A Review on Projective Techniques applied on Social Science Research

Ganesh Das

Subject Matter Specialist (Agricultural Extension), Cooch Behar Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India.

*Corresponding Author: Ganesh Das, Subject Matter Specialist (Agricultural Extension), Cooch Behar Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India.

ABSTRACT

Projection is an-inner defence mechanism in which a personal motive that is forbidden is perceived by the person concerned as a motive of one or several other persons. Projective techniques are questioning techniques that depersonalise the question to the respondent thereby desensitising the respondent to the answer they give and deactivating their conscious defences about the answer they give. Projective techniques are based on quite unstructured materials — a vague and ambiguous picture, an ink-blot, a word, a phrase, some modelling clay or a paper and the finger prints. There are numerous exploratory, standardized or unstandardized projective media. Projective techniques are sufficiently versatile to be employed within a wide range of research strategies and applications. They can be involving and fun for respondents, tap feelings, perceptions and attitudes that can be difficult to access by more direct questioning techniques and can be a rich source of new leads and ideas for researchers.

Keywords: *Projection, Projective, Ink-Blot, Finger Paints, Perceptions*

CONCEPT AND BACKGROUND

The projection of inner perceptions to the outside environment is a primitive mechanism. It has the greatest share in shaping one's outer world. "A person who ascribes to another person a trait or desires of his own that it would be painful for his ego to admit; is said to be projecting. Projection, being an unconscious defence mechanism, is not communicated to others and represents a false perception in the person himself. "As Harold H. Anderson (1952) has shown in the above definition, projection is an-inner defence mechanism in which a personal motive that is forbidden is perceived by the person concerned as a motive of one or several other persons.

Norman D Sandburg (1977) has classified projection in two ways — classic and generalized. He told, "There are two important ways in which the term is used. Classic projection is the defence mechanism described by Freud, and refers to an unconscious and pathological process when the person rejects unacceptable impulses or qualities in him but attributes them to individuals or objects in the environment. According to Rapaport and others (1952) "The concept of projection as used in

projective procedures is one formed on the pattern of projector and screen, in this sense, a projection has occurred when the psychological structure of the subject becomes palpable in his actions, choices, products and creations. Therefore, when a procedure is designed as to enable the subject to demonstrate his psychological structure untilled by conventional mode, it is projective.

The subject matter used in the procedure serves as a lens of projector, and the recorded material of elicited behaviour is the screen with the picture projected on it."Freud's discovery of psychoanalysis became the basis of all projective techniques. The way in which Jung utilized the free association method, foreshadowed the finalisation of the projective techniques.

Projective techniques are questioning techniques that depersonalise the question to the respondent thereby desensitising the respondent to the answer they give and deactivating their conscious defences about the answer they give (Boddy, 2005b; Ramsey, Ibbotson, & McCole, 2006; Vinten, 1995). Several different techniques were developed such as the well-known Rorschach technique, or 'ink-blot test',

where subjects are assumed to project aspects of their personality onto the ambiguous features of a defined set of blots of ink (Graca & Whiddon, 1990). Market researchers use projective techniques in a much more structured way than the Rorschach technique, to facilitate deeper responses from respondents than direct questions obtain (Haire, 1950; Hofstede, vanHoof, Walenberg, & deJong, 2007).

CLASSIFICATION OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUE

Projective techniques are based on quite unstructured materials — a vague and ambiguous picture, an ink-blot, a word, a phrase, some modelling clay or a paper and the finger prints. There are numerous exploratory, standardized or unstandardised projective media. A number of projective techniques are being used to understand personality aspects. They may be classified by various schemes, stressing the nature of materials, the manner of interpretation or the type of behaviour or response that is required of the subject.

Linzey (1961) has categorized the great variety of projective devices into five groups, based on types of responses required from the subject —

Association Techniques

Association techniques ask the person to respond to some stimulus with first word, image or percept that comes to mind. Examples are the Rorschach and word association.

Construction Techniques

Construction techniques give the subject the task of producing something, usually a story or a drawing such as the Thematic Apperception Test.

Completion Techniques

Completion techniques require the subject to finish an incomplete task in any manner he wishes, such as the sentence-completion procedure.

Choice or Ordering Techniques

Choice or ordering techniques merely involves a selection among alternatives, sometimes with instructions to rank the possibilities in order of preference or attractiveness; such as the Tomikas Horn Picture Arrangement Test which consists of sets of three line drawings depicting activities to be arranged by the subject to make a story.

Expressive Techniques

Expressive techniques are oriented toward revealing personal manner and style in the process of performing some activities, such as play situations with children or the draw-a-person test.

Word Association Test

The word association technique consists of a list of words which is read by the examiner to the subject one at a time. The subject is asked to respond with the first word, image, idea or percept that occurs to him. He is asked not to reflect or reason but to give his most immediate response. The word association test comes in the group of association techniques. Originally the test was known as the "free association test". The word association test may be considered in the group of verbal techniques also. Most of the projective techniques require verbal responses but certain projective techniques are wholly verbal, utilising only words in both stimulus material and responses. The classical form of verbal projective test is the word association. The word association test is fully a verbal technique; we may call it word-word association test. It may be administered in either oral or written form. It is also suitable for 'written group administration.

