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2016 marks the 70th anniversary of the Market Research Society (MRS). It's an opportunity to celebrate the social, commercial, creative and intellectual riches of the largest per capita research sector in the world.

For this special report, we asked some of the most influential names in the research business to write about their chosen 'game-changer' – a person, technique or innovation that fundamentally changed the sector forever.

MRS Curiosity
Insight
Revolution

70 years of helping people talk to power

50s

The birth of sentiment analysis

by Adam Phillips

After World War II ended, it was widely assumed that Winston Churchill would be elected Prime Minister. He had led the nation through the war and Britain had won. All the media expected him to win the General Election in 1945, and the polls confirmed this. So the landslide victory of the Labour Party was a shock. This was the first major failure of 'scientific' polling to predict an election result. The only research organisation to forecast that the Labour Party would win was Mass Observation.

At the beginning of 1945, Gallup put the Labour share of the vote 20% behind that of the Conservatives. The polls continued to show a significant Conservative lead throughout the campaign. The actual result of the election in July was a Labour win with a 7% lead over the Conservatives. On the day of the election, Gallup published a poll that was very close to the actual result, but it was too late to have any influence. Mass Observation had predicted that Labour would win well in advance. At the time, this forecast was discounted because it was not based on a 'scientific sample'. Mass Observation had synthesised information from a mixture of self-selected samples and qualitative work that ▶

▶ included listening to conversations in public places. It had developed a way of classifying the formation of public opinion, which involved six stages:

1 What a person says to a stranger (e.g. an interviewer with a questionnaire)

2 What a person says to an acquaintance

3 What a person says to a friend

4 What a person says to a partner or lover

5 What a person writes in a personal diary

6 What a person says to themselves or dreams

Mass observation argued that traditional quantitative polling elicited opinions at level 1. In the case of the 1945 election, no-one wanted to criticise Churchill publicly; however, conversations with friends were much more open, as people tried to find out if others were also thinking that Britain needed a change of leader. Mass Observation believed that opinions not yet fully formed were inaccessible to traditional surveys until the person was close to voting. Diaries and overheard conversations among friends were likely to give a much better indication of the issues and the way undecided voters, or those influenced by social norms, were likely to vote.

Social media analysis and mobile ethnography are now accepted research techniques. In 1986, Mollie Tarrant, the research director at Mass Observation in its early years, expressed frustration at the narrow and superficial focus of quantitative research at that time. She wished she had been able to use video diaries; she would have been delighted to have had access to the automated text and image-coding software that is available now. What the Mass Observers were hoping to create 70 years ago is now possible at an affordable cost. They were the first to develop the ideas that underlie sentiment analysis.

Adam Phillips is a Fellow of MRS and managing director of Real Research

The qual
revolution

by John Downham

Immediately after World War II, market research in Britain consisted of fairly straightforward usage and attitude surveys. By the 1950s, however, the emphasis had moved increasingly into developing research's ability to explain, and not simply to describe. Attempts to uncover why consumers bought particular products and brands were given extra impetus by the growing concept of brand image.

On the technical side, the development of attitude-scaling methods and other work in the US, by sociological researchers such as Paul Lazarsfeld, led to the use of more complex (and longer) questionnaires – and of more advanced statistical techniques, such as factor analysis. But, on the whole, this was a process of evolutionary development rather than revolutionary change.

In the middle of the 1950s, however, came two potentially game-changing developments. One was the advent of computers into research agency work. Over time, this dramatically altered research activities, initially in the fields of media and panel research. Even so, the main impact of this and other technological developments was not fully felt until later, with the creation of the internet, the introduction of mobile phones and the growth of 'big data'.

The second major development of the 1950s – the arrival of 'motivation research' – had more immediate effects. Up until this point, the application of psychological theory to market research in the UK had been limited and relatively uncommon. However, growing publicity for the work of US psychologists and psychoanalysts such as Ernest Dichter helped to increase interest – and heighten controversy - among UK researchers, advertising agencies and their clients. In the case of BMRB, for example, a reconnaissance visit by Dichter in 1955-56 led us to set up a new qualitative research unit and alter our company organisation.

