Slide 1

Chart 1
'Tackling data overload', the title of this conference. If anybody is going to be challenged by this, it's qualitative researchers. So, today Martin & I are addressing this challenge from the qualitative perspective. We've tried to be balanced. But bear in mind, the first thing most people will say when you mention qualitative research is going into great detail with small numbers of people. And its purpose is to answer 'why?'

Chart 2
Wouldn't it be nice if we could reach the holy grail of research: The notion of quant research integrating with qual techniques to allow us to put numbers on qualitative fluffyness. And wouldn't it be great if technology could take us there?

Well, let me start by saying, I think we are a long way away. And I believe we will never get there unless major principles are ignored.

Can you really quantify an emotion, for example, both in terms of its intensity and in terms of the number of people sharing it at the same level of intensity? And why do you even need to think about quantifying it. I'll explain that later.

Chart 3
Last week I went to the Festival of Marketing Conference. No, I didn't spend a grand on the two-day ticket even though I was wooed with the prospect of seeing Sir Alan Sugar and Monica Lewinski speaking. I actually won a ticket from the ten the MRS were handing out. Result!

I guess I'm always looking for one nugget when I go to a Conference and on this occasion, I wasn't disappointed.

There was a session on how bad digital advertising is. Apparently it only gets 0.04% engagement level, whatever that is.

CHART 3A
BUT Sir John Hegarty of Bartle Bogle Hegarty fame then released his one-liner – the nugget I was seeking:
"Technology should accelerate creativity". He didn't actually say those exact words: he said Technology accelerates creativity, but that was because he was trying to promote the new company he's got a finger in. Anyway, for the case I'm making today, it's better as Technology should accelerate creativity.

Yes, I thought, but this can be extended into qualitative research because qual is highly creative, too: "Technology should

accelerate qual" or even "Technology should accelerate insight from qual". And that has got me thinking. There's loads of great stuff going on in qual, but what technology related stuff is there that is really accelerating insight from qual?

Which makes me question even more stuff. Like why is research commissioned anyway?

So, let's start with that question. Being very simplistic, I believe there's two reasons for research – it's either:
CHART 4
To say 'what is' or 'what was' – the type of research that can be labelled as 'hindsight' or maybe 'currentsight'. A lot of quant falls into this area.
CHART 5
Or, we do research to stimulate new thinking among our clients – the type of research that I think as being "a catalyst for change". To get there we usually need to answer the question 'why?'. Note, I'm not saying we need to ask our respondents why they did or think something 'cos they might not know – system 1 vs 2 and all that. But we certainly should be aiming to answer the question 'why?'

So, I repeat, qualitative research usually aims to be a catalyst for change. We need to provide those nuggets that will improve our clients' worlds.

CHART 6
And these nuggets can come from anywhere – qual researchers use their skills to understand people – then to analyse and INTERPRET, not to give reportage. It doesn't matter how many …. What matters is the quality of the thought. And the ability to 'land' it.

So, let's think about technology that is potentially or even actually enhancing qual research, whether allowing us to understand people at the information collection stage, or at the analysis stage.

CHART 7
And let's be very upfront on this. Qualitative researchers are very open-minded. We are a broad church. (Yes sorry about the image.) We've come from the world of social sciences and anthropology, but most of us have been very accepting of the other newer flank, the behavioural economists. Quallies are very inquisitive and very open to change. Their desire for

improvement is real. But they defend and fight if they feel their skill is being eroded.

And the reason why I know this – until three months ago I was the Chair of the AQR.

CHART 8
So, let's judge technology in this context. Is technology accelerating qualitative research, and if so where and how? Or, dare I ask: is it decelerating insight?
I think the best way to look at this is to differentiate between the information that comes into us, and the analysis we use to that give us the nuggets we are seeking.

CHART 9
Starting with an undeniable truth that defines this conference. Never before have we had so much stuff. Technology is certainly giving us the opportunity to collect a lot more information, so conceptually it has made things better. But has it allowed us to analyse it better? In most cases, probably not.