THE USEFULNESS OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Psychologists and market researchers who are used to using projective techniques both claim that they are very useful, and Simeonoff, for example, (1976) says:

"People who have experience of projective techniques realize the insight they can give, not only into other people's mental processes but also into one's own". (Semeonoff, 1976).

The definition of projective techniques given in the 'Dictionary of Marketing Terms', (Anonymous, 2007) gives an insight as to why these techniques are found to be useful, they are defined as being: "A psychological method of uncovering subconscious material within subjects". This ability to uncover subconscious material makes them useful in such work as brand development research (Chandler et al., 2002), in educational research (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000), in consumer research (Chang, 2001) and in psychological counselling (Clark, 1995).

This is because their use helps people to articulate and acknowledge facets and feelings that may otherwise prove hard to access and may therefore remain unrecognised. They have been used in market research since the reported

success of their use in studies in the early 1950's (Haire, 1950).

In previous research among business academics and postgraduate business students, respondents were given a presentation on the usefulness of projective techniques and then asked to complete the verbal reply bubble and thought reply bubble in reply to another researcher asking them what they thought about using projective techniques in business research (Boddy, 2004b; Boddy, 2005a). When the business academics in this study became aware of projective techniques, they reported that they regarded them as helpful and that they wanted to find out more about them so that they could use them in their own research.

It was apparent in this study that although market researchers and psychologists use projective techniques frequently in their research, most academics do not. However, once they had become familiar with the theory behind projective techniques and with their use inpractice, academics were persuaded as to the potential benefits of using these techniques.

BENEFITS OF USING PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Projective techniques are sufficiently versatile to be employed within a wide range of research strategies and applications. They can be involving and fun for respondents, tap feelings, perceptions and attitudes that can be difficult to access by more direct questioning techniques and can be a rich source of new leads and ideas for researchers.

Projective techniques are usually employed in combination with other quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Word association, sentence completion and bubble cartoons can be incorporated into interviewer administered or self-completion questionnaires (Oppenheim, 1992). Other techniques such as story telling or personification techniques are more appropriately employed in class discussions or focus groups. Where projective techniques are introduced at an early stage in group discussions, the responses they generate can provide ideas and new perspectives for further discussion (Will et al., 1996). Clark (1995) suggested that they could be used in the counselling process for similar reasons.

The willingness of respondents to cooperate and volunteer thoughtful responses concerns academic and commercial researchers (Morton-Williams, 1993). Long questionnaires and long, boring runs of questions with little variety in response format can demotivate respondents. Researchers may be disappointed when answers to open questions appear superficial and stereotypical. By contrast, projective techniques generate respondent curiosity because they are different, unusual and intriguing. They are more likely to stretch the respondent's imagination and involvement than survey questions and scales.

DRAWBACKS OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

The assumption that projective techniques tap into the deep layers of the psyche that are inaccessible to direct questioning is open to challenge. Mostyn (1978) and Yoell (1974) argued that responses reflected cultural and social awareness rather than the projection of unconscious thoughts and feelings. Paradoxically, the reason they were rejected by Yoell and others is the very reason they are so attractive to consumer researchers today. With the prevailing cultural turn in much consumer research, projective techniques are employed for what they can reveal about consumer products and brands as cultural symbols and the myths that surround them (Durgee, 1988; Levy, 1994).

Currently, there are two broad approaches to the analysis and interpretation of projective data, the content analysis approach (Mostyn, 1985) and interpretive approach (Durgee, 1988; Levy, 1994). Content analysis is well documented in the literature and involves an examination of the content of the data to identify themes or categories and their salience Market and consumer researchers employ a range of interpretive approaches to the data, including semiotic analysis (Alexander et al., 1995) and story grammars (Mick, 1986; Mick et al., 1992). Others employ psychodynamic frameworks to data interpretation (Broadbent & Cooper, 1987). Most respondents have little experience of projective techniques and are naturally curious about their purpose, their own and others' responses and how these will be interpreted where practicable, we provide an opportunity for those who complete them to compare responses and to help in their analysis and interpretation.

REFERENCES

[1] Alexander, M., Burt, M. & Collinson, A. (1995). Big talk, small talk, BT's strategic use of semiotics in planning its current advertising, *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 37: 91–102.

[2] Anderson, J. C. (1978). The validity of Haire's shopping list projective technique. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 15: 644-649.

[3] Anonymous (2007).Dictionary of Marketing Terms. Accessed 17 September 2007.

[4] Anonymous.(2007), Dictionary of Marketing Terms.www.marketingpower.com/mg-dictionary.

[5] Boddy, C. R. (2004a). From brand image research to teaching assessment: Using a projective technique borrowed from marketing research to aid an understanding of teaching effectiveness. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Education*, 12(2): 94-105.

