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2. *The Fresh Cream Cakes Market: The Use of Qualitative Research as Part of a Consumer Research Programme*

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The research programme described here deals with *qualitative* research. This type of research has a language and craftsmanship different from that which applies to quantitative research. This contribution has therefore the double merit of describing a more typical case and setting it within the wider context of the basic techniques available to the qualitative researcher. As the author points out, the choice of basic techniques and variants upon these will be chosen to suit the problem at hand. The student can expect only guidance. therefore, and not hard rules.

This case appeared in the first edition of this book and has stood the test of time. The Fresh Cream Cake campaign was simply a good vehicle for demonstrating the use and value of qualitative research. The case has therefore been retained for this edition, but in the discussion sections it has been updated in line with new methodological approaches. Further references have been added.

INTRODUCTION

What is Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research is generally differentiated from quantitative research in terms of methodology. The differences are twofold. Firstly, qualitative

research involves unstructured or semi-structured methods of data collection, group discussions and individual interviews being the most commonly used tools. It is response-orientated rather than *question* orientated, as the flow of any given individual or group Interview will be at least partly, and often largely, determined by the respondent(s), rather than by the format of a prestructured questionnaire. Secondly, qualitative research involves relatively small samples which, whilst they may have been carefully selected to reflect the known characteristics of a target group, cannot necessarily be assumed to be *representative* of larger populations.

These two broad methodological differences between quantitative and qualitative research have led to differences in the criteria upon which each type of research is evaluated, and bought in the commercial context. With quantitative research, the technical knowledge and skills of the individual researcher and the reputation and resources of the research company appear to be critical factors. With qualitative research, the personal skills of the individual researcher are what the client is primarily buying. A paper published by the Market Research Society R&D Subcommittee on Qualitative Research suggests: '. . . it is agreed that the skill and experience of the interviewer/researcher conducting the group is the most important determinant of the value of the results of the study'.'

The same writers also suggest that the qualitative researcher is more like the artist: part of his stock in. trade is his personal capacity for empathy, sensitivity, imagination and creativity, as well as his capacity for logical analysis',

The nature of qualitative research methods, and, in particular, the heavy reliance placed upon the skills of the individual qualitative researcher have led to serious questions about the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Twyman[2] conducted an experiment which indicated that different individual researchers reached different conclusions on the basis of studies they had separately conducted on the same creative material. May (Qualitative Advertising Research, JMRS 1978) questions the extent to which an. individual researcher's knowledge of his/her client's needs and expectations may, albeit unwittingly, influence the interpretation of qualitative data.

However, it seems to the writer that most criticisms of qualitative research stem from attempts to compare it directly with quantitative survey methods, and to employ criteria for evaluation based on the principles of survey research methodology. Such comparisons are on the whole, relatively meaningless, since the two types of methodology are designed, and largely used to tackle, *different types of problem.* The problems qualitative research is most frequently required to address are those of *understanding,* as opposed to *assessment.* Whilst the proper methodological response to *assessment* questions is the methodology of a *test,* the proper response to *understanding* questions is that of a *search.* Most problems of human social behaviour

involve complex variables, where the relationship is not reflex or self-explanatory. Hence, questions such as how do consumers perceive the inter-relationships between brands in a given market? or how might a given advertising campaign be working? are essentially *qualitative* questions for which the methodology of *search* is often most appropriate. If we are searching for understanding, there can be no strict procedure. Furthermore, a given pattern of 'results' has no one necessary interpretation, and it is counter-effective to suggest that it should.

Hence it is important to evaluate qualitative research within the context of the problems to which the techniques are best suited. To employ qualitative techniques to predict which of a range of new product ideas might achieve the highest level of sales is clearly a nonsense. Thus the main criterion to employ when evaluating the worth of qualitative research is that of whether it can provide an *understanding* of a market, brand or service, which can help contribute towards making right decisions. We must *accept* that the unstructured way in which the data are collected means that they cannot be aggregated. Qualitative research can identify the *range* of behaviour and attitudes, but it cannot provide a basis for saying *how many* people behave in a certain way or hold particular views. Trust in the results must inevitably be largely derived from subjective judgemental criteria, and becomes heavily dependent upon trust in the individual researchers conducting a given study.

To lock at it from the opposite viewpoint, the standardised way in which quantitative date are collected also has limitations.'The questions to be asked and the ground to be covered must be determined in advance; question wording cannot be adapted to suit particular respondents, since everyone must be asked for the same sort of information in the same sort of way. Thus, we cannot capture the depth and detail of the individual case. Furthermore, as Stephen King points out, 'people do not go around with ready packaged views on everything—they often need to talk a topic out to discover what they really think'.[3]

The essential point is that we should judge the two methods of enquiry in relation to the problems for which each is appropriate, rather than seek to compare them solely on the basis of technical merit.

Uses of Qualitative Research

The types of problem qualitative research is mainly used to tackle are described below. These applications mainly reflect the commercial uses of qualitative research in the UK.

Broad Market Exploratory Studies

Qualitative research is frequently commissioned to examine consumer attitudes and behaviour in relation to a broad product field or service. This

may constitute an initial examination of" a potential new market for a client, or a fresh look at a developing or changing market. Such studies will often seek to understand:

— how consumers perceive the parameters of 'the market' and subsections within it;
— motivations for purchase of (the product category, and brands within it;
— images of different brands and dimensions which seem key-to brand discrimination;
—underlying attitudes, aspirations and needs which may affect behaviour.

Goodyear in 1978 suggested that 'strategic studies aimed at giving a detailed understanding of the dynamics of a market have been on the increase in the qualitative sector for a number of years'. While such studies frequently constitute initial, exploratory research to be subsequently Quantified, they can also be used to help understand and explain behaviour which has already been identified and described by quantitative surveys.

More Focused Exploratory Studies

Qualitative research is sometimes used to examine in depth the attitudes of a particular group within the population, attitudes towards one specific brand, or one facet of the brand mix.

For example, the perceived need to reconsider a brand's positioning may suggest the need for an intensive brand image study; the desire to expand a brand's franchise in a certain direction (e.g. to pull in more young, single users) may suggest a qualitative project specifically designed to examine the attitudes of this group; lack of understanding of a specific segment of the market (e.g. rejectors of a brand) may indicate the need to explore their motives in depth, and so on.

New Product Development;

Qualitative research can prove especially useful in new product development at a number of stages, e.g. it can help to:

—provide an understanding of the structure of the market into which a new product is to be launched;
—examine the nature of strengths and weaknesses of new product concepts, thus helping to develop early ideas;
—provide an understanding of the contribution of various elements in the brand mix;
—explore positioning concepts for new products.

Examples of the use of qualitative research in new product development (e.g. see Essex and Knox[4]) tend to stress the importance of research as an integral *part* of a development programme, rather than simply a means of assessing a range of alternatives at various stages of the development process.

Creative Development

Again, qualitative research can contribute to various stages of the process of developing advertising.

Firstly, the most important contribution qualitative, and indeed all forms of research can make is that of helping to guide the advertising strategy. The strategy sets out the advertising intentions, and will encompass the advertising objectives, the target audience the advertising should address, and the key thought or feeling about the brand we want the target to take out of the advertising. A thorough analysis of available quantitative market and consumer data will be essential at this stage to understand the brand or service's current position within the market and determine competitive strengths and weaknesses. However, the special contribution qualitative research can make is that of providing an understanding of how different consumers relate to the brand or service concerned, on psychological as well as rational levels. Using qualitative research to explore the relative appeal of different positionings for a brand, using stimuli in concept form, can be helpful at this stage, as in the research programme for Fresh Cream Cakes.

Secondly, qualitative research can aid the development of the creative brief, which will be based on the advertising strategy. Because qualitative research can examine relationships between consumers and brands at an individual level this can help 'bring the target group to life' for creative people.[7]

Thirdly, qualitative research is frequently used to explore the potential of advertising ideas before finished advertisements have been produced. Typically, rough representations of advertising executions will be researched (e.g. drawn storyboards, animatics, rough press layouts) and consumer responses used to help guide further development. Whilst neither this type of research, nor indeed any form of quantitative pre-test using rough material, could reliably predict the sales-effectiveness of finished advertising, qualitative research used at this stage can help indicate whether, and how, advertising may achieve the objectives set, and provide guidelines for further development.