CHART 10
This chart outlines my thinking.

In blue are the things where qual research has been potentially enhanced whether because it offers a new way of collecting information, a better way, or a more cost effective way. You'll see the uploading of videos and photos fall in this category.

The green items are those where it can be argued that both collecting AND analysing have been improved by technology, although I feel I must add caveats. For example, wearables, eye tracking, facial coding and stimulus evaluations can all offer factual stuff that move from the qual to the quant – we'd only feel comfortable in qual terms, however, if we understood WHY people have responded the way they did.

The red item is where analysis has been improved by technology. There are some exceptional pieces of analysis software out there – things like Nvivo – but these came from academia and probably won't appear in commercial research very much because of the time and inherent cost of application.

That leaves the items where technology may be detracting from the potential benefits of qual research.

CHART 11

Can I start by saying it is my firm belief that data overload of anything falls into this category. **How to tackle data overload**? -> don't get yourself in this place in the first instant!

Have you ever tried to analyse 50 videos of 5 to 15 minutes each and/or 200 photos? Can you imagine it? When we analyse these we might be trying to understand certain behavioural traits, but as important we are trying to understand people – only by doing this can we get to answer 'why'? Contextual analysis is key: How can technology look at a video and (with the exception of age, gender and ethnicity) decide on the type of person we are interviewing? Can technology make a judgement on pride and fastidiousness; on love and devotion that can be gleaned by looking at the photos around the house? Not that I know.

Narrative evaluation falls into a different camp because some software claims to help. So, there's software that is meant to identify positive or negative comments – really? Sarcasm can really get in the way of that!

CHART 12
Just look at Google translate. I did a little experiment. I entered a phrase in English translated it into French then into German then back to English. Here's the final outcome:
"If I'm not a cold shower soon will begin my makeup to melt"
(If I don't get a cold shower soon my makeup will start to melt.")
"You should one of the hottest couple in the timber park."
(They must be one of the hottest couples in this neck of the woods")

CHART 13
Then there's word search coding that can be used with tagging. Put in the word "trendy" and you'll miss out "up to date", "leading", "great dresser", "cool", "hot", "fashionable" as well as all the negatives "not dowdy", "never behind". Wordl is better at the English words that come from one of our invaders. Where there's lots of synonyms the impact is diluted.

CHART 14
Does this really matter? You bet it does! We are looking for the nugget not the general. We want the amazing point of differentiation, not the bland. A print can give you pleasure; but the detail from the original gives you ecstasy. And note the irony – obviously both of these are prints!

I suppose I should mention my thoughts on online communities here, because they have embraced technology to a greater or lesser extent. In my eyes, they reflect two key types:
The small, qualitative online communities like our own Thinking Shed are, in my view, taking the best from what technology offers – they offer good ways of collecting information, but are small enough to allow traditional qualitative skills of high quality moderating and analysis to flourish. Technology accelerating qual.
The continuous communities with higher numbers of respondents (sometimes in the tens of thousands) are really quantitative tools, not primarily designed for qual. True there are qual tasks set among defined minorities, and if they follow the methods I've just outlined for smaller communities, then they may find the nuggets. If they try to collect too much information and/or over mechanise the analysis and/ or concentrate on reportage rather than interpretation, then I think technology has been decelerating qualitative research.

So, where does this leave us? Avoid the bland. Let's use technology to accelerate qualitative, and let's avoid it when it doesn't.

I'm now going to pass to my learned friend who will develop our thinking of when technology is working in qual.

Slide 2

…OK I know the more observant of you will know that the animal in the picture is not a horse but I think it illustrates some of the tensions and contradictions that go into the decision making about methods. Should it be quant, should it be qual? Should we scrape social media? Look at 'big data'.

(By the way anyone know what the animal is? It's a push me pull you with Rex Harrison in the 1967 film Doctor Dolittle.)

I think we need to think of the type of project first. Is it a '**what**' type of project, a '**so what**' type of project or '**now what**' type of project.

