

7 Tips for Effective Cross-Cultural Research

1 Research Starts Before you Leave; Do your Homework

Read newspapers and articles from your targeted country, not just the International papers targeted to Westerners. Research the culture, history, local customs, rituals, Holidays and religious differences. Learn about verbal and non-verbal communication, negotiating and work styles.

2 On the Ground; Get Outside + Immerse yourself

Take pictures of everything; this visual diary will reveal the codes and rituals of everyday life. Read local papers and magazines, watch local television, listen to local radio, collect local products and artifacts even though you may not understand the language you will absorb cultural cues and learn how others interpret everyday products and situations. Ask questions, as an outsider you are expected to ask nonsensical questions.

3 Use Local Intelligence; Hire Locals to be your Cultural Tour Guides

Gain credibility and legitimacy by using a local interpreter or key informant. If you are going into a city use a native interpreter from that city. If you are visiting large parts of a country do not attempt to use the same interpreter in rural and urban locales, intra or micro-cultural differences and indigenous perspectives may be infused with cultural bias and not be correctly interpreted. Again do not be afraid to ask questions.

4 Avoid Ethnocentrism; Use Cultural Relativism

Leave your own pre-conceived assumptions and stereotypes behind. Use the Insider vs. Outsider method in order to avoid seeing and interpreting through your own cultural lens. Take on the role of visitor completely, regardless of whether it is your first visit or fiftieth visit you will always be a foreigner in a foreign land.

5 Don't do Research in a Vacuum; Research in Context

Observe in context, in the natural environment. Do not quarantine respondents in sterile rooms. Customs and rituals vary greatly amongst different populations and affect brand perception, interpretation and usage patterns. In order to understand behavior it is necessary not only to understand the cultural drivers and motivators but also to observe the visual details, non-verbal clues and attitudinal information during the actual usage and consumption process.

6 Use Image Based Stimuli + Ask Open Ended Questions

Collages, diaries, "Day in the Life" scenarios or the bubble figure methodology are all formats which do not rely on verbal dialogue yet can be easily adapted to different cultures. When working with a translator, ask open-ended questions to gain valuable insight and avoid injecting bias.

7 Be Fluid + Flexible

The practical and logistical issues of data collection in different cultures is ever challenging, use these as an opportunity to learn even more about cultural perspective and interpretation. Remember that original hypotheses may need to be modified once in the field and adapted accordingly.