

ETHOLOGY or behaviour observation

● BACKGROUND

This is the story of a girl who buys herself a pullover in a shop. She looks at the garments, touches them, holds them up against her, tries them on... A banal story you might think, but not as simple as all that. At each stage of her behaviour, the girl questions her final decision, i.e. the purchasing act. It is therefore on each of her attitudes before she goes to the cash desk that we need to act. In order to identify these attitudes, the ethologist blends in discreetly with the background and observes...

The study of Individual-Environment interaction is a vast domain covering many manufacturer issues: knowing what consumer preferences are, identifying buyers' choices, adapting the product to the user, anticipating customers' needs and expectations. In short, understanding the Customer-Product relationship. To date, many traditional approaches for responding to this question do exist: qualitative analyses, quantitative analyses, sensory analyses, sociological analyses, ergonomic analyses,... each one contributing to the construction of a diagnostic.

● HUMAN ETHOLOGY

Human ethology is the science which studies the behaviour of Man in his environment, in order to understand and optimise Individual-Environment interaction.

With the ethological approach, it is possible to study Customer-Product interaction from another point of view and go beyond certain limits. The ethological approach enables us to:

- apprehend the information conveyed via a media other than **verbal language**;
- analyse the **spontaneous interaction** between an individual and a given environment (product, place, ...) by **minimising** the influence of the test and data collection methods
- collect information **expressed naturally and habitually** by the individual without necessarily getting them to verbalise it.

● THE DOMAINS

Repères essentially works on **product test** and **space management** issues, calling on its knowledge and command of models on the psychology and physiology functioning of Man.

Product-mix component tests (packaging, design, formula...)

- Analysing precisely usage behaviour of the product
- Evaluating what is felt by the user (perception, well-being, comfort,...) by observing micro-behaviours
- Constructing a cluster analysis out of behaviours towards a product / brand
- Revealing the usage ritual of the product
- Studying Customer/Product/Environment interaction
- Testing the practicality, ergonomics of packaging
- Observing the discovery of an unusual or new product

● THE DOMAINS (cont'd)

Space facilities (Movements, Flow)

- Characterising a product's clientele through observation (the tactile people, the visual people, the experts, ...)
- Determining space exploration strategies, i.e. the different possible routes round a sales area, the movement flows
- Defining the average visit of a customer (visit / purchase duration, important zones within the sales area)
- Understanding the purchasing process through behaviour
- Evaluating the comfort of a sales area

● THE METHODOLOGY

The approach of applied human ethology involves drawing up a study protocol adapted to requirements and the questions to be answered. It comprises the following stages:

- **analysis of requirements and definition of specifications:** the ethologist translates the research request into a scientific approach, weighs up the constraints and feasibility of the study and draws up proposals to be included in the specifications
- **finalisation of the study protocol** (*pre-observation stage*): during this stage, behaviour observation takes place in such a way as to precisely characterise the situation (context) and behaviours to be taken into account for the rest of the study. A coding system is chosen. The sample of subjects to be observed is defined, as is the choice of analysis methods for the data that will be collected in the following stage;
- **collection of the behavioural data** (*observation stage*): direct or indirect observation (recordings) and the use of the coding system defined in the previous stage enable behavioural data to be collected taking all the methodological precautions possible to avoid any biases in the observation and the data collection;
- **analysis and interpretation of the data:** the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data is conducted using different methods and statistical techniques, both probabilistic and mathematical. This leads to validated results from a statistical point of view;
- **conclusions and suggestions:** the results are discussed and interpreted taking into account already validated studies and the requirements of the client.

● COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER TECHNIQUES

Ethology gives us access to hidden information, information which is out of search of traditional methods, particularly new Consumer Insights.

Ethology also enables us to optimise traditional approaches:

- **Crossing** qualitative, quantitative and ethological analyses, thereby combining verbal information with what is left unsaid
- **Guidance** for qualitative and quantitative research based on the observations carried out before them
- **Cluster analysis** out of behaviours towards customers
- **Calibration** of sensory panels according to the identified behaviours