.

“Consumers” and “non consumers” stated that Savory had fewer flavors than their competitors, which was not true. Something was distorting the brand image, generating that perception, and making it look like the competition had a more varied offer.

In observations of the points of sale, one scene was particularly revealing: a mother with a young child stopped at the Savory counter, and picked up the child to look at the flavors that were exhibited. Looking at the competition shops, we observed that they had large, well-lit cases that allowed people to look at the diversity of flavors from afar.

On the contrary, at Savory, the flavors were hidden, and Savory’s layout at the point of sale and the POP material focused exclusively on the 2x1 sales: the “reading” of the “consumers” and “non-consumers” was that Savory did not have many flavors and, consequently, they ended up preferring the ice creams of the competition.

SAVORY



COMPETITION



Changes in the layout, stressing the ice cream flavors, and changes in the communications strategy, among other things, were enough for sales to rise to the levels expected by the company.

SAVORY's SOLUTION



II. CASE: Cemetery. Parque del Sendero.

Another discovery, of greater emotional complexity, occurred at the Parque del Sendero cemetery.

Parque del Sendero is a park-like cemetery, located in Santiago, aimed at low income “clients”. The sales of lots were good, but there was a big problem, out of control, and without possibilities of finding a solution: the administration and the bereaved were constantly confronted.

To maintain a cemetery looking like a park, there are permanent cleaning and grass cutting activities that have to be carried out. This required taking out or moving the presents and ornaments that the bereaved left in the niches of their loved ones.

Excess ornaments made it difficult to carry out the maintenance activities that the park’s administration wished to maintain.



Through observation and talks with the family of the deceased and niche owners, and walking around the cemetery, we were able to establish the symbolic value that a grave has for Santiago’s low-income population.

When there is little money and decisions have to be made regarding one purchase or another, low-income people in Santiago prioritize buying a grave rather than a home. Thus, the grave becomes the closest thing you have to a real estate property, and it is used as such, “decorated” and expanded at will. The feeling is that nobody, except for the family, has the right to withdraw the gifts that “decorate” the grave.

At the same time, the administration insisted that they sold graves, and as owners of the park-cemetery they had the responsibility of taking care of the premises and, therefore, property over the graves and any object that could hamper the maintenance of the park.

When the administration became aware of the fact that people buy “their own home” and not a grave, small house-like structures were built, enabling the protection of the offerings and presents, while at the same time establishing limits for the maintenance activities to be carried out to maintain the “Park”.

SOLUTION



Sales increased by 60 percent when the administration understood that people bought “their own home”, and offered a place to safe keep the “goods” that family left for the deceased. It is important to highlight that the cost of the solution was insignificant.

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