I think Ken was speaking earlier more about the **'now what'** maybe with a sprinkling of '**so what.'** Whereas quantitative research has typically dealt more with the '**what'** and '**so what'.**

Personally, I think the distinctions are blurring between pure play qualitative and quantitative. In fact with the advent of big data they are NOW being grouped together. Issue is they are now being called **'thick data'.**

As a market research practitioner it is not the first time that I have been accused of being 'thick' – but, in this context, I quite like it. Although I think I would prefer **deep**. As an aside no wonder big data is winning the intellectual battle if we have named ourselves 'thick'.

So a definition of Thick Data is "ethnographic approaches" that uncover the meaning behind Big Data visualization and analysis.

Thick Data analysis primarily relies on human brain power to process a small "N" while big data analysis requires computational power (of course with humans writing the algorithms) to process a large "N". Big Data reveals insights with a particular range of data points, while Thick Data reveals the social context of and connections between data points. Big Data delivers numbers; thick data delivers stories. Big data relies on machine learning; thick data relies on human learning.

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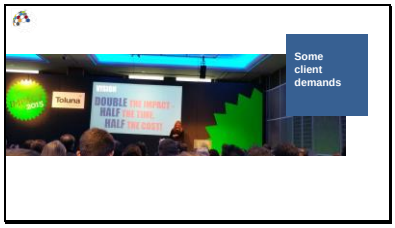
So, now back to our clients – let's face it without them there is no debate worth having anyway. What are ***they*** looking for?

Slide 3



Does anyone know who this is?

It's Christine Habib who is the Global Head of CMI for the refreshment category at Unilever. Here she is at this years MRS conference showing the new Unilever mantra of:

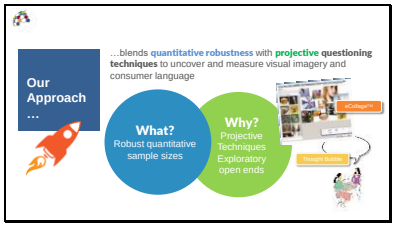
- Double the impact, Half the time, Half the cost

These are some of the types of pressures we are dealing with. I think this is less about method but more about impact. I think that is where we need to focus.

For me, I think if we are going to help companies like Unilever address their business needs, and stay in business ourselves, we need to be a bit smarter.

…
I think…

Slide 4



…we need to address the **what** and the **why** as best we can in the same study.

However, I agree with Ken that **thickdata** will always be best at helping to understand and explain but also provide confidence to act.

The challenge we face as a business is to try and help clients answer the **what** with robust sample sizes that provide confidence etc.

There are good scientific principles at stake here: repeatability, minimize moderator and group effects, scalability, objectivity, ability to compare across markets and segments etc. Let's not lose sight of them.

However, we are also trying to address the all important **why** using qualitative techniques embedded in the same study to provide answers and also inspiration.

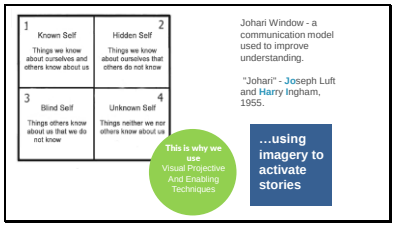
I think one of the great disservices that quantitative research has done (or bad research in general.) is to be **too rational.**

What I mean by this is that the brief says 'why do people buy Evian?' and the question the goes direct to the respondent is then 'why do you buy Evian?'

Have a guess what the answer is?

So to help address this kind of challenge we need 'tools' and techniques that allow respondents to tell us **their** story…I useful model here is Johari's Window…

Slide 5



Joharis Window – named after **Jo**seph Luft and **Har**ry **I**ngham has been around since 1955.

It is a simple model but one I use a lot. I think it illustrates well that the domain of too much quantitative / rational research has been quadrant 1.

I think the best research – what ever form it takes – gets us into quadrants 2 and 3. This is where we get to the hidden self and the blind self revealed by the stories.

