

# Samra2017: Throwing bones and singing praise songs

 By Leigh Andrews

18 May 2017

The more futuristic and future-proof-themed day of research paper presentations started with a short play on stage presented by Kantar TNS filled with ululation, titled 'Throwing bones and singing praise songs, drawing inspiration from African culture to develop locally relevant projective techniques'.

The second day of the Samra annual conference 2017 kicked off with the vibrant presentation from Thandi Chiweya and Dudu Njapha of Kantar TNS, playing the roles of fizzy drink marketing researcher and traditional healer respectively. Their active presentation highlighted the importance of interpreting the stories of the people by asking what they are saying and making meaning thereof through specific projective techniques and learning from existing culture.

“ Second day of [@SAMRA\\_CEO's #samra2017](#) conference is off to an interesting start, coverage on [@Bizcommunity's @Biz\\_Marketing](#) soon! [pic.twitter.com/i8uKoyXZH0](https://pic.twitter.com/i8uKoyXZH0)  
— Rambling Litchi (@Leigh\_Andrews) [May 18, 2017](#)

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The two explained that projective techniques are a great tool for researchers to gain insight into consumers' underlying feelings, motivations, beliefs and values, which many consumers may find difficult to articulate. In addition to this, for some black African and lower income research participants it's even more difficult to participate and relate due to cultural or social distance.

As a result, their research paper with Jack Hlongwane, and what they presented to Samra conference attendees, was specific projective techniques inspired by African cultural practices intended to make these specific respondents more comfortable. Firstly, they mentioned that misinterpretation is common in any field study due to word choice and people's associated meanings. So, it's important to put interpreters and moderators in the room, but there are still certain linguistic barriers that can cause interpretation problems.

For example, Chiweya and Njapha point out that speaking of birds to someone who lives in the city implies a sense of freedom and the sky being the limit - positive and encouraging - while for many rural black participants there simply are no trees in the township so living like a bird means you are likely on the chopping block as that night's dinner. This is why it's important to adapt your specific questions and techniques to the specific respondents in each group. Chiweya and Njapha looked specifically at the cultural practices of singing praise songs and throwing bones as projective techniques in their focus groups. The praise songs worked wonders, the bone-throwing not so much. Here's why...

## Singing the praises of praise songs

Praise songs have deep cultural meaning. They are passed down over generations as an oral tradition that's part of every day life yet most are not documented and are used everywhere on the continent, not just a South African thing, clarify Chiweya and Njapha. Some are used to praise leaders and chiefs, others are used at events like at weddings and parties, still others are used to give thanks for the goodness we get from nature, while others are for inanimate objects. It's very poetic and proved effective as a projective technique in the focus groups.

We watched a video of a praise song of Stoney ginger beer, one of five beverage brands in rotation. Clearly a favourite, it was said to be 'too good for children who would waste it or people who are unpure or who have sinned' and that it builds happy marriages and a happy home. So while this wasn't explicitly listed as a question in the discussion guide, it was addressed through the projective technique as participants were allowed to respond as they felt best.



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The 'bone-throwing' of fizzy drink-branded cards didn't work quite as well. While the concept of throwing bones was easily understood, it's seen as such a sacred space and has a spiritual or religious aspect that many didn't want to broach in such a public or potentially blasphemous way. One of the key findings from this was that it's easy to misappropriate culture, and that at the end of the day it's not about what you want to get from people's stories, it's about letting them tell their own stories and giving them the control to do so. Handing over the reins by exploring different projective techniques also makes it that much easier for the story to flow from within the respondents.

It is still early days but this research has definite implications for the need to be more open to let people speak in these settings and not confine them to what we have planned or expected. It's also clear that there is definitely scope to learn from culture to understand our markets better. Chipeya and Njapha encourage all market researchers to think about what we can do to learn from what exists in culture, particularly for the black lower LSMs. That way, we will better understand the nuances behind the stories people tell about the brands we research.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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