From the mid-1950s onwards, the impact of motivation research on the profession and marketing in the UK generally was striking. It

Claus Moser and the LSE legacy

by Geoffrey Roughton

Claus Moser, whose obituary appeared in early September 2015, received many tributes about the way he "did so much to enrich Britain economically and culturally after the Second World War". He was a polymath; a man of empathy and scholarship; a gifted pianist; a director of the Royal Opera House; and a Master of an Oxford college, picking up a knighthood and peerage along the way.

In such a glittering life, Moser's contribution to our activities perhaps had less mention. But for market researchers, his 20-year tenure at the London School of Economics (LSE) – where he became professor of social statistics – was seminal to the development of survey methodology. His subsequent appointment by Harold Wilson as registrar general, meanwhile, helped to establish the value and independence of statistics.

For several years after 1945, LSE was pivotal in developing survey techniques. Claus was part of a hot-house of new ideas about social administration that brought him into contact with luminaries such as Mark Abrams, Maurice Kendall, Alan Stuart, Richard Titmuss, Peter Willmot and Michael Young. That decisions in this area should be evidence-based was an important tenet for Claus. His book, *Survey Methods in Social Investigation* (1958) – written with the involvement of Tom Cauter and John Downham – was groundbreaking work and a very helpful reference at a time when many of us were learning these 'new' methods. His book with W Scott, *British Towns: a Statistical Study of Their Social and Economic Differences* (1961), led to Acorn, CACI and other classification systems. Many of the methods we take for granted originated at the LSE; although the projects were social in nature, they spilled over into the commercial sector.

As registrar general, Moser presided over some major changes: the General Household Survey and the Labour Force Survey are ongoing testaments to him. But perhaps the most important was to insist on the independence of the Government Statistical Service. He put his job on the line rather than agree to delaying the publication of a statistic that might have been inconvenient to the government of the day. That kind of intellectual independence has contributed to the ethos that underlies the principles on which contemporary market researchers hope to collect and present results.

Moser's comment, "Education costs money, but then so does ignorance", fits with his belief that good-quality statistics can educate policy-makers, and they should not be amenable to the whims of political masters. The MRS in Britain is the largest group of practitioners in the world. That position has come about, in part, through the legacy of Moser and others at the LSE. He set some good examples; we would be wise to aspire to them.

**Geoffrey Roughton** is a Fellow of MRS and CEO of X-MR

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triggered sometimes heated debates on a wide range of issues, including: how important is it for a survey sample to be representative of the survey population; and how is 'representative' best defined? How much weight can be attached to the findings from small samples? How reproducible are the findings? What are the effects of interviewer/respondent interactions, and the setting and context of an interview? What training is needed by people carrying out motivational research? What are the relative merits and limitations of 'depth interviews' and group discussions? How can possible biases held by the survey designer, interviewer or analyst best be allowed for? Is there too much reliance on 'gurus'? Could such research be more appropriately carried out closer to the creative department within an advertising agency?

Arguments about these and related questions risked creating a virtual polarisation of the market research profession – 'qual' v 'quant'. It took some years for any general agreement to be reached about the appropriate relationship between the various research approaches. This upheaval, which started in the 1950s, can reasonably be described as a revolution – but it was one that led to a better understanding of the nature of differing methods and techniques, and to a more broadly based profession.

