The Cultural Triangulation as a Tool to Capture Trends

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Abstract

Cultural triangulation is a tool developed in social sciences field in order to examine and verify the incoming changes of a society by a method. The objective of this paper is to discuss the procedures adopted by the cultural triangulation and how it can contribute for the seeking of trends in new and emerging market movements.

Keywords: trend, methodology, cultural

Introduction

The world is experiencing an era of transitions. Authors such as Gilles Lippowetsky and Zygmunt Baumann conceived words that display the urgency for speed as one of the main results from the relations existing in the current society. Today, as never seen before in the whole history of capital, the need to forecast cultural reactions within a context of rapidly changing and high availability of goods and services is no longer a simple competitive advantage but became essential in the success or failure of organizations.

According to Mota and Rodrigues, any product, service, brand or institution is defined for the meaning people see in them or create from them (*apud* McCracken, 2011, p.10). In this sense, it is valid to say that is being set a demand for professionals to guide companies and institutions in the monitoring of market trends, not only in meeting the temporal needs, but also in finding the ways for its constant development and its continuity as economic and social agent.

This article aims to analyze the trends of research methodology proposed by Martin Raymond (2010), which describes the use of the cultural triangulation as a way of catchment and analysis used by the author in his work. The methodology of cultural triangulation was chosen for stand out in a universe of methodologies aimed at this purpose due to join tools to capture trends with quantitative analysis techniques to provide results more easily assimilable by the corporate world.

Trend

According to Caldas (2006) the term "trend" derives from the Latin *tendentia*, wich meanings are "tend to", "lean to" or "be attracted to". The word has taken on other meanings over time, and only from the eighteenth century the definition has to be what is known today: the general direction in which something tends to move, to veer in an specified direction.

The concept of trend is related to a manifestation, which can be related to behavior, consumption or the "spirit of the times" (or zeitgeist). It could also be described as a sensitivity announced by signs, and for market interests, it acquires meaning of risk reducing (CALDAS, 2006). The whole concept of trend has been built over time and it responds to a specific type of sensitivity, pioneered by modernity, with its cult of the new, the changes and the future, and which postmodernity consecrated.

This term has been gaining importance and increasing relevance for the understanding of the consumer behavior, when related to emotional, behavioral, intellectual and even spiritual questions. It can also be "an idea, as well as a set of similar ideas or interrelated objects" (Raymond, 2010, p.13). These ideas may open new directions for innovation and provide valuable tips for the development of products and services. Trends allow trace routes and scenarios for long-term planning by anticipating the strategic information.

Considering also a scenario in which the changes happen ever more rapidly and in all directions, the trends become a privileged tool to provide an effective and current vision, foresight and strategic view in search for innovation. According to Caldas (2012, p.30) "... a trend cannot be seen as something that moves in one direction, but as changes within complex systems, which should be considered as a whole context". Unlike a style, that is a way, an aesthetic expression, a method or a different way of expressing something new, a trend is the direction that something new or different takes.

Thus, the importance of understanding the opportunities, i.e., the "trends", paved the way for the emergence of new agencies and professionals in this segment of market research: the trendhunters, professionals dedicated to detect patterns or changes in attitudes, mentality or lifestyles that contrast with the predominant features.

According to Raymond (2010), the trend hunting is made in all aspects of society that may be important for the understanding of the recent changes or new seeds in the culture around us. This forecast can be made through studies of collective behavior that can identify changes of great importance which reach the realm of science, technology, fashion, decor, architecture or art, or even more subtle changes and harder to identify in the way of living: changes in the food we eat or the way to listen to music or access the media.

> "The collective behavior studies try to reveal how are created, disseminated and how act behavioral phenomena that affect the masses and crowds, where fall fashion, booms, the coqueluches and panic" (Caldas, 2006, p.47).