Fourthly, qualitative research can be used to help direct future development of campaigns where one or more ads have already run. Researching these to discover how they work with consumers can help guide the direction of subsequent executions. Such research cannot, of course, determine whether or not previous advertising has been sales effective. We would use different methods to understand *whether* advertising has worked; qualitative research can help us to explain *how* it has worked, and help us to do better in the future.

The preceding summary seeks only to provide an indication of the nature and uses of qualitative research. The main body of this chapter attempts to demonstrate how qualitative research was used at two stages of a research programme for fresh cream cakes. It has been written assuming that the reader is unfamiliar with the basic practices and processes involved. Hence descriptions of the basic techniques and how they can be applied are given at each stage of this case study. Clearly, the picture of 'how to do it' conveyed in this chapter reflects the methods of approach favoured by the writer, and should not be assumed to reflect the beliefs and practices of all qualitative research practitioners or companies.

THE FRESH CREAM CAKES MARKET: A CONSUMER RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The qualitative research studies described here constituted two parts of a consumer research programme conducted for the Milk Marketing Board to examine consumer attitudes and behaviour in relation to fresh cream cakes. The series of studies commenced in the early part of 1977 and was completed by the end of that year.

This research programme was not commissioned in response to any specific marketing or advertising problem, but rather to fulfil a need for up-to-date consumer information on which to base the direction of future marketing and advertising strategies. Qualitative and quantitative market studies had been conducted in 1972, but since that lime consumers had experienced recession, and it has not known how this might have changed attitudes and purchasing patterns. Furthermore, developments in other markets which might be considered competitive to fresh cream cakes had occurred (e.g. frozen cream cakes/gateaux, packet cake mixes, chilled desserts). In any event, ascertaining sales trends over time is difficult in this market. Whilst the Milk Marketing Board was in possession of trend data relating to supplies of *fresh cream to bakers*, this could not in itself provide any reliable indication of trends in *unit sales.*

The appointed advertising agency on this account, Ogilvy and Mather, were heavily involved in the conception and design of this research programme. As with any account, a regular review of advertising strategy had led the agency to question whether the advertising objectives needed revision, and information was needed on which to base any rethinking. Hence the first two stages of the research programme were planned with the agency's needs very much in mind, whilst the third stage was specifically designed to aid the development of future advertising.

During 1977, three separate studies were conducted by Research Bureau Ltd. (RBL is ore of the largest UK research companies, and part of the Research International group):

(i) *A preliminary qualitative study* designed to explore consumer attitudes and behaviour within the product field, and help guide the design of a subsequent quantitative survey.
(ii) *A quantitative survey* designed to produce reliable data about purchasing and eating behaviour, product image, and related consumer attitudes.
(iii) *A qualitative creative development study* designed to guide the creation of a new advertising campaign for fresh cream cakes.

The first and third, qualitative stages of this research programme are discussed in some detail, whilst the second, quantitative survey stage is referred to only briefly. This is simply because it is the purpose of this chapter to concentrate upon qualitative rather than quantitative research techniques. The reader should not assume any underestimation of the importance of the quantitative survey in establishing reliable information about the (then) current status of the market.

Two further points should be m2de prior to a detailed consideration of the research itself. Firstly, this was in many ways a 'typical' research programme. At no stages of research were novel approaches adopted, or experimental techniques employed. Studies very similar to those described will have been conducted on countless occasions, in *a* wide range of different markets by other qualitative research practitioners. However, it is not to the latter that this chapter is addressed, but to the student of market research, for whom a 'typical' case history may be more useful than an exceptional one. Secondly, there was very close co-operation between the client, research agency and the account planner from Ogilvy and Mather at all stages. This teamwork undoubtedly contributed in no small measure to the quality and actionability of the research.

PROJECT 1: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR IN RELATION TO FRESH CREAM CAKES

When this study was commissioned, a follow-up quantitative survey was planned. Hence the specific objectives of this stage of research were defined in the light of this knowledge. In summary, they were *to provide a qualitative understanding of consumer altitudes and behaviour in this market which would:*

— help to guide the design of the quantitative survey; and
— help guide the subsequent interpretation of the results of the latter study.

It is important to remember that the subsequent quantification of qualitative research findings does not always occur, and the design of a qualitative study which would be required to 'stand on its own' might be differently conceived.

The reader will be taken through the various stages of this study, from inception to birth. Figure 2.1 attempts to illustrate a typical step-by-step approach to a qualitative consumer research project. As with all process models, it represents a simplification of the dynamics involved, but it will hopefully serve as a useful framework for a discussion of each stage in the process.

Stage 1: Planning

Planning a qualitative research study involves finding what seems, on the basis of inspection and judgement, to be 'the best' of many possible solutions. There is never any one right way of doing things, no ideally appropriate sample size and structure. Furthermore, a research design which seems, judgementally, to be the best solution may not prove feasible because of timing or budgetary constraints.

There are four main questions to be addressed at this stage:

(i) *To whom do we want to talk*, which market and consumer characteristics will primarily guide sample design?
(ii) *Which basic qualitative techniques do we want to employ*, shall we interview people individually, or in groups, and what sort of interviews or group discussions would be most appropriate?
(iii) In relation to both the above, *what should the size and structure of the sample be?*
(iv) *What Question areas do we want to cover?*

In the case of this study, the main contribution to the solution of these problems was made by the advertising agency planner working on the account. She prepared a preliminary proposal for this study, which was discussed and agreed with the client and subsequently submitted to two research agencies. These in turn prepared detailed proposals for this first stage of research, building upon, and modifying, the initial advertising agency proposal, and preparing cost estimates. Research Bureau Ltd., the research agency selected to conduct the project, then finalised the research design for this first stage of the research programme, in consultation with the client and advertising agency. Hence all the questions listed were addressed, separately and severally, by each of those involved in the project. Each will be discussed in turn, indicating what the solutions were in this instance, and why they were selected.

	Research need determined by client and/or client's agent	
	Client prepares detailed research proposal and may seek quotations from ore or more suppliers	Client briefs one (or more) suppliers and requests they submit detailed research proposals
Stage 1: *Planning*	Work commissioned with selected supplier; research design finalised	
Stage 2: Recruiting	Fieldwork controller briefed; recruiting interviewers briefed and commence recruitment	
Stage 3: Fieldwork	Qualitative researcher(s) conduct fieldwork	
Stage 4: Analysis	Tape recordings of interviews/ group discussions analysed by researcher(s) and preparation of verbal presentation of findings takes place	
Stage 5: Presentation	Verbal presentation of findings to client; and client's representatives (e.g. advertising agency)	
Stage 6: Report	Written report prepared and delivered to client	

Figure 2.1 Typical step-by-Step approach to a qualitative consumer research study

To Whom do we Want to Talk?

Qualitative research studies are usually based on relatively small-scale quota samples. Such samples are not generally designed to be representative of a specific population, but to represent certain sectors of that population. Thus, when deciding whom we want to talk to, we need to try to answer two broad questions:

(i) What is the consumer profile of the market, or brand, with which we are concerned?
(ii) Given the nature of the research problem, which sectors of this papulation do we want to be represented in the sample?

In some cases, where the consumer profile for a product or brand is limited to a narrowly defined segment, or when the problem a study is required to

tackle is in itself very specific, the decision about whom 10 talk to is relatively easy. For example, the writer has been involved in conducting studies to explore:

— how, and when, mothers of first babies make decisions about feeding solid foods;
— why credit card holders who use their cards for petrol, but not for other transactions, restrict usage in this way;
— how businessmen who regularly make transatlantic flights decide which airlines to use.

In other instances, the market for a product or brand may be very broad, possibly including the majority of men, women and children (e.g. chocolate bars), and the research problem may have broad-based objectives, which makes the task of designing a small-scale qualitative sample more difficult.

This first stage of the Fresh Cream Cakes research programme was a study with broad objectives, and the product *is* consumed by men and women of all ages, and by children. However, it was decided to restrict the sample to housewives, who were believed to be primary purchases of the product (based upon findings from the 1972 survey), and who would be the prime target for advertising. Representing different levels of product usage was thought to be of prime importance. Motives for purchase/consumption are often very different for heavy users of a product compared with infrequent users, and in this instance we ultimately needed to decide whether or not we could successfully appeal to all usership groups through a single advertising campaign. Given mat the subsequent quantitative survey would represent a*ll* levels of usage, we believed that it would be most useful to represent the *extreme* groups within the qualitative sample; hat is, heavy users and light plus non-users, ignoring the 'medium' group. This would, it was hoped, maximise our understanding of differences in motivation between those with greater and lesser involvement in the product field, and enable us to hypothesise which measures of attitude and motivation might discriminate between different user groups at the quantitative research stage.