[6] Boddy, C. R. (2004b). Projective Techniques in Business Research: Are they Useful? Paper presented at the Proceedings of the National Business Student Research Conference, Perth, 1-2 August.

[7] Boddy, C. R. (2005a). Industry Uses Projective Techniques Extensively, Frequently and Successfully In Research:- So Why Don't Academics? Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Australasian Business & Behavioural Sciences Association Conference, Cairns, 5-7 August.

[8] Boddy, C. R. (2005b). Projective techniques in market research: valueless subjectivity or insightful reality? A look at the evidence for the usefulness, reliability and validity of projective techniques in market research. *International Journal of Market Research*, 47(3): 239-254.

[9] Boddy, C. R. (2007).Projective Techniques in Taiwan and Asia-Pacific market research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 10(1): 48-62.

[10] Boddy, C. R. (2008). Are Projective Techniques Actually Projective or Are Market Researchers Wasting Their Time? Australasian Journal of Market and Social Research, 16(1): 5 - 17.

[11] Broadbent, K. & Cooper, P. (1987). Research is good for you, Marketing Intelligence and Planning, 5: 3–9.

[12] Catterall, M., & Ibbotson, P. (2000).Using projective techniques in education research. *British Education Research Journal*, 26(2): 245 - 256.

[13] Chandler, J., & Owen, M. (2002).Developing Brands with Qualitative Market Research. London: Sage.

[14] Clark, A.J. (1995). Projective techniques in the counseling process.*Journal of Counseling and Development*, 73: 311–316.

[15] D. Rapaport, D. (1952). Projective techniques and the theory thinking. In: The collected paper of David Rapaport, ed, M. M. Gill. New York. Basic Books.

[16] Durgee, J.F. (1988). On Cezanne, hot buttons, and interpreting consumer storytelling. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 5: 47–51.

[17] Graca, J., &Whiddon, M. F. (1990). Projections into Ambiguous Stimuli: Part II. Other than Inkblots. In J. C. Crumbaugh (Ed.), A Primer of Projective Techniques of Psychological Assessment. San Diego, California: Libra Publishers Inc., 34-76.

[18] Haire, M. (1950).Projective Techniques in Marketing Research.*Journal of Marketing*, 14(5): 649-656.

[19] Hofstede, A., vanHoof, J., Walenberg, N., &deJong, M. (2007). Projective techniques for brand image research. Two personification-based methods explored. Qualitative Market *Research: An International Journal*, 10(3): 300-309.

[20] Levy, S. (1994). Interpreting consumer mythology.*Marketing Management*, 2: 4–9.

[21] Linzey, G. (1959). On the classification of projective techniques.*Psychological Bulletin*, 56: 158–168.

[22] Mannan, M. (2007). Student attrition and academic and social integration: Application of Tinto's model at the University of Papua New Guinea. Higher Education, 53(2): 147-165.

[23] Mick, D. G. (1986). Consumer research and semiotics: exploring the morphology of signs, symbols, and significance. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13: 196–213.

[24] Mick, D.G., DEMOSS, M. & FABER, R.J. (1992) A projective study of motivations and meanings of self-gifts: implications for retail management, Journal of Retailing, 68: 122–144.

[25] Morton-Williams, J. (1993). Interviewer Approaches, Aldershot, Dartmouth Publishing Company.

[26] Mostyn, B. (1978). Handbook of Motivational and Attitude Research, Bradford, MCB Publications.

[27] Mostyn, B. (1985) the content analysis of qualitative research data: a dynamic approach, in: D. Brenner (Ed.) The Research Interview, London, Academic Press: 115–145.

[28] Norman D. Sundberg. (1977). Assessment of persons, Prentice-Hall, the University of Michigan.

[29] Oppenheim, A. N. (1992). Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement, London, Pinter Publishers.

[30] Piotrowski, C., Keller, J.W. & Ogawa, T. (1993). Projective techniques: an international perspective. *Psychological Reports*, 72: 179–182.

[31] Ramsey, E., Ibbotson, P., &McCole, P. (2006).Application of projective techniques in an e-business research context.A response to 'Projective techniques in market research - valueless subjectivity or insightful reality?' *International Journal of Market Research*, 48(5): 551-573.

[32] Semeonoff, B. (1976). Projective Techniques. London: John Wiley and Sons.

[33] Sichivista, V. O. (2003). College Choir Members' Motivation to Persist in Music: Application of the Tinto Model. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 51(5): 330-341.

[34] Vinten, G. (1995). The art of asking threatening questions. *Management Decision*, 33(7): 35-39.

[35] Wetzel, J. N., O Toole, D., & Peterson, S. (1999). Factors Affecting Student Retention Probabilities: A Case Study. *Journal of Economics & Finance*, 23(1): 45-55.

[36] Will, V., Eadie, D. & Macaskill, S. (1996). Projective and enabling techniques explored, Marketing Intelligence and Planning, 14: 38–43.

[37] Yoell, W.A. (1974). The fallacy of projective techniques. *Journal of Advertising*, winter: 33–35.