The amazon algorithm that keeps suggesting that based on my purchase history I should buy a dress is just not understanding that both my wife and I use the same account. Alternatively, it has a profound insight into how I dress on a Friday night – but I am not sure how it would know this?

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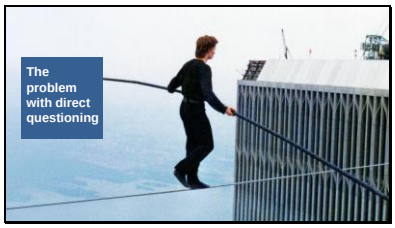
This is where I would like to show you tell you a short story that illustrates the problem with direct rational questioning that tries to address quadrant 1.

Slide 6



Anyone know who this is?

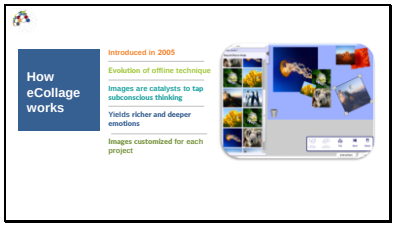
It's a guy called Phillipe Petite in the movie Man on Wire.

In 1974, he recruited a team of people to help him realize his dream: to walk the immense void between the World Trade Centre towers.

The story is also being told in a new film called "The Walk" which is out now.

Now I want to short movie 40 second movie about Philippe – listen to the question at the end and you will hear why it is relevant to market research.

Slide 7



This is a very qualitative technique that we have brought it into the quant 'world'.

BuzzBack's proprietary eCollage™ is a patent-pending technique that 'activates' respondents to interact with the issue or question in a non-lexical indirect format, thus reducing the dependency of accessing rational thoughts (which consistently results in affected attitudinal responses rather than emotional responses). We have overwhelming evidence that by expressing their reactions through pictures along with
follow-up open-ends we gain a much richer understanding than through words alone.

Respondents select images from a library of 100-120 images. Within each group all respondents will be provided with the
same set of images to choose from when creating their collage. Images are randomised to prevent positional bias.

Image selection guidelines will be provided by BuzzBack, but in general they include a broad set of imagery including experiences/occasions, need states, and attitudes and behaviours. The image set will also include a balance of positive and negative imagery (minimises social desirability and
over-priming), range of Universal Metaphors and balance across the colour spectrum.

It allow comsumers to create collages of what say a brand or need state means to them and then they explain their collage. We can then undertake advanced statistical techniques on the data like factor analysis to explore interrelationships among variables to identify common underlying dimensions (factors). To

look for patterns and themes but, most importantly, based on the stories voices of many.

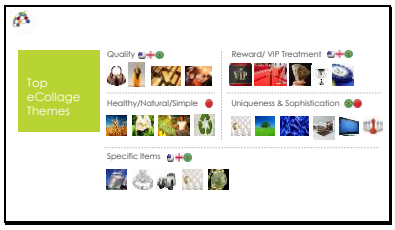
Slide 8

We can construct visual wordles – or picture clouds. Where the images are shown in proportion to the frequency of selection. These allow us to look for patterns.

Like these with understanding the meaning of the word ‘premium’.

With an understanding of the meaning behind the collages we can find…

Slide 9



…both functional and emotional associations that come with the use or purchase of say a premium product in this example.

For us the ability to use images to activate the consumer story and then share these visual stories with our clients allow us to generate business impact – more of the **now what** I mentioned earlier.

Of course there is science behind this…

Slide 10

I took this great picture at the MRS earlier this year.

Research shows that stories create images in the mind that may also trigger mirror neurons. Use stories if you want to get people to take an action.

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So that is where I want like to leave our brief talk. I think we need to develop **tools** to better understand the power of imagery in telling stories and driving action. I think we need to be **thicker.**

But I would like to take you back to the title of our talk **"A question of balance".**

In our attempt to achieve balance with the tools we develop we need to be careful what we wish for …here is a prototype from the world of transport that is trying to achieve balance.

I don't know about you but I think it will struggle to take off…

Slide 11

Thank you for your time