We also believed that we needed to talk to both younger and older housewives, representing the upper and lower socio-economic groups. Furthermore, we wanted to make some attempt to spread our sample across different regions of the country. All these factors helped to determine our final sample structure, which is described subsequently.

Which Qualitative Techniques do we Want to Employ?

It is likely that the vast majority of qualitative research conducted in the UK is based on using group discussion or individual interview techniques, the

former being considerably more popular than the latter, for reasons discussed later. For this project, group discussions were judged the most appropriate and cost-effective technique. However, this is not to say that a sample of individual interviews would not have produced equally useful results.

A 'typical' group discussion might consist of 8-9 respondents, recruited prior to the event, who attend a discussion which lasts for 1-114 hours, chaired by a trained moderator. Similarly, a 'typical' qualitative interview might last for a similar time period, and again be conducted by a trained qualitative researcher, the interview appointment having been made beforehand by the recruiting interviewer.

However, exceptions to these norms do occur, although not, perhaps, as frequently as might be desired. The problem lies in the fact that these tools of the trade are too frequently perceived as defined 'techniques'. They can, and should, be adapted to suit the problem at hand. Qualitative 'interviews' can be conducted with any size and structure of group. The writer (and doubtless most other qualitative researchers) has conducted interviews with married couples (e.g. about cinema-going habits); with family groups (e.g. about television viewing); with peer groups (e.g. about pub going), and so on. Similarly, both group discussions and individual interviews can be planned to last for any reasonable time length, from a quarter of an hour to a whole day (with break periods). 'Sensitivity panels'[5], groups which reconvene on a regular basis over a period of time, have been reported to be particularly useful for some projects, for example, the development of new products.

We ate currently witnessing more experimentation and innovation in the qualitative research field, in Europe more than the US. For an excellent review of the current 'state-of-the-art', readers are referred to Sampson's recent paper[6] which in turn provides comprehensive references for further reading. The key point is that the techniques employed, and the subsequent analysis, should be designed to meet the needs of the task the research has been commissioned to tackle.

Nonetheless, there are some guiding principles which should help determine the choice between the two basic techniques, namely individual interviews and group discussions. *Individual interviews* are often more appropriate in the following instances:

1. *Where behaviour and attitudes may be very private,* and not admissable in a group situation. This may be true for research concerned with contraception, personal finance, certain types of patent medicine, etc. However, it is surprising how far membership of a temporary group can prove supportive, and often encourage, rather than discourage, discussion of 'personal' subject matter.
2. *Where research is required to explore relationships between altitudes and behaviour at an individual level.* For example, motives (or losing

weight vary from one individual to another (the desire to stay healthy, keep fit, be sexually desirable, fashionably dressed, etc.) These underlying motives may govern altitudes towards dieting patterns, slimming food product fields and individual brands. It can prove difficult to disentangle these relationships at an *individual* level using group discussions.

3. *Where research seeks to understand the sequence of events which leads towards a complex decision process.* For example, the choice of a career, the purchase of a car, the choice of a holiday all involve complex, multi-faceted decisi

approach for providing an understanding of the segmented nature of such decisions.

Group discussions seem to be far more widely used for commercial research than individual interviews. This is partly for reasons of expediency. Conducting and analysing 30 individual tape-recorded interviews is considerably more time-consuming, and hence more costly, than conducting and analysing four group discussions with eight respondents in each. It may also be that research suppliers lend to avoid individual interviews because they can be less stimulating, and more tedious, to conduct and analyse. However, apart from reasons of time, cost and possible tedium, group discussions can be a preferable choice in the following situations:

1. Generally, where attitudes and behaviour are admissable and readily discussed in front of others, *the group discussion is an effective tool for generating a wide range of attitude and behaviour pattern examples.* The interaction between group members allows individuals to compare and contrast their views with those of others, stimulating them to articulate thoughts and feelings which night not otherwise have emerged.
2. *Group discussions are especially useful for eliciting brand image dimensions, both product orientated and emotive,* for the reasons outlined above. However, other methods have been claimed to be as, or more, successful in this respect.[8]
3. *Group discussions provide a quick and effective means of exploring advertising ideas in the early stages of development*', where a 'consumer input' to the development process is required. Here we are using consumers, in groups, as 'consultants', to provide views which, taken together with judgement, may help guide and modify future development.

For this project, we decided to use group discussions for a number of reasons. Firstly, the product field seemed unlikely to be one which would

involve private behaviour not admissible in front of others. Secondly, motives for purchase seemed unlikely to be very complex: a fresh cream cake is, after all, a fairly frivolous buy. Thirdly, we knew the qualitative study would be followed by a quantitative survey; hence we wanted to generate a wide range of descriptive attitude and image data to help guide the design of a quantitative questionnaire. Group discussions are ideal for this purpose.

In the event, we may have slightly misjudged the market and consumer attitudes relating to the product field. Precisely because fresh cream cakes are a frivolous product, they represent a sheer self-indulgence, not easily justified on rational grounds. The research results, discussed more fully later, suggested that attitudes towards personal self-indulgence seemed to differ between heavy and light buyers of the product. Had we included a proportion of individual interviews, we might have been able 10 explore the self-indulgence motive in more depth. However, this greater depth of understanding might not have affected the broad direction of our thinking, or proved actionable in marketing or advertising terms. As with many qualitative studies, we did not end up feeling we had lost out, but simply that we could have selected a slightly different approach.

What Should the Size and Structure of the Sample be?

Having decided whom we wanted to talk to, and which qualitative techniques seemed appropriate, we then had to decide upon the exact size and structure of our sample. This is never an easy task, as there is no one obvious solution. Decisions tend to be based upon the following factors:

1. *The extent to which different sample subgroups are hypothesised to hold different attitudes.* For example, attitudes towards skin care amongst women differ considerably according to age; thus in a study on this topic one might structure the sample carefully to ensure *separate* consideration of all age groups, from teens upwards. A study on dog foods might need to consider separately views of owners of different sizes of dog; research into motor oil would need to take account of the extent to which motorists undertake their own car maintenance, and so on. For this study, we believed it would be useful to *separate heavy and light users* of the product within the sample structure.
2. *The amount of reliance one wishes to place on the results.* Whilst one does not usually treat a qualitative research study as reliable in the statistical sense, one does not want to run the risk of the results being wholly misleading. The much-quoted Twyman study[2] indicated that qualitative 'results' based on a two-group discussion sample size may indeed be misleading. Some work has been done to examine the reliability of qualitative research data[9] but concern remains that research users all

too Frequently place 100 much reliance upon data generated from small, unrepresentative samples.

3. *Time and cost restraints.* In the writer's experience, time considerations are often more pressing than cost restraints. Research buyers will often be prepared (or may be persuaded by their suppliers) to tailor their spending to the nature and importance of their problem. Time constraints are, in practice, often based upon 'paper' time schedules which can in reality be changed. However, where they *are* real, it is a question of weighing up whether *some* research would be better than none. Providing that a very small research project is not required to *make* a decision, the former may often be the preferable course. A Few 'examples' of consumer opinion may, at the very least, help those who have to make a decision to see the variables they are considering in a fresh light.

This first stage of the Fresh Cream Cakes research programme was not hampered by unrealistic time or cost constraints, and there was concern to ensure that this study would provide a firm basis for both guiding the development and subsequent interpretation of the quantitative study. Hence we based our sample size and structure upon the hypotheses we had formed about whom we wanted to talk to, and upon which subgroups should be treated separately. The latter point is especially important to bear in mind where it is felt that people with disparate views, or patterns of behaviour, may conflict with each other in a group situation in an unproductive way. (For example, research designed to examine motives for cigarette smoking which included smokers and non-smokers in the same group might produce a very real conflict, but reveal little about individual smokers' motives.)