John Downham is a Fellow and former chairman of MRS

1960 70s
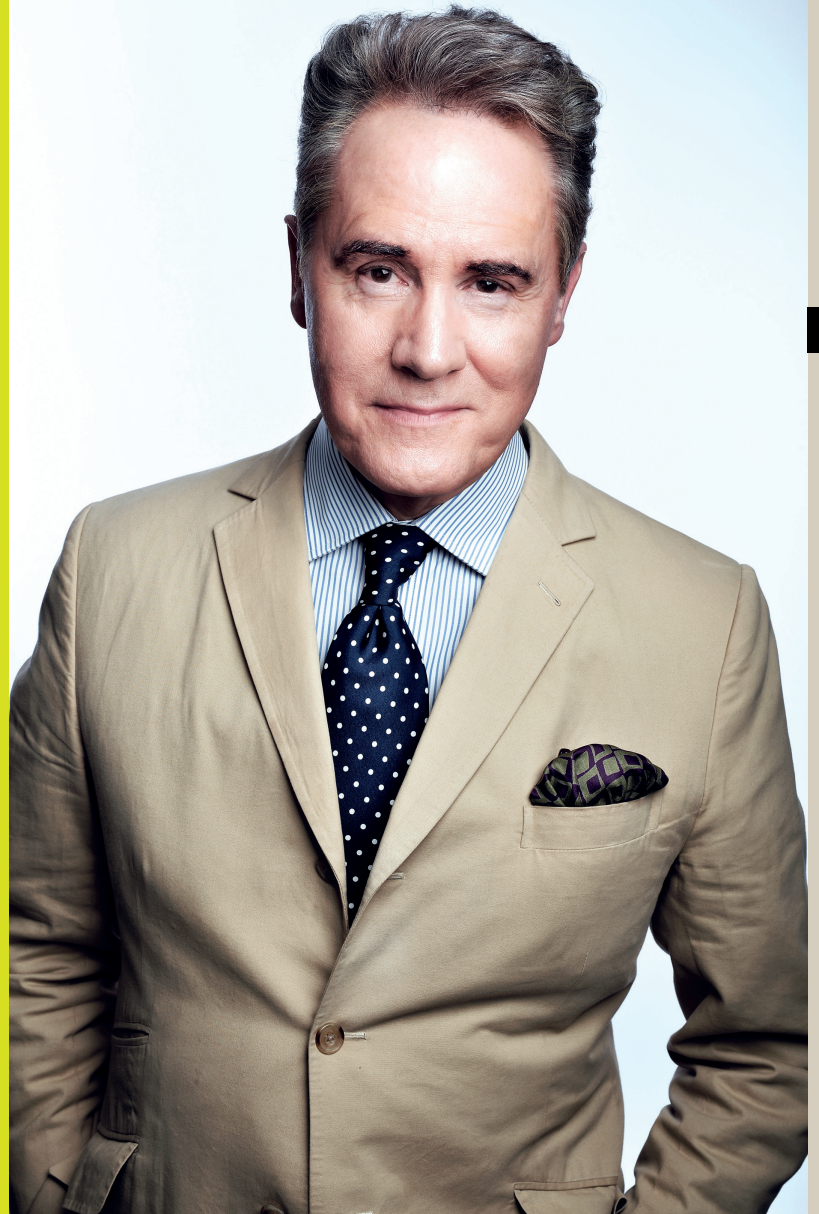
The market research intelligentsia

by Peter York

My first and only employer, Conrad Jameson, was utterly heroic. Heroic for employing the deeply unpromising me for a start; after I left his business, I had to set up a partnership with clever, disciplined Dennis Stevenson, because it was obvious no-one would ever employ me again! Heroic in teaching me about research and its potential role in the world, linking it to politics, social psychology, architecture and design. And heroic for being a market research intellectual.

The market research intelligentsia was developed by people with a 'big picture' view,

rather than a narrow, technique-based one; who were interested in the world outside the fortunes of the FMCG giants that dominated the client base when they had started working. They would be the people who'd use, say, qualitative work for Heinz to develop big ideas about changing family structures, class variations in table manners and mass delusions about nutrition.

