

## **THE APPLICATION OF MIXED RESEARCH METHODS IN THE ANALYSIS OF THE “CHILD HELPLINE” ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN (2011-2014)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Advertising companies before they initiate and after they launch an advertising campaign, follow communication research approaches in order to specify people's understanding and approval/acceptance of the advertising messages and visuals. It is a good habit to develop at least focus group or in depth interviews with the representative of target group, but quite often it is only the internal discussion of the designer's own self. With the case of Child helpline launched in Estonia, the authors had a possibility to execute focus group interviews with main target groups (adults and youngsters) after every campaign was already launched (2011-2013). Sampling methods about both research methods are discussed.

Keywords: Mixed research methods, Social marketing, Social advertising, Children, Processing of advertising information, Cognitive defense, Social modeling, Social capital, Trust; Estonia

## 1. Introduction

Researchers focus for a one or another research method (qualitative or quantitative), but in real life we can benefit from the mixed strategy. Qualitative research may give us input for the quantitative research and after getting results, we can evaluate outcome with qualitative research again for better interpretation of quantitative numbers. Evaluation of Estonian Child Helpline advertising was such a case.

Mixed-Method studies have emerged from the paradigm wars between qualitative and quantitative research approaches to become a widely used mode of inquiry. Depending on choices made across four dimensions, mixed-methods can provide an investigator with many design choices which involve a range of sequential and concurrent strategies. Defining features of these designs are reported along with quality control methods, and ethical concerns. Useful resources and exemplary study references are shared (eg. Terrell, 2012). "Mixed-Methods Studies are studies that are products of the pragmatist paradigm and that combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008).

Quantitative research (i.e., a positivist paradigm) has historically been the cornerstone of social-science research. Purists call for researchers to "eliminate their biases, remain emotionally detached and uninvolved with the objects of study and test or empirically justify their stated hypotheses. Qualitative purists support a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm and "contend that multiple-constructed realities abound, that time- and context free generalizations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value bound, that it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects, that logic flows from specific to general and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality ( eg Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In-depth analysis may take place (Kavoura and Bitsani, 2014).

The End of the Paradigm Wars and the Emergence of Mixed Methods calls in the 80's and 90's for "a truce" between the two major paradigms. Many major authors and researchers felt that quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are compatible. Many social-scientists now believe there is no major problem area that should be studied exclusively with one research method. Quantitative tells us "If"; qualitative tells us "How or why (eg. Terrell, 2012). "Paradigm relativism – "the use of whatever philosophical and/or methodological approach (that) works for the particular research problem under study" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008, p. 9).

This paper aims to examine the way both quantitative and qualitative methods can be employed before the initiation of advertising campaigns. In particular, it focuses on helpline and will present the way of outcome which help us to change the advertising language (visuals and messages) in order to be more clear and influential for an advertising agency's target group.

## 2. Social Marketing -definitions

Social marketing" is a process designed for those working to create social change that will improve the lives of others, or society in general. It is not a theory, but a practical approach to follow in order to create and manage needed social change. Social marketing is defined as the application of commercial marketing and communication principles to public initiatives/programs in order to achieve social goals through behavior change. The mission of social marketing programs is to benefit the consumer and or society, not the host organization (eg. Sutton, 1999). Social marketing uses same techniques/ tactical tools, but the strategy is totally different. Child helpline campaign applied more to the so called "marketing mix", where for the marketing well known 4P (Product, Place, Price, Promotion) is added fifth P- Politics (McCarthy, 1960). It means package of different political and environmental supportive activities, which help to gain strategic aim of social marketing.

"Social marketing programs will typically address at least five areas (often called the 5 P's) and only one of those areas is communication. The areas covered by social marketing include: What is being offered to the consumer (Product)? What must the consumer do to receive the offering (Price)? How will the consumer access the offering (Place)? What kind of policy environment is needed to support the effort (Politics)? What messages must reach the consumer to motivate behavior change?" (Sutton, 1999).

The main objectives of advertising campaign are: raising awareness of the Helpline and positive attitudes toward it. Social advertising is the one component of Social Marketing Mix and thus applies to a large extent in social advertising for commercial advertising tactics. Therefore, it is necessary to ask - Do we can apply all marketing tactics in the very same way and how children react on it?

How do children receive commercial advertising, have been studied much. However, there are not so many texts about receiving social advertising messages by children. It is commonly known that under age 8 years are children immature to work with advertising messages in their information processing, but from the age 8-9 will appear little sceptic, who can understand advertising techniques, influence methods and aims.

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The knowledge and skepticism about advertising that is typical of children eight years of age or older is often viewed as a "cognitive defense" against advertising (eg. Sutton, 1999).