We had already decided that we wanted to talk to:

— heavy and light/non-buyers of fresh cream cakes (light and non-buyers were not thought to be very different, since few people *never* buy fresh cream cakes; we did exclude those who simply disliked the product, since we felt it unlikely that any attempt to convert this group would be cost effective;
— housewives representing higher and lower socio-economic groups;
— older and younger housewives;
— people living in different regions of the country.

We also felt it would be useful to focus specifically upon a small sample of freezer owners, who bought frozen cream cakes, in order to understand their behaviour patterns in more detail, although freezer owners were not, of course, excluded from the rest of the sample.

Our final sample structure was as follows;

Total: 14 group discussions, ail conducted amongst housewives:

6 groups: 'Heavy' buyers of fresh cream cakes (once a week or more often):

3 groups: BCl class housewives (1 South, 1 Midlands and 1 North)

3 groups: C2D class housewives (1 South, 1 Midlands and 1 North)

6 groups: 'Light' and 'non-buyers' (the former were defined as those buying less often than once a month but at least once every three months, and the latter as those buying less often than once every three months— each group discussion included roughly equal proportions of each category):

3 groups: BCl class housewives (1 South, 1 Midlands and 1 North)

3 groups: C2D class housewives (1 South, 1 Midlands and 1 North)

2 groups: Freezer owners who bought frozen cream cakes at least once a month:

1 *group:* BC1 class housewives

1 *group:* C2D class housewives

Within each group, roughly half of the respondents had children aged under 12 years, and roughly half had children aged between 12-18. Additionally, 3-4 respondents out of a total of 8-9 in each group were working full or part-time.

What Question Areas do we Want to Cover?

For most qualitative studies, a brief, or 'topic guide' as it is sometimes called, is prepared in advance, setting out the subject areas to be covered by research. This may be prepared by the client researcher when he/she is quite clear about what is needed, or by the research agency when ideas and input are required from this source. In any event, both parties usually contribute to the content of the topic guide, and it will generally be discussed between them at a briefing meeting. In this case, the final topic guide was written by the research agency, based on the preliminary proposal prepared by the advertising agency planner.

The topic guide serves two broad functions. Firstly, it acts as a formal statement of what the research *is expected* to cover. Secondly, it forms, as the name suggests, a guide for the researchers conducting fieldwork, with which they will become very familiar before commencing research, and to which they can refer between individual fieldwork experiences to ensure that they are covering the ground set out. Thus whilst the content of the topic guide will be determined by the needs of the client, the *form* in which it is

written should be geared towards the needs of researchers. The writer favours the use of broad questions which research should tackle (although these will not, of course, be questions asked of respondents in the form in. which they are written).

An important thing to decide at this stage is the context within which he product field or brand will be approached—in other words, the starling point for group discussions or interviews. It will often be one objective of research to understand how a product is perceived within the broader context of a market, in order to hypothesise which characteristics differentiate it from competition.

In this instance we needed to understand how fresh cream cakes were compared with other types of cake, and whether there was any overlap between fresh cream cakes and other product fields (i.e. dessert products, confectionery products). Hence the topic guide suggested that discussion commence with a general exploration of how different types of cake are perceived and used, later homing in on fresh cream cakes in particular. Arguably, one could have commenced with a general discussion of family eating patterns, to ascertain how fresh cream cakes fit into this broader context. However, there is the danger there that too much of the discussion time will be spent or. broader issues not appertaining to the problem at hand.

Nonetheless, there are occasions when the starting point of group discussions or interviews must be one stage removed from the product category being examined. For example, to understand why a woman chooses a particular brand of shampoo, one may need firstly to ascertain what type of hair she feels she has, and how she wants it to look. To understand why someone applies certain criteria to the choice of a lawnmower, one needs firstly to ascertain the extent and nature of his/her involvement in gardening, and so on.

The brief used for this study is appended to this chapter (Appendix 2.1) and shows how the development of discussion from broad through to more specific topic areas was envisaged. Also appended (Appendix 2.2) are a series of specific advertising positioning concepts which were introduced to respondents towards the end of the group discussions. These took the form of very simple, descriptive statements about the product, which were printed on cards. The objective of including these positioning concepts was not to see which 'won', but rather to help provide more understanding of the relative importance of different consumer motivations in this market.

Stage 2; Recruitment

Having planned the study, the next stage is that of recruitment, namely finding and making appointments with individuals who meet the quota requirements specified. Recruitment is not usually carried out by the researchers who

conduct the qualitative fieldwork, but by trained field interviewers. (These may also conduct other types of survey research interviewing, especially if they work for research companies or fieldwork agencies who undertake qualitative *and* quantitative research projects.) However, it is desirable that some specialist training in qualitative research recruitment methods be given to interviewers, over and above 'standard' fieldwork training. The recruitment task and skills required, are rather different from those needed for survey research.

By far the most common method of approach to recruitment in the UK is for interviewers' homes to be used as interview or group discussion venues, with the interviewer acting as a 'hostess' to those she has recruited. The selection of respondents will be made on the basis of door-to-door interviewing conducted within the vicinity of the interviewer's home. A recruitment questionnaire will normally be provided, which may cover classification factors, product usership and/or any other detail of altitude or behaviour required to determine eligibility. For security reasons, recruitment questionnaires usually contain filter questions designed to exclude individuals who are employed (or whose close relatives are employed) in manufacturing or service industries connected with the product field under investigation, in market research companies, advertising agencies, or by the media. Increasingly, questioning will also seek to determine previous involvement in market research, especially qualitative studies, in an attempt to discourage the claimed tendency for same interviewers to recruit the same respondents too frequently.

Having ascertained that a respondent is eligible, the interviewer will then invite him or her to attend the group discussion or interview venue a; the allotted time. Respondents are usually promised a small gift, often cash, as recognition for giving their time, and to help cover any associated expenses (e.g. local travel, babysitting).

With this first stage of the Fresh Cream Cakes project, this broad method of approach was followed. Interviewers from the RBL Qualitative Research Unit specialist fieldforce recruited respondents and held the discussions in their homes. The total sample of 14 group discussions was divided into seven pairs of groups, one recruiter being allocated to cover each pair. The recruitment questionnaire covered the following information areas:

(i) *Demographic classification:* age; social class; presence of children in household; working status;

(ii) *Screening questions,* to exclude any respondent who had attended a group discussion within the previous 12 months, and to exclude any who were associated with the manufacture or sale of cakes or with advertising, market research or the media;

(iii) *Usership questions,* designed to ascertain frequency of purchase of fresh cream cakes and frozen cream cakes: these questions referred

to other types of cake as well (i.e. packet cakes, bakers' synthetic cream cakes, other bakers' cakes) as we did not wish to reveal the specific focus of our interest prior to group discussions.

Respondents were told we were holding group discussions and interviews about cakes in general, including both bought and home-made.

This practice of holding group discussions and interviews in recruiters' homes has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages are as follows:

1. Private homes provide informal and comfortable venues, conducive to informal, relaxed discussions, whereas hired halls and hotel meeting rooms are less likely to do so.
2. Interviewers experience a sense of continuity between the recruiting task and the 'end result' (for them), namely the *event* of the group discussions or interviews. This helps to motivate then, and, in particular, seems to help ensure high attendance levels. The agreement made between interviewer and respondent is personal rather than purely official — the former invites the latter to her home.
3. This form of approach is more easily organised, and less costly, than hiring accommodation in which to hold group discussions, and paying the recruiting interviewer to attend and act as hostess.

However, [his method of recruitment has inherent disadvantages, only some of which can be surmounted by careful supervision and quality control:

1. Catchment areas tend to be small, and samples drawn from them may be unrepresentative. For example, respondents' experiences of grocery and other retail outlets may be limited to the selection available locally.
2. Even if they are individually recruited, respondents may well know each other socially. Whilst this can aid the conviviality of a group discussion, it may lead to concealment or distortion of reported behaviour and attitudes which might not have occurred in front of strangers.
3. Relatively small catchment areas also mean that recruiting interviewers can 'exhaust' their areas, literally running out of doors upon which to knock. (Unfortunately this may be especially true for interviewers who specialise exclusively in qualitative research recruitment, who may be the most skilled in other ways.)