They were the first in the Sixties and Seventies to move out of the FMCG box and into political research, social policy research and working for charities. They were the first movers in relating ▶

What I owe the
geeks at IBM

by Eric Salama

In the winter of 1982, I was busy writing my university dissertation. I used a word processor for the first time – some kind of precursor to the lovely Amstrad PCW 8256 that I bought a couple of years later – and I couldn't believe I could cut and paste, and correct errors without the use of Tippex!

At that stage, I had no idea there was a world of market research and insights – and certainly, therefore, no sense that this industry would eventually be transformed by the kind of computer that had brought me so much joy. That is exactly what has happened, however.

Quite apart from the Sex Pistols and The Clash, the late 1970s and early 1980s ushered in two things – desktop computing and relationship databases. In 1977, the Apple II was among three personal computers launched on an unsuspecting public, followed, four years later, by the IBM PC. This computer was based on an open architecture that allowed third-party developers to flourish, and had 640KB of RAM and an audio cassette for external storage! People could use spreadsheets such as Lotus 1-2-3, and database software such as dBASE. Both became top-selling software products for years to come.

A decade earlier, Edgar Codd, (be honest, have you heard of him?) was working at an IBM lab in San Jose, California, and was dissatisfied with the search capabilities in existing systems. This drove him to develop relationship databases and write the 1970 paper *A Relational Model of Data for Large Shared Data Banks*.

Everyone I have worked with knows the importance I attach to the centrality of human curiosity and creativity to great insight work – without it, we cannot understand why people think and behave the way they do. However, it would be churlish of me not to recognise the impact computing has had on our industry.

As the cost of computing has tumbled – and its power and storage capacity have increased exponentially – we have been able to undertake large-scale, global, quantitative survey work, and to analyse and interpret the results. As relational databases became the norm, we were able to look at individual-level attitudes and behaviour, and fuse data to understand cause and effect, and become more holistic in our analysis.

More recently, it has become possible to analyse gigantic amounts of census-level media, purchase and social data, and to use it to make our work more predictive and 'real time' – not to mention our ability to visualise data in ways that bring it to life and give it meaning.

For anyone who believes research can only be considered great if it can be used to make better decisions, the past few years have been inspiring. We are able to give clients better, more holistic insights, in real time, delivered in a way that makes them want to act.

I will always believe that human ingenuity, curiosity and creativity will continue to play a critical role in understanding why people behave the way they do.

However, none of us can underestimate the role that the geeks at IBM, Apple and elsewhere played in giving us the tools to transform our ability to capture and interpret data in meaningful ways – and in democratising the process of market research, and opening it up to millions.

Eric Salama is CEO of Kantar Group

qualitative and quantitative pictures of the world, leaving behind the nerdily partisan divide between the two approaches. They were clever, educated people, drawn in by the massive growth of marketing-speak businesses in the Sixties and after. Before, they might have gone into the clever bits of the Civil Service; later, into the clever bits of the City. It felt as if they had all been at the LSE (of course they hadn't) or done something psychological – and, of course, they hadn't all done that, either. But the behavioural sciences were a major reference point for them.

Because it was a smaller world then, they all pretty much knew each other. Some worked as pioneer advertising agency planners, before agency planners suffered their 1980s identity and dress-code crisis. Many worked in small and singular independent companies – not corporate or quoted – and they'd moved around.

They usually didn't work in client company research departments for long because they realised – with a few exceptions – that company researchers tended to be siloed off, didn't get much variety, and didn't get to be CEOs. And client companies had offices in the most epically boring bits of the Home Counties, whereas ad agencies and independents were in London.

Jameson is a Harvard-educated American, who had come to London on a sort of quest that didn't involve working for a living. When his father cut off his allowance, he had to find things to do. What else for a Harvard social science and LSE graduate to do than work with pioneering market research intellectuals such as Liz Nelson and social research firms such as Mass Observation?