These phenomena can be explained through phases or stages: propensity, stress, general belief, precipitating factors and transformation factors of general belief in specific belief, crystallization and spread of a specific belief. It is necessary to

understand every step of the main features contained therein, in order to identify "trends" that are present in these behaviors.

Raymond (2010) says that a trend can be emotional, intellectual or even spiritual. It can be defined as "the direction in which something (which can be anything) tends to move and that has some effect on culture, society or the business field in which it is developed". For example, in the 80`s the reduction and elimination of national barriers in order to facilitate the movement of goods, capital and people opened space to a trend that we now call globalization. In the 90`s, the united desire to consume products without pesticides triggered a trend towards buying green products. Similarly, the way that some of us consume the information (through the media rather than journals), listen to music (downloading them instead of buying CDs) or even a way to describe the sense of ethical (respectful with the environment instead of environmentally indifferent) can be described as a trend (RAYMOND, 2010).

Trends are eventually an important part of people`s emotional, physical and psychological environment, and as we detect them by tracing its path, and use them to predict what's new in the world we live in and what is about to come, we are be encouraging in an important level the understanding of the principles and the underlying ideas that guide and motivate us as individuals.

Besides motivations, people are often conditionally or unconditionally guided by the trends, which come to be understood as imitations. Raymond (2010) says that trends are compulsive, addictive, or in some cases, viral, as they affect us without being expected and sometimes either being required or not. They are spread through what Dawkins calles "memes", wich are a cultural version of a gene, that it reproduces itself in response to social, ethical, environmental or biological changes. Trends are transmitted from a brain to another through a process called imitation, in which a person imitates the behavior of another particularity, observing the advantages that can be obtained by making such imitation, and they are diffused by a group diffusion pattern studied by M. Everett Rogers (apud RAYMOND, 2010, p.17).

In his theory, Rogers describes that, regardless of the type of innovation, the diffusion pattern in a group, community or social tribes is always the same. Start with an idea, where the "innovative" person has this idea, that is transmitted to a group called the primary adopters. Quickly they embrace the idea and transmit to a second group called the most primary, which then transmits to a neighbor group called late majority.

The last group to adopt the innovation is called laggard, which brings the most averse to change or new ideas people.

Identifying and understanding these groups is part of the process of capturing trends in the search for innovation, drawing paths or methods that allow the monitoring of influences and social, cultural and market changings.

Methodology

"Innovation is a vital ingredient for business success" (BAXTER, 2000, p.1). It is continuously present in companies that need to remain active in the always competitive market. The pressure imposed by competitors and consumers themselves means that innovation is not just a gap, but a perceived need. And the search for appropriate trends in order to assist in this process becomes essential.

According to Vianna (2012), industries search for information on trends for the innovation process. This process aims to recreate business models, build new markets, meet human needs and select new ideas in record time, never previously seen. The idea is to understand the new requirements: not only technological, but also from new markets. So in addition to new forms of customer contact, are new paths with a human focused approach that sees in multidisciplinarity, collaboration and feasibility of thoughts and processes, methods that lead to innovative solutions.

Therefore, it becomes essential to find a method, a process or a methodology for capturing or identifying trends in the search for innovation. According to Peon (2000), a methodology is a set of procedures and the ordering (process) to achieve a given goal. In other words, the methodology is a tool for developing a goal, not an object itself. Therefore, it should allow to be used as a tool to solve problems.

> "If you learn to deal with small problems you can also think about solving larger problems. The projective method does not change much, just change areas: rather than solve the problem alone, in case of a large project it is necessary to increase the number of specialists and employees, and adapt the method to the new situation. "(MUNARI, 1981, p.12)

About methodological processes, Brown (2010) describes that there is a better way to go through the process, there are points of departure and useful reference points along the way, but the continuum of innovation can be seen more as a system of

overlapping spaces rather than as a sequence of steps ordered. Thus, the methodological process may be linear or not. It may have a non-linear journey, where unexpected discoveries can occur along the way. These findings can be assessed and added to the process, or brought to revisions of the basic premises. It's a cycle methodology, in which the best must be constantly reevaluated and updated (BROWN, 2010). In his classical study, Munari (1981) asserts that the projective method is not more than a series of necessary operations, arranged in logical order, dictated by experience. Its goal is to achieve the best results with the minimum effort.