Qualitative recruitment standards had become a subject of concern by the mid 1970s, and in the late 1970s a working party of the Marker Research Society Study Group was set up to examine this issue, It is the writer's observation that standards have since improved considerably. Controls over

recruitment procedures have been tightened by suppliers', and reports are usually obtained from group moderators to ensure that respondents recruited meet the criteria set.

Stage 3; Fieldwork

One could easily devote a whole chapter to a discussion of how qualitative interviews and group discussions are conducted. This is not least because there are no simple rules; every qualitative researcher develops his or her own style. Hence, this section will be limited to a discussion of procedures, inevitably at a fairly superficial level. Learning how to conduct qualitative interviews and group discussions effectively is best achieved initially by observing skilled practitioners, and ultimately by personal trial and error. The following step-by-step description of an approach to fieldwork is limited to the group discussion technique used for this study, and will inevitably reflect the writer's personal predilections and experiences.

Who Conducts The Fieldwork?

In the UK the majority of qualitative fieldwork is undertaken by researchers who specialise in this type of work. There are some researchers who are skilled in undertaking both qualitative and quantitative research projects, but these are in the minority. Qualitative researchers may be employed by companies who specialise in this type of research (many are quite small-sized organisations), or by specialist groups within larger research agencies. A number work on an independent freelance basis, often subcontracting the recruitment function to fieldwork agencies.

It is important to remember that the qualitative researcher(s) who conduct the fieldwork will usually also be responsible for data analysis, preparing and delivering a verbal presentation, and writing the final report. Thus a range of skills is required at each stage of the process. One attempt to describe the qualities which a qualitative researcher should ideally possess reads as follows.[1]

> They must have intellectual ability yet show common sense and be 'down to earth'! They must show imagination, yet be logical. While an eye for detail is essential they must have conceptual ability. They must show 'instant' empathy yet project themselves neutrally. They must be able to identify the typical yet think beyond stereotypes. They must be articulate but also good listeners. The ability to summarise concisely is essential but a literary flair or style is needed. While thinking analytically they must tolerate disorder.

The same writers go on to suggest that academic training in the behavioural sciences, whilst not essential, car. be a distinct advantage. Certainly there is a tendency for qualitative researchers to have a qualification in psychology or an allied discipline, but there are many skilled practitioners with very different basic qualifications, and some who have none.

There seem to be more female than male qualitative researchers; there are a number of possible explanations for this, which will not be discussed here. However, the important point to bear in mind is that there are few occasions when the sex of the researcher need become a choice consideration. Clearly some subject matters virtually demand that interviewer and respondents be of the same sex (e.g. sanitary protection). In other instances, a researcher of the opposite sex to respondent may have some advantages. For example. a man can more credibly ask housewives to describe how pastry is made in some detail by pleading personal ignorance; similarly, a woman can elicit detailed descriptions of perceived differences between motor oils, or draught beers. However, in general it is the qualities and abilities of an individual researcher which will determine his/her suitability for a given study, rather than gender. For the Fresh Cream Cakes study, there was certainly no Feeling that either male or female interviewers would be the more appropriate; in the event both researchers working on the project were female.

This brings us to the next question, that of *how many* researchers should be involved in a given project. Opinions on this subject differ, but the decision will in most instances be dependent on the size of the study concerned and the time available. Some researchers believe that, where feasible, a single researcher should be responsible for conducting and analysing all fieldwork. The advantages of this are that one individual can compare and contrast the findings which emerge from different sample subgroups, while retaining a concept of the overall results.

However, others favour dividing the fieldwork on a project among two or more researchers, arguing that this will reduce ' interviewer bias' and enrich the interpretation of the findings through the application of more than one head to this task. Certainly, with a large-scale project, interviewer fatigue may become a problem if one individual conducts all the fieldwork. 'Fatigue' here means the boredom that can result from going over the same ground again and again in interviews or group discussions when differences between individual attitudes and patterns of behaviour are minimal. (The writer generally prefers to conduct no more than half a dozen or so group discussions, unless a research project covers a series of rather different sample subgroups.) With the project discussed here, the total sample of 14 group discussions was, as mentioned, equally divided between the writer and one other female qualitative researcher. Each undertook some fieldwork in two out of the three geographical regions selected, and both worked closely together on the analysis and interpretation of findings.

The Group Discussion Venue

Let us now assume that recruiting has been completed and the researcher has arrived at a group discussion venue, in this instance one of the interviewer's homes used for this purpose. What needs to be done before the actual group commences? The interviewer/hostess should, as part of her training, have the necessary administrative arrangements in hand, in short:

(i) She should have prepared the room, ensuring that adequate chairs/settees arc arranged in an informal circle, usually considered the most conducive pattern for relaxed discussion.
(ii) She should have made sure that occasional tables are provided for coffee cups, that ashtrays are available, and that the room will be adequately heated and lit.
(iii) She should be ready to serve tea/coffee and biscuits or other light refreshments as soon as. respondents arrive in order to avoid any interruptions during the group discussion itself.

The researcher will usually arrive at least a quarter of an hour before the group discussion commences. He/she will check that the administrative arrangements are in order, and make personal preparations for the event. These may involve:

(i) Testing the tape recorder *in situ* and checking recording levels.
(ii) Deciding where to sit, and ensuring that a little distance is left between the researcher and respondents at either side so that the researcher can readily have eye contact with all participants.
(iii) Testing the video equipment (if this is being used to show commercials, for example) and ensuring that any other materials to be shown arc to hand (e.g. concept boards, packs).
(iv) Checking the exact composition of the group with the interviewer (there may have been last minute cancellations and replacements); if there has not been time for recruiting questionnaires to be returned to the researcher before the group date, these will have to be quickly checked to ensure that sample requirements have been met.
(v) Taking a last look at the topic guide (which will have been carefully studied beforehand) to refresh one's memory.

The writer prefers each respondent to be shown into the room, and introduced by the hostess, on arrival. In this way an informal atmosphere can be established from the outset, and shyer respondents can hopefully be encouraged to char a little before the group discussion stars. However, some researches prefer respondents to assemble in an adjoining room, and to be shown in and introduced when all have arrived.

Introducing the Group Discussion

The form of introduction used is very much a matter of personal style. Some researchers prefer to avoid any sort of formal 'beginning' to a group, and might in this instance have simply commenced by saying 'we're here to talk about cakes —tell me about the sorts of cakes you like'. Others prefer to tell respondents something of what is required of them, why they have been selected to attend, and how the information they provide will be used. Despite the fact that the public is becoming increasingly familiar with market research practices, a group discussion may be an unfamiliar concept to most, and respondents may be uneasy about now they will be expected to perform. Additionally, it is desirable to explain why the proceedings are being tape recorded, despite the fact that increasing familiarity with tape recording equipment means that this rarely seems to be an inhibiting factor. (Indeed, qualitative group discussions and interviews are video recorded more frequently these days; some advertising agencies and research suppliers have special facilities for video-recording research sessions).

The form of introduction usually adopted by> the writer is paraphrased below. However, this is not set up as a 'model', but simply as an example of one individual's approach:

> 1 come from an independent research company, and we conduct research on behalf of all types of different manufacturer and organisation. A lot of this research is trying to find oat what people think about the different products they buy, and with discussion groups like this we get the chance to hear about your views in a little more detail than we could if we just asked you very specific questions. We usually tape record discussion groups because it is a lot easier than trying to write down everything you say at the time. We listen to the tapes later, and try to summarise what was said, but we don't use your names, so it is all quite confidential. We obviously want you to give your own persona! views, and we don't imagine that everyone here has the same opinions, so do say if you disagree with something that has beer. said.
>
> Now today we want to talk about cakes, and, to start, could you tell me a bit about what sorts of cakes you buy, whether you ever make cakes, and so on.

Following the introduction, some researchers prefer to go round the room, seeking an initial contribution from each respondent. This both enables the researcher to gain an impression of group members, and breaks the ice by ensuring that each has contributed at the outset. However, the potential disadvantage of this approach is that it may establish an expectation amongst respondents of an ordered structure where each mast speak in turn. Other

researchers prefer to let the group 'take off' by throwing out a fairly general question at the beginning (as at the end of the introduction above) and simply letting an unstructured discussion occur. In either case, it is important to try to establish a pattern of discussion *amongst* group members at an early stage, rather than a series of interchanges between given individuals and the group moderator.