Jameson was smart in every sense of the word – and I absolutely loved that. His offices, when I worked there in the 1970s, were in Belgravia, next door to Lord Lucan – just before all that. He was – still is – gregarious, talkative and hugely connected. By the time he hired me, his archive included various county council strategy initiatives, the Labour Party and a raft of design-led clients such as Sanderson. He believed research could drive social policies and design development because he was intensely interested in both. He introduced me to Charles Jencks, the architectural critic and great proselytiser for post-modernism, and Gavin Stamp, the 'Young Fogey' hero of The Victorian Society.

Jameson taught me how to interweave qualitative and quantitative evidence for an argument (and how to make these arguments in 'mock mandarin' paragraphs that made Establishment-types sit up and listen). He taught me that the orthodoxy of 'validation' – doing a qualitative 'pilot' then validating it with some reassuring numbers – was completely wrong. You should, of course, do it the other way around.

Above all, he told me that market research, intelligently designed and persuasively reported, was the best basis for strategic thinking – miles better than the management consultants' MBA cookie-cutter analyses. So your client needs to have his hands on the strategic levers. Aim for the top and report to the CEO. When we started SRU, that was exactly what Dennis and I did.

Peter York is a patron of MRS and a broadcaster and author

Geodemographics:
the birth of big data

by Peter Mouncey

I have attended most MRS conferences since the late 1970s, but a presentation that still sticks in my mind is the one given by Ken Baker, John Bermingham and Colin McDonald in 1979, introducing the first commercial application of geodemographics*.

The British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) team had been inspired by a lecture given by Richard Webber at the Centre for Environmental Studies in 1977, describing his pioneering development of a classification of residential neighbourhoods (CRN). This was shortly after BMRB had completely redesigned its main sampling frame using data from the 1971 census – what it believed to be the first nationwide computer-automated sampling frame in the UK market research sector.

This was important because it made it relatively straightforward to add the CRN 36 cluster solution to the sampling frame, and the 1978 TGI dataset was also back-coded with the clusters. It had cost BMRB the princely sum of £160 to obtain a classification!

Webber moved to CACI, and Acorn – the first full, commercial geodemographics process – was launched by the end of 1979, adding the codes to the full list of census variables.

Another important development at this time was the Royal Mail's introduction of a national postcode system for UK addresses, and its financial inducements to encourage database owners to add postcodes to their address records.

I believe this also led to the birth of 'big data', because – by using the postcode – geodemographic codes could also be added to each record. This eventually provided links to other data, especially from surveys such as NOP's Financial Research Survey. Such systems would become standard in market research in the years ahead and a whole new sector of marketing analytics was born.

Returning to 1979, the findings presented in BMRB's paper opened our eyes to a new world for marketers. As Baker described in his introduction to a reprint of the paper in two special issues of *JMRS* that celebrated the Market Research Society's 50th birthday, they enabled the 'where should I?' question to be answered.

The indices presented by the authors provided a new view of consumer consumption patterns by residential area – whether it was for wine purchasing, credit card ownership, book buying or exposure to media. They also demonstrated its value to social research.

Since then, geodemographic coding – and the different systems – have become ubiquitous within market research and marketing.

CACI and Experian (Webber developed its Mosaic system) remain two major players in this field, but there are several other companies providing such products – updated after the 2011 census – plus an open data ONS/UCL system. The concept has become international – I spoke at the CCN (now Experian) launch conference of Australia Mosaic, in Sydney, in 1992.

There is also the very influential MRS-affiliated Census and Geodemographics Group, founded by Barry Leventhal – who devised the Pinpoint system and FRUITS classification – which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2014.

Some years ago, Webber was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the MRS for his work in this field.

The utility to market research of the classification of residential neighbourhoods, by Ken Baker, John Bermingham and Colin McDonald (BMRB), *JMRS* Vol 39 No 1, January 1997 – Proceedings of the MRS Conference, March 1979, Brighton.

Peter Mouncey is a Fellow of MRS and editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Market Research*

80-90-

Big data has changed our role

by Corinne Moy

Since the turn of the century, there has been an explosion in the availability of data, both inside and outside client organisations. The growth in capacity and flexibility of computing has allowed businesses to harness this information in ways that weren't possible in the past. So now a wide range of data is available to our clients, from which they can extract insight and business intelligence – from CRM and transactional data through to point-of-sale data and radio frequency identification (RFID).