The main research question in this study is associated with understanding how well started all these cognitive defense mechanism among advertising target group (12-15 years old youngsters) compared with other target group (adults/parents in middle age).

The effect of cognitive defense is possible to avoid in the information processing if advertising language (visual and verbal) is applied to the target group in the aim identification own self with campaign core message. An advertiser aims to answer questions such as did we succeed with the aim of adequate and quick information process in the children`s mind and good attitude to the core message we distributed?

"All but the newest behaviors have a pre-existing image - a set of expectations and associated feelings among consumers. Images allow consumers to economize their processing of information. They provide reassurance in a changing environment. Overall, the image of the desired action answers the consumer's implicit question: "Is this action something that I can see myself doing? Are they talking to me?" The image comes mainly from: (1) the physical properties or functional consequences of the action and (2) communications about it, such as what peers, role models, authorities, or other influencers say, do, and show. Any communication will project a particularism age of the desired action" (Sutton, 1999).

The concept of social modeling has long been understood by psychologists and by commercial marketers. In the work of Albert Bandura, for example, social modeling plays a central role in social learning and social cognition; that is, the formation of knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs (eg. Bandura, 1986).

So, we also need to ask- is this message good for a role modelling and learning (call to action)?

The important aspect in this particular advertising campaign is trust. We need to analyze it in the frame of social capital theory.

"In sociology, social capital is the expected collective or economic benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups. Although different social sciences emphasize different aspects of social capital, they tend to share the core idea "that social networks have value". Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a university education (cultural capital or human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups" (Putnam, 2000).

Theory of social capital helps us to understand reaction of different target groups to the state activities to establish new regulations and norms, also advertising. If social capital coherence is high then there is effective way to transfer own messages through strong social networks but if it is low then it is better to do it individual level.

Robert Putnam added value for the Bourdieu ideas. He is connecting social capital with trust. Social capital is 'trust, norms and networks' that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (eg. Putnam, 1995).

"Trust and context are inextricably linked. We experience trust in numerous contexts, such as within family, between and among friends, and colleagues, with organizations and institutions. Any discussion of trust must be contextualized to have meaning and relevance. Trust within the context of family differs from the trust we experience within civil society" (Qianhong Fu, 2004).

Based on that we can also ask: Is Estonian social capital and the level of trust enough for our children to target them social advertising messages? Are they accept it or not? Do they trust advertising and the service we provide (child helpline). Answers for these questions may be the outcome of surveys made by mixed methodological strategy.

### **3. The Estonian environment**

Estonia is a country in the Baltic region of Northern Europe. The territory of Estonia covers 45,227 km<sup>2</sup>, and is influenced by a humid continental climate.

According to data from Statistics Estonia, the population of Estonia is shrinking. While there are other European countries like Estonia with a birthrate that is below replacement levels, Estonia lacks immigration to compensate for the negative natural growth. In fact, the number of emigrants is larger than the number of immigrants. As such, the population is on a slow downward trend. The population increased from 1,351,640 in January 1970 to 1,570,599 in January 1990. Since 1990, Estonia lost about 15% of its population (230,000 people). The population decreased to 1,294,455 in December 2011, which is even lower than the number of people that lived in Estonia in 1970.

Although there is a downward population curve, explained by a larger death than birth rate and a larger number of emigrants than immigrants, the line graph of the natural population increase shows the rate of population decrease was slowly diminishing.

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Between 1970 and 1990 the age structure of Estonia was rather stable with around 22% of the population in the age group 0–14 years, 66% between 15 and 65, while 12% were 65 years or older. Due to the low birth rates after 1990, the proportion of the population 0–14 years of age dropped to 15% in 2009, while the proportion of 65 years or older gradually increased to 17% in 2009. The proportion of the age group 15–64 also slightly increased to 68% in 2009 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonia#Demographics>).

#### 4. Description of Research Methodology

In the years 2011–2013 we examined a campaign via focus group interviews. In all three years, two important target groups were in focus: parents of pre-school children and youngsters aged 12 to 15 years old.

We used the focus group interview method to find answers to questions. We strived to ensure the representative nature of the sample, primarily with regard to different opinions.

In the last two years, this research used a semantic differential on individual worksheets in order to better understand the emotions related to the advertisement.

A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members (Kavoura and Tomaras, 2015).

A focus group could be defined as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue.

“A focus group is typically 7–10 people who are unfamiliar with each other. These participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group. The moderator or interviewer creates a permissive and nurturing environment that encourages different perceptions and points of view, without pressuring participants to vote, plan or reach consensus” (Krueger, 1988).