In the case of the "trendhunting", the idea of a methodology is to build a clear and objective way to identify and understand trends, consistent with the observed reality. But the quest for understanding the future is already an arduous task itself, and taking control of that future through a search tool for trends proves to be an even more challenging activity. Thus, aiming to clarify the process of capturing trends, we analyzed the methodology of cultural triangulation as a way to identify and understand the future through the trend analysis.

The cultural triangulation

Cultural triangulation is a methodology to capture trends developed by The Future Laboratory. The term, according to Raymond (2010), was first used by Christopher Sanderson in 2001 to describe a system for identifying trends based on three pillars: consultation, observation and intuition. This method provides more quantitative ways to justify the work the "trendhunters" within the business scenario, which often do not show up to be used to the qualitative aspects of uptake, while being more solid and precise in its results.

Triangulation is a term from the social science field that refers to a process by which two methods are used in three ways to reach the same conclusion in order to confirm that it is correct. Raymond (2010) describes that it is believed that by combining several methods and procedures the 'trendhunters' can eliminate the habitual bias when using only one. Raymond says that it can also be described as a way to examine and verify the changes that happen in societies through a method that puts in evidence, verifies or validates another. By merging the quantitative with the qualitative, the visual with the factual, and the intuitive with the expert, cultural triangulation aims to help on the development of a future-ready strategy and innovation pipeline underpinned with relevant trends and core consumer insights.

The three triangulating factors are:

- Interrogation: quantitative and qualitative snapshots of key consumers and consumer insight panels to capture new and emerging consumer thinking;
- Observation: ethnographic and interrogative studies of target groups that reveal the new and emerging needs of these groups;
- Intuition: insight and orientation panels, underpinned with expert interviews via our global networks, to identify future developments in new and emerging tastes;

- interrogation phase

The initial phase of the process is the time to thoroughly examine all issues related to the initial question. It is the use of quantitative techniques of survey, included field research and interviews with experts to question people and groups regarding their attitudes and activities in order to calculate the distribution of these attitudes or activities in relation to general population or majority group. Consisting of three distinct processes: informative amnesty, the delimitation of the topic and quantitative research.

- informative amnesty

As reported by Raymond (2010), "trendhunters" must use the informative amnesty in order to begin the process of cultural triangulation. It is a term used to refer to the early stages of triangulation process in which the "trendhunters" interrogate their customers in order to gather all the information they consider significant about the subject or object of inquiry or research, so they can approach more precisely to the issues that truly require response. According to Marsan (apud RAYMOND, 2010), if we get a correct base, we have a correct general composition. And so you can form a proper base, first of all you must understand clearly and comprehensively customer instructions, besides all material and documentation provided and any research that has been done on the issue that you were given to study.

In order to have an idea of the quantitative target audience, information may be collected in various sources: the client's marketing department, his research team, among others. And in order to get a complete information and not put to waste the whole research process, in the very begin of the project the researcher needs to know exactly what are the general goals and objectives, if what is sought is a new product idea, a new impetus to an existing product, or if the focus will be on new behaviors that

can be observed in the audience; if there is any matter that might limit the work from the beginning - as resistance by the target audience or any inconvenience to conduct research.

- delimitation of the subject

This is the stage of identifying all the issues that may influence the subject and determine a clear line of investigation of the topic. It consists in making use of the internet, the basic search tools, available facilities and organizations engaged in the research, including focus groups, with the intention to form a broader concept of the market being studied. According to Pillot de Chenecey (apud RAYMOND, 2010), this must be done after interviewing the client and determine what he knows or not.