Meanwhile, the digitisation of society has created hitherto undreamed of activities and concomitant behavioural traces – social media data, such as blogs, videos, photos; mobile and location data; digital behavioural data; and e-commerce data.

These developments have led to a fundamental change in the research industry. When I joined it in the early 1990s, we were all about designing, executing and reporting on surveys. But the explosion in data and digitisation has meant clients' expectations have changed. Rather than designing projects to answer specific research objectives, they

require us to meet broader business aims using whatever information is available and appropriate.

Market research, of course, has long been an industry of data aggregators – combining surveys, but at the same time taking our clients' CRM and transactional data and making sense of this.

However, in the new paradigm that big data creates, our role has changed. We now need to define, for each customer assignment, what we measure and how. What is the best way to gather each piece of information? Should we create a survey, use passive measurement, scrape the digital sphere, or create observational frameworks? Traditional surveys are just one of

the ways for consumers to make their voices heard – and given the wealth of data available via other sources, it is incumbent upon us to make surveys shorter and smarter.

Furthermore, market research is built around implicit and explicit consumer frameworks. By contrast, big data is unashamedly atheoretical. We, as researchers, have adopted a wider role – that of 'curators': identifying, sourcing, integrating, analysing and interpreting the full range of available data to deliver insights that we would not have achieved by more traditional means. This covers the integration of sources via imputation/fusion/matching, as well as via design.

Arguably, we have become the keepers of the total customer view – not just for that bit of their day when they are visible to a brand. We can see the bigger picture by using all available sources to understand the holistic consumer journey and the motivations that drive it. We understand the provenance of data and provide context to it.

This offers us a huge opportunity to explore consumer insights in new ways. It enables us to combine our traditional currency of survey data with all forms of big data – to deliver truly 'smart data'.

Corinne Moy is a Fellow of MRS and global director of marketing sciences, GfK NOP

2000s

Smartphones as a measurement tool

by Paul Bainsfair

The internet, particularly the mobile internet, has revolutionised the way people interact with media. Consumers now have access to a fantastic array of choices and have the means to control what media they consume, where and when.

This creates many measurement challenges; however, one of the major reasons for this growing complexity – the smartphone – also offers the means to not only reach increasingly

uncooperative respondents, but also to precisely monitor their actions.

A person's relationship with their mobile phone is incredibly personal. Many people – particularly in the younger age groups – are totally dependent on their smartphones; they carry them throughout the day and place them on the bedside table at night. The alarm wakes them in the morning and, from that moment on, they ▸

▸ provide the user with news, communications, information, entertainment, shopping, directions and so on. People, on average, use their phone every other minute.

Given that smartphones are with consumers throughout the whole day, they can be used in a variety of ways to interview respondents – from administering a standard questionnaire to asking interactive questions that are served after specific actions by the respondent, such as browsing a certain product or service, or entering a location. Not only can the respondent answer questions, they can also supply photos and/or videos of their situations, and take part in discussions – all of which are then transmitted back in real time.

Smartphones can also be used as monitoring devices; the total use in terms of calls, browsing, apps and location can be passively monitored via an easily downloaded app. Phones can also be fitted with technology to monitor which television and radio programmes are being received, and, of course, respondents' locations can be tracked by GPS.

The use of smartphones as a measurement tool is a game changer and is growing rapidly as technological advances allow us to do more and more – for the most part, all relatively cost-effectively. However, we have to ensure we treat our smartphone respondents with respect, making sure we do not breach data privacy guidelines and ensuring that the respondent has given full permission to use their data.

We also need to make sure that we do not overload them with questions and that those questions do not become too intrusive. Last, but certainly not least, we need to make sure that we do not drain their batteries!