“The group discussion is conducted several times with similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions. Careful and systematic analysis of the discussions provide clues and insights as to how a product, service, or opportunity is perceived by the group” (Marczak and Sewell, 2015). The sampling method here used convenient sampling.

The researchers did a representative survey through a web panel. Online research can take place and may be used in different sectors (Kavoura, 2014). Since the goal of the survey was to evaluate the penetration rate of the campaign among target groups, and attitude to the topic in the population, we used a nationally representative sample. This was done by constructing quotas based on age and geographic region (NUTS codes) of the actual distribution of the target group in the general population. This distribution was then scaled down to the sample size. Such an approach means the researchers have data that reflects the attitudes of the people that is representative of the population distribution in different regions of Estonia.

In addition to the representative country-data, we boosted the sample in regions that have more access to the advertising materials (big cities, especially the capital, Tallinn). The aim of such a sample boost is to provide data for more in-depth measurement of the types of advertising that are concentrated into particular areas of the country, and for which the exposure rate of national data is likely to be insufficient. Since the target groups are not very large, we estimate a 400 respondent-strong sample to be sufficient for the purposes of measurement of penetration and attitude. On top of this, a 100-respondent boost in big cities/Tallinn will allow to measure variation among the target that has seen the advertising materials, and allow for additional qualitative analysis.

The quotas in the adults' survey were calculated on the basis of the age, gender, ethnic and regional division of the population, thus ensuring the representative nature of the survey. In the case of children, the main target group was 10–15-year-olds, but children aged 8 to 10 years were also surveyed in the children's questionnaire. In addition, we conducted a pilot study among all specialists who deal with children. For that purpose, the client (Ministry of Social Affairs) provided the necessary database and recommendations for updating the questionnaire. There are many ethical issues if you're doing research among children (until 15 years). “The most fundamental consideration in undertaking research involving children is deciding whether the research actually needs to be done, if children need to be involved in it and in what capacity. Accordingly, at the very outset of the research process researchers need to engage with critical issues regarding the purpose of the research and the impact that participating in the research may have on children in terms of potential harm and possible benefits” ([www.childethics.com](http://www.childethics.com), 2015). Child helpline doesn't have such issues, but working with children is still more difficult.

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First of all you need to get permission from the parents, because in focus group interviews you will record and make transcription about everything you see and hear. So, there was a possibility for parents to come and see the interview. That was so called “survey room” where you can see and listen, but you`re not in the same room. There was a possibility for interruption via survey secretary. Representative survey was also distributed through parents to the children (below the age of 15 years old). They explained main research questions and helped with questionnaire overall.

## 5. Results: level of awareness of different target groups

The qualitative survey part confirmed the semantic differential results; children did not differ from adults. In this particular survey the benefit of using both methods together in mixed way (focus groups and representative web panel) was visible.

From the qualitative part, the research got not only immediate emotional and rational feedback for the visuals and messages but more or less all the possible barriers (misconceptions), different sources and channels dealing with children`s problems in general. Without it, the research couldn`t have tangible evidence of what kind of situations with children can be as triggers for helping them at all.

Possible answers for the main research questions emerged in the questionnaire such as: how high is the rate of child-related topics (including a helpline) becoming a subject of discussion and what are the behaviors and attitudes of the target group. Quantitative survey let the researchers know the exact rate of all different outcomes from the focus groups. The qualitative results brought forth the issue that awareness rate about the advertising campaigns could not be very high because the target group didn`t understand the visuals and messages before and the quantitative survey confirmed these findings.

The majority of adults did not know that the child helpline exists, while among children the percentage of those who were aware of the helpline was equal to the percentage of those who were not aware. Specialists, who due to their work are involved in helping children, are all aware of the child helpline.

Children, specialists and adults thought that it was a helpline that mainly children should call. In many open answers throughout the survey, the helpline number was found excessively to be long and difficult to memorize. Only a few representatives of all the target groups were able to spontaneously recall the helpline number.

The Estonian society is not one that cares about children`s concerns, and people are not very eager to choose children in need as a subject of discussion. Adults were confused as to the reason why one should call the child helpline. The fear that such information sharing would cause problems, primarily for the child, was ranked high in results.

Children do not know why they should call the child helpline. They were afraid that callers would be persecuted, and similarly to adults children are also afraid that the child they are sharing information about might get into trouble.

## 6. Conclusion

The authors conclude that more attention should be paid to the results from groups so that advertising campaigns can be more effective. Respondents can help advertisers realize people`s needs and wishes and which media they can use based on their replies in focus groups and surveys.

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