At this stage of the process the main point are the trends, as well as the information that the research will be reporting to track any trends that may affect the market or consumer group in question. In order to find them, information can be extracted from some other research trends or organizations. To make sure that the "trendhunter" will not have his look distorted by the sight of other research, trends may also be found through the procedures used in cultural braille or transcultural analysis. At the end of this phase a summary is prepared, in which should be detailed all the incipient trends related to the original question; areas to investigate further, and the names of the experts who now and then appear in the texts we read in order to form a list of people to be interviewed.

Once identified all relevant themes and selected the panel, an e-mail to all members should be written an abstract and an initial compendium of questions that require answers. Then the members are interviewed separately to verify if they believe to be included all the topics that should be considered or if something has been left out and what they believe to be the best and the worst things that can happen, which is not the same as asking them a hypothetical development of an evolving situation, so that you have access to your thoughts on the outcome future of the object under study.

- quantitative research

This step is done to investigate and quantify the significant data for the process, as the scaling of the affected group compared to the rest of the population, the percentage by gender, income and age, region / nation / city they live in, ethnicity and sexual orientation group, and the social / political / ethical criteria that may focus on one

or all of the aspects. Here the researchers can work with consumer`s opinion research companies, and the number of participants will be determined according to the size of the niche searched. The questionnaire should require the participant their social, ethical, cultural, moral, etc., regarding the subject matter, their level of knowledge and ignorance of the topic, their doubts and prejudices that may have on the subject, and his pre-designed ideas. It should also bring questions to allow the "trendhunter" to tell the difference between the consumer and experts ways of thinking, the typology which they belong, and the words and sentences they use to describe themselves.

These questions can determine, for example, what percentage of people who are part of a certain group of innovators. Finished this step, the researcher can distribute data in order to check how people answered questions of the research. Raymond (2010) says that this process will determine a typology and develop a more detailed, useful and accurate profile data to the individual types identified.

The research should reveal, among other information, the gap between consumers and market experts and the percentage of innovative, primary adopters, most primary, late majority and laggards on the subject (which will give the notion of when a trend is no longer specific from a group and is passing to another). An abstract of these results must be sent to the expert panel a week before re-interview them, so they have time to retraining about all topics. The main results should be classified as incipient trends that began to emerge.

After presenting the main results, the expert panel should be asked about the impact of the search results to the original question and their opinion about the irregularities. These comments will be added to a larger document that will provide a deeper understanding of the trend, the analysis and projection of the future, containing the results of quantitative research, office investigation and quotes from experts.

- observation phase

In the observation phase, the methodology of cultural triangulation proposes that the "trendhunter" use the ethnographic map in order to go beyond percentages and feel, touch, scrutinize the trend without intermediaries. At this stage the "trendhunter" should join the innovative or group in question so he can assimilate with more details and measure the impact of the trend in other groups. Here is also made the development of visual profiles, to monitor and observe consumers or individuals who perform a particular task or activity of their own lifestyle in order to learn more about them.

- ethnographic maps

According to Raymond (2010), ethnography is a method used in the field of trend hunting to unravel easily the attitudes behind the behavior of the primary innovators or adopters in order to fabricate a map that describes how other groups tend to behave in the future. This stage can be justified assuming that the actions of the innovators or primary adopters must be watched so the trends can be defined and understood, knowing that people express trends better than talk about them.

The ethnographic study can be done in several ways. The "trendhunter" can ask the studied group to write a diary or make a record of their activities so that he can relate their day-by-day with the subject matter. With the same purpose, can be request from the studied people to take pictures or record details of the activities that are supposed to be studied. Another option is to provide images, texts, journals, without editing video material on social networking sites related to the topic.

- photographic studies of actual cases technique

Through this technique, the "trendhunter" should include on the research visually illustrative and fundamental elements about the public studied: domestic spaces, intimate spaces, personal technology or equipment they use, objects that carry in their pockets and the backpack, personal objects of desire, places and spaces that attend to, among other information they deem relevant. All material should be accompanied by explanatory small texts or brief statements.