Paul Bainsfair is director general of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA)

The launch of Twitter

by Edwina Dunn

Accurately gathering information about consumers' needs and preferences no longer has to mean asking a question; it might include 'looking over a shoulder' online.

In less than a decade, 320m people worldwide have signed up to Twitter. Suddenly, the likes, dislikes, passions and opinions of a vast and diverse range of the global population are available publicly. Twitter is one of the world's fastest-growing open-data sources and is a goldmine of information about consumers.

The connections people choose to make with influencers – such as brands, media and celebrities – unveil important information about them. And, since time on social media is given freely, these connections are a powerful window into how people live, or aspire to live. You are what you follow – what you're passionate about.

Customer data is a rich source of insight. What are they spending time watching or thinking about? What mix of interests do people display? What's in their digital shopping basket, across all their passions? Which communities do they belong to and how does this affect their transaction behaviour?

Traditional market research methods still have a major role to play in exploring these knowledge gaps, but what if you don't know which question to ask next, or which trend you should be watching out for? Analysis of Twitter behaviour – the whole audience, not just the vocal few – means consumers can now guide research, rather than the other way around.

From my years at dunnhumby, I know that the power of grocery data lies in the high frequency of visits, the sheer volume of interactions with products. Such intense interaction gives incredibly rich

insight into how 16m people live their lives – you are what you eat!

What's amazing is that Twitter data follows the same principles, but on a much larger scale; 260m people using the social network interact with five or more 'influencers'; this means – even if your customers aren't visiting or transacting often – they are still revealing important information about themselves elsewhere, all of the time. This is vital and transformational insight for the vast majority of retailers who record only one transaction a year.

In a world where consumers want brands to be timely, authentic and relevant, the insight from Twitter about your consumers and those of your competitors, all around the world – right now – cannot be underestimated.

Edwina Dunn is a patron of MRS and CEO of Starcount

Digital, data and globalisation

by Sir Martin Sorrell

At WPP, what we once called market research or consumer insight is now described as data investment management. Contrary to what the resulting acronym might suggest, we think this is not so dim.

This sector of our business has always been about gathering and interpreting information, but the internet has created a new, ever-expanding universe of data, the sheer volume and complexity of which demands ever-more sophisticated approaches, tools and techniques. It also demands a fundamental shift in how we think

about the business itself – hence the new definition.

Managing clients' investment in data – in a fragmented, complicated world – is what we do, just as we manage their investment in media (today we talk about media investment management rather than media planning and buying). These two areas are increasingly linked within our group, as we integrate data and media to provide clients with the most telling insights and the best return on their investment.

Some dislike the new terminology – and not only for the admittedly

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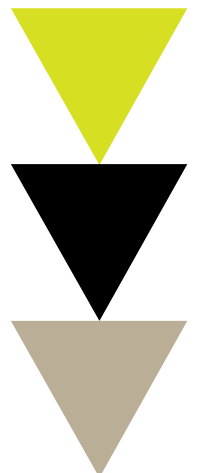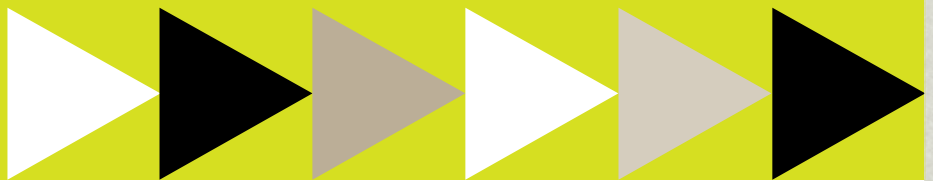
unfortunate abbreviation – because they believe it relegates the role of insight. Not so. Data collection and analysis is nothing unless it produces insights – and, as Jeremy Bullmore has so elegantly argued, insights have little value unless they are potently expressed.

