

ETHNOGRAPHY

AN UNFILTERED VIEW OF BEHAVIOUR
CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE @ IPSOS




WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH?

Ethnography helps you get a deeper, more intimate understanding of people, and positions their behaviours within social and cultural norms.

Rooted in anthropology, it is an observational practice in which ethnographers spend an extended period in a person's life, accompanying them and following their schedule for the day.

Not only does ethnography look at specific behaviour, it also explores the context of that behaviour. It examines people's relationships with others, their environment, their emotions, and their culture – all of which create engrained attitudes that greatly influence how they think and behave.

Ethnography examines what people do alongside what they say. Together, this paints a holistic picture of people's lives. Using trained ethnographers in the field is key to the methodology – for empathy, to direct the flow of the interaction, and to capture the most pertinent data needed for the research. Video is used to document fieldwork, for analysis and to bring findings to life in a report.



In the world of market research, there are many different ways of conducting ethnographic research, but when we talk about ethnography, we mean:

BEHAVIOUR

Going beyond what people say, ethnography allows for the observation of in-situ behaviours that are often habitual or routine. This is important because people are often unable to articulate things that they do instinctively.

EMPATHY

Empathy allows researchers to truly understand how a participant experiences the world: it allows the researcher to 'walk a mile in their shoes'. A good ethnographic researcher can build rapport with a participant and make them feel comfortable opening up.

OBSERVATIONAL

Ethnographic researchers are specially trained to closely observe participants' behaviours, nuances in their relationships, and their wider environment.

PARTICIPANT LED

Ethnographic interviews are based around the participant's daily routine. They lead the conversation, with the ethnographer asking questions where and when it is appropriate.

USING ETHNOGRAPHY TO PREDICT TOMORROW'S BEHAVIOURS

Robust ethnographic research allows us to document and analyse the behaviours and attitudes of today, but what about those of tomorrow? Our world is changing at an incredible pace, and we need to be able to predict what people will be doing and thinking in one year's time, in five years' time, even in ten years' time.

Using ethnography, we future-sense by mapping the social practices of the 'leading edge' individuals who demonstrate attitudes, behaviours and habits that will be adopted by the general population in the coming years. Although they may sound like an enigmatic group, the 'leading edge' actually make up 15% of the population; they aren't difficult to find. What is difficult however, is accurately identifying 'leading edge' behaviours: what are they doing now that is different or unique to the rest of the world, and what's the likelihood that these behaviours will be normalised?



Take minimalist living as an example. The trend was popularised with the release of Mari Kondo's "The Life-changing Magic of Tidying", and although it is known by many, it is just the 'leading edge' who are actively making changes to their lifestyle and the environment. With this group's enthusiastic uptake, however, we are starting to see sparks of aspiration amongst the wider population, and small but significant changes in behaviour.

Ethnography allows us to understand the motivations behind these behaviours, giving us the tools to predict what people will be doing, thinking, and feeling in the future. Finding culturally relevant 'leading edge' behaviours allows us to map how trends will gather pace and momentum.



WHEN TO USE ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography works well as a foundational piece of research where business questions are open or investigative. This extends to analysing behaviour cross-culturally, segmenting consumers by need states, searching for white space, and targeting behaviour change. Ethnography is less suited to very specific research questions, where there is little behaviour to be observed.







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