- intuitive phase

According to Raymond (2010) this phase is dedicated to the use of the experience that the "trendhunter" has to contribute to a deeper analysis based on the collected quantitative and qualitative data collected during the interrogation and observation phases.

- go further in the analysis

After careful analysis of all data collected, making use of his experience and prior knowledge, the "trendhunter" must question the relationship that holds what is known now to the original question or study area, how it can be used now to better inform the customer about what he needs to understand about this, how all these changes reverberate in the client's expectations for the future, if there are aspects of his

findings that the client has not yet been realized and, if so, what are they and how to integrate these issues into their current strategy. The "trendhunter" should also examine whether the research was able to find new sources of income and which, if it was able to detect new threats, if the client has all the tools, all the resources and services necessary to work forward to everything that will come across and, if not, if he can be warned about it. Raymond (2010) tells that as the researcher examine all the material he needs to use his wider knowledge about the society to better interpret the deeds, statistics, comments and opinions he has collected (his awareness of the past), but do it with awareness of present thought, which involves assessing quantitatively and qualitatively what is new and imminent. The researcher will have to leave aside the usual sense of logic to identify and treat the underlying forces that drive people to do what they do and to adhere to trends that inicially may seem illogical, dangerous, foolish or paradoxical. The ability to do this has an important role at the time of writing the final report and generate the tendency showcases.

Writing the report

The final phase of the process of cultural triangulation is writing the report. As Raymond (2010) recommends, the final report should be formed of numerous steps, comments, quotes and opinions, arranged in a logical, sequential and reflective way. It should contain the overall goals and objectives of the research and the initial question, the methodology used in the research and the experts consulted and cited sources if not listed below. It should also be followed by the presentation of the initial question, cultural, social, economic and environmental factors that possibly will influence in the answer to the question. The text should substantiate and confirm the arguments made by experts and highlight the disparity between their ways of thinking with the consumers in general. It should also identify and explain the types of target consumers possibly related to these trends and to the changes to which they are taking place, offering the client a detailed portrait of the emotional state and attitudes existing in the group, as well as details about their tastes, the environment in which they live, and how they behave, what they eat, how they dress and the main technological products they own. Finally, the final response to the client must be given: what the research means, in which way it will affect on his current strategy and future possibilities that it offers, in what direction he can and should move forward, etc.

Briefly, the process of culture triangulation must complete the following steps:

1st. The office research, which covers the statistics and situational data that context the original question or initial inquiry's investigation;

2nd. The interviews to the panel of experts, which complete the research office in the same time that give a further step in the analysis, orientation and context of the original question;

3rd. The quantitative research that helps to contextualize the reflections of experts and determine how the potential bias can influence consumer behavior;

4th. Identifying the basic typology that helps to identify the main characteristics of the types of consumers, essential to understand the trend and encourage its dissemination;

5th. The interviews the selected people, which help to go beyond the numbers and know the environment that surrounds those who are ahead of the trend that we try to identify;

6th. The photographic studies of specific cases within the key types with which the client can see and understand the general characteristics of the group.

7th. Adding the experience and intuition of the "trendhunter" through observations made through the collected material.

8th. The final report which should lead the factors and conclusions to the client.

Final thoughts

In this era of transition which we live in, leaving an industrial society to a knowledge society, anticipating trends within a context of changes and large supply of goods and services is no longer a simple competitive advantage to become essential to the success in the corporate world. This scenario creates a demand for professionals who can guide companies and institutions in the search for innovations, making the identification of trends on market an essential competitive tool as way to identify and understand the directions that should guide these innovations.

Analyzing the cultural triangulation methodology as a tool for identifying trends brings the understanding of the process and of the techniques of capturing results. However, it is necessary to examine the practical application of this method to capture trends, for its validation. In this sense, we can understand that the proposed methodology should be repeated to verify its efficiency.

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