Unearthing and communicating valuable insights remains the core purpose, and the traditional disciplines of market research remain very important in doing that. However, as digital technologies change the world, we need to be at the forefront of new developments. As TNS puts it: "Advances in social media analytics, data flows from connected, 'Internet of Things' devices and many other technological innovations mean that the toolkit the researcher can use to find insights has expanded way beyond the survey."

One manifestation of this new reality is Kantar's pioneering partnership with Twitter to provide real-time social TV data, since expanded to new research products in the areas of advertising effectiveness, consumer insight, brand equity, customer satisfaction and media measurement. Others include the sophisticated social media analysis engine behind TNS's social products, and our partnerships and investments with Rentrak and comScore, which are coming together.

So the web – and the data explosion it set off – have changed the game. But another force at work has arguably had just as much of an impact: the rise of fast-growth markets – the so-called BRICS, Next 11 and other nations whose economies have expanded so rapidly in recent decades.

Huge growth in the consuming classes has supported the development of advertising and marketing services and, within that, data investment management. The quantity of data and quality of insights now available to brands in these markets would have been unthinkable not long ago.

Millward Brown, for example, now produces in-depth BrandZ reports on the major brands globally and in China, Latin America, India and, most recently, Indonesia. Shortly after sanctions were lifted, TNS opened an office in Myanmar and conducted the country's largest ever consumer survey. Soon, we may be able to do the same in Cuba – and even Iran.

The digital/data/fast-growth market combination means, for the first time, we can offer clients a truly global view of consumer attitudes and behaviour – perhaps the greatest ever opportunity for what we used to call market research.

Sir Martin Sorrell is a patron of MRS and founder and CEO of WPP

The future

by Honor Mallon

"There is a world market for maybe five computers," confided IBM chairman Thomas Watson in 1943, while – almost four decades later – a young Bill Gates predicted that "640k of memory ought to be enough for anybody".

Over the past 70 years, an avalanche of disruptive technology has transformed the research industry, so why should the future be any different? Can we predict what we cannot imagine?

Passive data is flooding our personal and business worlds: wearables measure our bodies; telematics control our cars; there are more mobile devices than people in the world, their numbers growing five-times faster than the human population.

Gartner forecasts that more than 26 billion objects (excluding computers, smartphones or tablets) will be connected to the internet by 2020 – a 30-fold increase on 2009's Internet of Things. As homes, wearables, vehicles and personal data exchanges become more connected, the devices will become smarter; shifting from reacting to predicting.

As our interactions with each other, our suppliers and customers, and the state increasingly take place via a device, the trillions of recorded daily interchanges become the new market research data. Recipients of insight will become blind to the sources of information, concerned only with their utility and ability to deliver competitive advantage.

If big data is today's disruptive revolution, our task is to find within it that which adds value to business decisions – a process of winnowing or sculpting rather than sampling; a new mindset of data selection, not just data collection. This means customers, employees and stakeholders will be connecting with researchers in a new context – and this is where behavioural economics, organisational psychology, ethnography, anthropology, and a host of other scientific frameworks for understanding people, can add value. If we can use these to pull practitioners out of those grooves, let's embrace it.

All of this will help break down the barrier between insight and action. Market research will no longer be things collected some weeks ago from a subset of people answering only the questions we thought to ask. It will be a constant interaction with the real world and in real time, helping us to better understand what is actually going on, to predict the impact of actions more fully, and to make improved business decisions.

As an industry we are the interface between business and the world. We will have to consider how we are organised to deal with the scale and speed of information. Data visualisation and storytelling are only a fraction of the future. Old measures of quality and rigour will have to be rewritten.

The relationship between research agency, insight department and business stakeholders will need to evolve. Creativity will come into data selection and not just data use. We will need to save time in the gathering phase so that we can spend more time driving value from the insight and deciding how to act. Businesses that neglect the new market research world will be forever stuck in their old grooves.

Honor Mallon is partner of PwC, research to insight (r2i) and she is leading a collaboration with MRS to evaluate the UK research sector, in a report due in spring 2016

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