Running the Group Discussion

Running a group discussion effectively is much more difficult that it might seem. It is stimulating, but demanding, requiring total concentration throughout. The predominant function of the group moderator is that of listening and thinking, and deciding *when* to interject with a question, or probe. It is only when the techniques of *how* to pose non-directive questions and probes become second nature that the group moderator can concentrate upon listening to, and interpreting, what he/she hears. It is rather like driving a car. The learner will be preoccupied with grasping the mechanical skills; 'What should I do if they don't talk?'; 'How shall I stop them all talking at once?'; 'Have I covered all the question areas?' It is only when these basic skills have become instinctive that the group moderator can concentrate upon the complex navigational task, that of trying to understand consumer behaviour and attitudes in relation to the problem at hand. Thus it is not within the scope of this chapter to teach the student how to run a group discussion, or indeed to provide a detailed description of how these particular group discussions were conducted. This section will, therefore, be limited to describing the role of the group moderator, and providing a few basic guidelines.

Firstly, the group moderator must control the group. It is not simply a question of letting respondents chatter on, but of ensuring that the required ground is covered in adequate depth, and that all respondents are given a reasonable chance to participate. Thus the moderator wilt, from the outset, be trying to assess the group, ascertaining which are the more dominant and which the more submissive respondents, whether there arc different levels of product experience amongst group members, or whether attitudes are polarised and likely to produce conflict within a group. Being aware of the dynamics within a group will guide the strategy for running that group. Some of the questions frequently asked at Market Research Society qualitative research courses and seminars are as follows:

1. *What do I do if people won't talk?* Firstly, don't worry! Your nervousness will be contagious. An initial period of silence is common, but someone will invariably step in to break it. Sit back and relax at the beginning CD a group, thus helping to indicate that you are expecting

the group members to discuss things amongst themselves, and not address comments to 'the chair'. If respondents do run out of steam, change the subject, and if need be, come back to it later, using a slightly different approach.

2. *What do I do about a dominant group member who hogs the conversation?* Play the speaker of the house, and *avoid* catching her eye indeed, try to use your eyes to encourage others to participate. When he, or she, has just made a contribution, ask what the other group members think about it, and fend off further interruptions by saying you want the views of everyone. Often other group members will recognise that you are trying to stem the flow from a dominant or aggressive respondent, and will start to help you with that task.
3. *How do I cope with conflict within a group?* Conflict is not necessarily detrimental. Indeed, when respondents are trying to defend, say, their preference for a particular product or brand faced with others who hold different preferences, they may articulate their reasons for preference more comprehensively. Conflict is potentially a problem where some group members claim a behaviour pattern or attitude which is more socially acceptable than that voiced by others. In these fresh cream cakes group discussions, some respondents, especially light or non-users of the product category, extolled the virtues of home baking at length, which could intimidate those who were neither skilled nor interested in cake making. In such instances, the group moderator can try to adjust the balance by suggesting, directly or indirectly, that the apparently less acceptable form of behaviour is both normal and acceptable. In this instance the moderator could (truthfully) claim that she was hopeless at making cakes, which encouraged those similarly disadvantaged to feel such behaviour was admissible,

There are other types of potential problem which cannot be discussed in detail here, and again the reader is recommended to observe groups in action, noting how group moderators deal with difficult situations.

Secondly, the group moderator inevitably has a considerable influence upon both the scope and the depth of the data collected. He/she will constantly be seeking to understand and interpret responses in order to decide whether, and how, to probe for more detail; whether to approach a subject from a different angle; when to cut conversation short and when to prolong it, and so on. With this Fresh Cream Cakes study, whether or not respondents indulged in solus eating, and how they fell about this, seemed to encapsulate more general attitudes towards self indulgence. Hence, this aspect of behaviour was probed in more detail than had been anticipated at the outset.

Thus it is not simply a question of leading the group in order to cover the required ground, but of deciding where the group is leading you; of being

prepared, on some occasions, to adapt one's plans radically in order to pursue a line of thought which one had not anticipated. Within any given research project, individual groups may, therefore, follow very different formats, and this study was no exception. For example, light and non-users of fresh cream cakes spent more time discussing the perceived value for money of the product compared with home-baked cakes, whilst heavy users rarely compared these two types of cake on any dimension. Thus the writer can only give an indication of the *types* of questioning and probing technique employed in this study.

The group moderator will need to pose *non-directive questions* at various intervals during the group discussion, to change the direction of discussion where this is becoming stagnant and unproductive, and/or introduce completely new topics. For example, at an early stage in these group discussions, moderators asked respondents whether they perceived cakes in terms of various broad 'types', in order to ascertain the consumer view of the structure of this market. Consumers could indeed talk about different categories of cake; those made once a week, and kept in the cake tin to cut into; those made or bought primarily for children's teas; special occasion cakes; cakes which could be used as desserts, and so on. From this baseline, it became easier to comprehend how fresh cream cakes fitted into consumers' perceptions of the market. The experienced group moderator will fall into the habit of asking such questions in a non-directive manner. Even very specific topics can be introduced without leading respondents; for example, if one wants to turn attention towards frozen cream cakes, simply asking 'What about frozen cream cakes?' is enough to provoke discussion.

In addition to non-directive questions, the group moderator will also introduce *non-directive probes* to encourage elaboration or further explanation of a point which has been made. For example, it became clear during group discussions that respondents considered fresh cream cakes to be rather 'special'. Clearly it is important to understand which dimensions contribute most to this 'special' image. To what extent do the appearance of the cakes, the price, the cream content, the shops in which they are sold, the eating occasions with which they are associated each make them 'special'? Simply asking 'In what way are they special?', or 'What is it that makes them special?' will provide the required detail. It is an important part of the group moderator's task to follow up broad judgemental descriptors: epithets such as 'good quality', 'good value for money', and 'nice taste' mean very different things in relation to different products.

Within group discussions or individual interviews, *projective techniques* may be used to explore motives for using a product, or attitudes towards it, which respondents may find difficult to articulate or of which they may not be wholly aware. Where choice of a particular product or brand reflects an individual's ideal self-image (e.g. perfume and other toiletry products,

alcoholic drinks, cars), projective techniques can be especially useful in helping to elicit the less rational, but often highly motivating dimensions of brand imagery. (It is not within the scope of this chapter to describe the range of projective techniques available; interested students are advised to read about these elsewhere (see Sampson;[6, 10] Oppenheim[11]).

However, in this study we were not dealing with a product field in which motives for purchase were likely to be emotionally complex, or related to idea, self-image projection. Hence the only projective technique employed as the very commonly used one of asking respondents to imagine a 'stereotype user', a typical cream cake buyer and eater, and describe their images in terms of perceived appearance, personality, lifestyle, and so on. The images thus obtained helped provide an understanding of differences between heavy and light users in terms of attitudes towards the product and motives for purchase (see 'Findings').

Finally, it must be reiterated that this limited description of the practice of leading group discussions can give very little indication of the complexities of the process. The group discussion leader must constantly be aware, and interested in this process; sensitive to the dynamics of the group, and to the needs of individual respondents; considering, interpreting, and following up data as it emerges. He/she must control the group, without being authoritarian; be supportive, while remaining detached. It is a demanding, but stimulating task, and not to be underrated.

Stage 4: Analysis

Let us now assume that all the fieldwork is complete. How does one start to tackle the analysis of what often amounts to many hours of tape-recorded conversation? Broadly speaking, there are two basic processes involved, which usually occur concurrently rather than consecutively:

1. *A systematic analysis* of the tape recorded conversation is undertaken, involving initial transcription and subsequent organisation of the data.
2. *A conceptual analysis* of the data: this occurs throughout the process, namely whilst one is conducting the fieldwork, whilst transcribing the tapes, and when drawing together the material. Here the researcher's experience, possibly within the same or allied markets, will be instrumental in helping to *explain* the data. Where more than one researcher is involved in a project, this conceptual analysis will also entail discussion between them.

When it comes to detailed patterns of working, individual researchers have their own favoured methods. This section will simply describe, step-by-step, how the two researchers involved undertook the analysis on this project, which

reflects the procedures normally adopted within RBL at that time. Most reputable qualitative researchers probably adopt similar procedures on most projects.

Tape Transcription

The physical task of transcribing the tape-recorded material can be undertaken by an audio-typist, leaving the researcher to analyse the typed transcripts. This saves the researcher's time, and can prove especially desirable where large individual interview samples are involved, when personal transcription car. prove both tedious and time-consuming. The increasing sophistication of portable tape-recording equipment means that even group discussion recording can be of a sufficiently high quality to be transcribed virtually word for word by an audio-typist. However, on this project, the researchers involved produced edited transcripts of their own group discussions. This entailed transcribing the majority of each group discussion verbatim, omitting only conversation judged irrelevant, and in some instances summarising repetitive comment.

There are advantages to be gained from personally transcribing one's own discussions and interviews, especially for the relatively inexperienced researcher. Firstly, a typed transcript cannot replicate the atmosphere of a group discussion; the pauses, the laughter, the levels of enthusiasm generated in discussion cannot be experienced by reading a transcript. Secondly, when listening to the original recording, one can recall better the contributions of individual members, and hence distinguish differences of opinion which may have emerged at various points during the group. (Stereo recording equipment facilitates one's ability to recall individual members of a group in relation to where they were sitting in the room.) Thirdly, one can more readily gain an impression of the extent to which there was group accord or dissension on a given point. Murmured agreements and disagreements may not be transcribed as such.

To some degree, the material can be organised during the transcribing process. For example, notes can be made in the margin indicating the relevant topic area; reaction to different stimuli (e.g. ads) can be written on different pages, and so on. Furthermore, thoughts and ideas relating to data interpretation can be noted down within the body of the transcript or in the margin.

Finding a Conceptual Framework

Before becoming involved in the detailed organisation of the transcribed data, the two researchers working or. the project had a lengthy discussion of the findings and, with the aid of a flip chart, worked out a preliminary framework

for structuring the presentation. Words and phrases indicating their impressions of the detailed findings were jotted down under various section headings, and points of interpretation discussed. Differences between findings which emerged from different sample subgroups were mulled over, and reasons for such differences hypothesised. Intuitive thoughts were aired, and personal hunches discussed. This interchange of views about the interpretation of the findings, and their implications for marketing and advertising decisions. is especially important as this encourages consideration of *different* explanations of consumer responses, thus helping to avoid any tendency to try to make the findings 'fit' an overall 'story'.

However, the two researchers involved had been in regular contact throughout the fieldwork process, discussing findings as they emerged, and comparing views. Hence, a hypothesis put forward by one researcher would be probed by the other in later groups. As discussed earlier, the analysis and interpretation of qualitative research findings occurs throughout the fieldwork. Nonetheless, a more forma! discussion of findings can be particularly useful at this point in time, when, following the transcription of the data, researchers can become lost in the detail.

Organising the Data

Armed with the 14 edited group transcripts and the conceptual framework resulting from the interim meeting, one of the two researchers then set about drawing the material together. Using separate sheets of paper for each main subject area, and different coloured pens to represent different sample subgroups, the comment emerging from each group was summarised. Whilst with individual interviews it is possible to attempt some quantification (e.g. noting the extent to which a particular descriptive term is used), with group discussions this is less feasible, and one must be limited to noting where opinion seemed to be conflicting or otherwise within any ore group. Some practitioners prefer to write out individual verbatim quotes to illustrate particular points on these analysis sheets, whilst others may note down references to these, based upon transcript page numbers, so that they can be readily found for use to illustrate the written report commentary.

This researcher then prepared draft presentation charts based upon the conceptual framework and the detailed analysis, which were discussed with, and modified by, the second researcher prior to the formal presentation of findings.

Stage 5: Verbal Presentation

As with most qualitative research projects, a verbal presentation of the findings of this research was given to the Milk Marketing Board and their

advertising agency prior to the production of the written report. The verbal presentation often assumes considerable importance, partly because time constraints may mean that action is based upon this. Furthermore, senior marketing and advertising personnel who often attend verbal presentations of research findings may be unlikely to read the written report. The presentation may also serve as a forum for discussion of the research findings amongst all interested parties.

As with any form of verbal communication, careful structuring of content, clarity of expression and an interesting delivery arc all important. Qualitative researchers are, rightly or wrongly, often judged upon the 'quality' of their presentation, and in this context the concept of quality includes both presentation content and communication abilities. Again, this section cannot provide instruction to the novice. Each individual will adopt his or her own style of presentation, and indeed will adapt this to the needs of the audience. The following paragraphs will simply set out how this presentation was organised, and suggest a few guidelines for consideration.

The structure of this presentation followed the following, fairly typical format:

(i) *Research objectives* were outlined to remind the audience of the main purpose of the research.

(ii) *The research method* was briefly described, indicating the achieved sample size and structure.

(iii) *Main findings* were presented step-by-step, commencing with a summary of consumer perceptions of the cake market as a whole, and focusing in to a more detailed consideration of fresh cream cakes in particular.

(iv) *A final summary* outlined what seemed to be the most important hypotheses to emerge from this research.

The content of the presentation was tabled at the outset; this indicates to the audience exactly what will be covered, and helps to avoid premature questions. The entire presentation lasted for about an hour and a quarter, and was followed by general questions and discussion.

The writer generally prefers to chart presentations, using summary words or phrases to represent each point one wants to make about a particular topic area. Sometimes a diagrammatical form of presenting a concept of market structure, or a decision process model, will help communication. Wherever possible, summary words or phrases used or. chars should represent consumer language, and the verbal presentation itself can be brought 10 life by illustrating points that are made with verbatim quotations from group discussions or interviews.

The advantages of using charts are that these provide a structure to the presentation, both for the presenter and the audience, and also place specific

points within their broader context. This helps to avoid the danger of individual audience members latching on to the specific hypotheses which support their own views, and ignoring those which do not! However, some researchers dislike using charts feeling that they render qualitative findings into 'tablets of stone'.

The *content* of the main findings section covered the following broad areas, and the final report echoed this structure, although the latter was, of course. more detailed:

(a) *Broad perceptions of the cake market,* and consumer-defined 'segments' within it.
(b) *Choice and preference dimensions in relation to bought vs. home-made cakes,* and how these dimensions operate within different market segments.
(c) *Perceptions of fresh cream cakes,* including:
  — product characteristics;
  —eating experiences and satisfactions;
  — roles of fresh cream cakes, including physical, social and psychological roles;
  — serving occasions and product suitability for each;
  — perceptions of different types of fresh cream cake, especially individual vs. large.
(d) *Frozen cream cakes,* in comparison with 'fresh'.
(c) *Purchasing patterns,* especially impulse vs. planned decisions.
(f) *Retail outlets,* concentrating particularly on perceived cost and quality differences.
(g) *Projected images* of stereotype fresh cream cake eaters.
(h) *Reactions to a series of positioning statements,* prepared by the advertising agency, which had been introduced at the end of the group discussions to help guide the direction of advertising strategy development.

Finally, the importance of an effective verbal presentation canot be over-stressed. Data which are not adequately communicated to those who will use them are data wasted. There are many traps for the unwary, and this section will conclude by offering a few suggestions for avoiding these.

1. Resist the temptation to present *all* the data. When planning the presentation, go back to the research objectives, and ensure that both content and structure are geared towards meeting these. This research project represented the first stage of a basic market study; hence there was a requirement to cover broader attitudes to the cake market in general, at least in summary form. However, many projects have very

specific objectives, and in these instances it may be a mistake to present broad attitudes Towards a market which, while they might have been covered in research to ascertain opinions of a specific brand within a broader context, may simply tell the audience what they already know from other research,

2. Do indicate where *differences* in attitude between sample subgroups seem to be evident, or where findings seem unclear. Trying to mould qualitative results into one 'story', in which the various pans hang together, may well distort the true picture.
3. As far as possible, do try to make it clear when you are reporting consumer statements of behaviour and attitudes, and when you are discussing your *interpretations* of this reported data. Additionally, it is important to consider, and present, alternative possible explanations for a particular research finding.
4. Try to convey a real flavour of the people you talked to by ***using*** *their language*, and conveying how, and when, their enthusiasm was expressed. Creative people in advertising agencies will be particularly receptive towards a research presentation which helps them to envisage their target audience, and understand how the consumer feels and thinks. If groups have been video recorded, edited highlights can prove an interesting way of illustrating specific research findings.
5. Try to resist the attempts sometimes made by research users to 'quantify' the findings. 'How many people said that?' is a frequent form of question in a research presentation, and while one can reasonably indicate whether the point in question seemed to be a majority view, or a lone voice in the wilderness, *one should discourage the tendency to try and place numbers on qualitative findings.* With group discussions in particular, it is often open to conjecture whether an opinion voiced by one respondent was also held by others who were silent at the time.

Stage *6: Written Report*

Qualitative research reports usually consist of a descriptive commentary on the findings of the research, which is illustrated by verbatim quotations from the group or interview transcripts. As with the verbal presentation, the main findings should be organised under a series of subject headings, although the report will usually contain more detailed comment. This report was in no-way atypical, and contained the following main sections:

— overall summary;
— background and objectives;
— method and sample;
— main findings (organised under subject headings in a similar fashion to the verbal presentation);

—appendices (recruitment questionnaire, topic guide, and copies of stimuli used, i.e. advertising positioning statements).

As this report dealt with a basic market study, it was fairly lengthy (65 pages of typescript). Projects dealing with more specific problems car. often be effectively reported more briefly. Indeed, the writer questions the extent to which full reports of qualitative research studies are needed, or indeed used. In many instances where decisions are taken on the basis of verbal presentation and subsequent discussion of implications, lengthy written reports which arrive some weeks later are often redundant. In such instances, swiftly produced summary reports, together with copies of presentation charts, are often of more real value.

Once again, this section cannot aim to teach the novice, but can merely offer some guidance. Individual companies and individual researchers develop their own particular styles of structuring and writing reports, and different styles suit different buyers. The following observations arc offered:

1. *The summary* of a qualitative research report is extremely important, as this may be the only part read by some. It is preferable to restrict the summary to key findings, rather than attempt a synopsis of all results.
2. The report should be illustrated with *apt verbatims,* which will add colour and life to the text. The writer has seen reports which read as if the verbal quotes are simply linked together with text, or, as Mary Tuck once commented, where they are scattered indiscriminately 'like currants in a bun'. Illustrations should add to the overall communication, rather than simply labour the point being made or pad out the report,
3. *Interpretations* of findings and recommendations arising out of the research should be clearly referred to as such, so that the reader can be clear when he is considering consumer comment or 'researcher' comment. However, as discussed earlier, interpretation is an integral part of the qualitative research process. Hence one can never wholly separate 'findings' from 'interpretation'.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive summary of the findings of this research. However, some flavour of the results can be given by indicating the nature of selected findings, and illustrating these with verbatim comments.

(a) Fresh cream cakes were perceived to be a *discrete market segment.* They were not directly compared to or contrasted with other cakes, or indeed with other food products:

'You think of them in a class of their own. You can't really compare them with anything else. If I wanted a fresh cream cake, and they didn't nave any, I've no idea what I would choose instead.'

(b) Unlike most other cakes (and, indeed, many other food products) the *bought variety* were generally considered the best. Few respondents attempted to make fresh cream cakes themselves:

. 'Some of them look so gorgeous, and no matter how hard you try, you can't get them looking like that yourself. I suppose it's the professional touch.'

(c) The *appearance* of fresh cream cakes was highly motivating, often contributing to impulse purchase decisions. It was hypothesised that appetising product shots would be all important in advertising:

'If you're standing in a long queue for bread at Hobbley's (local bakers) you're drooling by the time you're served, you can't help buying them.'

(d) *The fresh cream* content obviously constitutes a strong part of the eating pleasure. However, the overall eating experience is sensually gratifying, and in some ways unique. Fresh cream cakes are sweet, but not sticky; 'gooey', but not heavy; creamy, but not cloying:

'It's just the thought of putting your teeth into all that cream.'

'They're pure self-indulgence, but they're not sickly like most sweet things. They must be fattening . . . but they're not heavy like some cakes.'

(f) Fresh cream cakes are very definitely seen as a *treat.* Their purchase cannot be rationalised on the grounds of nutrition value, filling properties or economy. In this way they are more akin to chocolate and confectionery than to other cakes. They represent a small extravagance, which can only be justified on the grounds of pleasure:

'If you're feeling a bit daft one Saturday, you might say "we'll have one each, as a big treat".'

'1 think it's the only luxury we've got left!'

'I buy them when I'm feeling thin and my pocket's feeing fat!'

(g) Fresh cream cakes were perceived to be more of an *adult* than a child indulgence. Indeed, it was sometimes claimed that children are not especially fond of fresh cream, or that they don't appreciate fresh cream cakes, preferring sicklier less delicate confections:

'Children have all sorts of extras. You buy them to treat yourself.'

(h) However, it was in relation to the *personal self-indulgence* motive that frequent buyers differed most from infrequent buyers. The former seemed happy to admit to self-treating behaviour, indeed even to sneaky, solus eating of fresh cream cakes. Any feelings of guilt experienced were quickly brushed aside:

> 'You stand outside the shop, and think "I shouldn't really, but 1 deserve it V
>
> 'We sometimes have one each later on in the evening when the children have gone to bed. It's frightfully mean!'
>
> 'Sometimes I buy one just for myself, and I feel I've got to eat it before anyone sees me. You're making me Feel guilty, all you sharers of cakes (addressing other group members). I'm a secret cream cake eater.'
>
> '1 always feel a bit wicked when I'm having anything luxurious. I think that's part of the pleasure really.'

In contrast, infrequent buyers found it more difficult to rationalise 'selfish' behaviour. They seemed to need mere rational motives for buying fresh cream cakes, such as a treat for guests, a surprise for all the family:

> 'I would feel guilty if 1 only bought one. I would feel the money could buy another loaf.'
>
> 'I couldn't just go and buy a cake for myself without buying some for the family as well. I just couldn't do it.'

(i) When projecting the 'stereotype cream. cake eater', there were again differences between the sample subgroups. Frequent buyers seemed more likely to project a warm, happy person, who enjoyed her food and enjoyed life. 'Someone who would spread a lot of butter on her bread and really enjoy it.' Infrequent buyers often projected an image of someone rich, and rather selfish, sitting in an elegant teashop eating cream cakes on her own.

Overall, therefore, these findings suggested that, above all, advertising should concentrate upon conveying the sheer pleasure obtained from eating fresh cream cakes. Positioning statements which reflected more rational product benefits, such as 'goodness', 'quality' or 'value for money' seemed irrelevant to purchasing motivations. However, quantitative data were needed in order to define more precisely the core target for advertising in terms of demographic profiles, eating behaviour and product attitudes. Furthermore,

we needed to check out both broad and specific hypotheses which had emerged at this qualitative stage of research, especially those relating to differences between frequent and infrequent buyers of fresh cream cakes.

PROJECT 2: A QUANTITAT1VE STUDY OF CONSUMER A ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE FRESH CREAM CAKES MARKET

As discussed at the outset of this chapter, the objectives of this quantitative study were broad. The research was required to provide reliable data about fresh cream cake purchasing and eating behaviour, product image and related consumer attitudes. To provide some indications of changing market trends, the survey needed to be comparable in terms of design and content to the previous market study conducted in 1972. Nonetheless, the findings of the qualitative research described suggested some additions to the questionnaire, particularly in relation to product image and consumer attitude dimensions.

It is not intended to describe the design of this survey in any detail, or to provide a comprehensive summary of the findings. However, some reference will be made to the ways in which this quantitative survey contributed towards our understanding of the market, and in particular how it helped to define the advertising objectives and advertising strategy for fresh cream cakes.

A national sample of 1250 housewives was interviewed, within which five different fresh cream cake usership groups were equally represented (250 each of very heavy, heavy, medium, light, and non-buyers). Whilst non-buyers had not been included at the qualitative stage, for reasons discussed earlier, it was decided to include these at the quantitative stage in order to contrast (heir beliefs and attitudes with those held by the different buyer groups. This effective sample was drawn from a contact quota sample which had been designed to represent demographic characteristics of housewives at a regional level. The survey data were weighted to restore the real proportions of the five usership groups, based on random sample omnibus readings taker. immediately prior to the fieldwork for this project. The overall design replicated "hat used for the 1972 survey, which had been conducted by a different supplier.

The key findings, which were instrumental in directing advertising objectives and advertising strategy, were as follows:

1. The data we had suggested that the market for fresh cream cakes was probably static at best, and certainly did not appear to be growing. The proportion of the buyers classified as 'heavy' purchasers (once a week