How Qualitative Research Can Boost Your Brand in Today's Digital Landscape

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2020 was a turbulent year for most industries, including the qualitative research industry. Many brands and agencies that had previously relied on in-person focus groups and interviews for qualitative research moved their work online, accelerating industry innovation.

Areas like participant recruitment, insight communities, emotional intelligence (AI and ML), UX testing and more are undergoing tremendous innovation. The rise of digital technologies has opened up new possibilities, an explosion of techniques and opportunities that help us better understand the human experience.

Besides gathering deeper human insights, technology has paved the way for increased speed and efficiency in data collection and analysis. Today, it's safe to assume that digital technologies have become crucial for markets and society, making digital transformation a vital area of business innovation.

Despite the bounty it presents, digital transformation is complex, and organizations will struggle to adequately grasp and capitalize on its opportunities unless they fully understand its impact on qualitative research. Let's navigate significant changes in the qualitative research landscape while discussing how brands (yes, that's you) can benefit from the digital transformation of qualitative research.

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Gather better quality insights: Reducing the say/do gap

Seeking answers to questions has always been complex art. Respondents might forget something, feel obliged to respond appropriately or be hesitant or unwilling to open up.

There's usually a gap between what respondents say and what they do. Winning in the qualitative research game today requires narrowing the say/do gap and capturing natural behavior.

Has expanding online qualitative research methods improved the ability to understand natural behaviors? Yes – with the inclusion of emotional intelligence.

It isn't enough to get feedback; the key is to pair it with behavioral insights. Emotional intelligence includes AI technologies like voice analysis, eye tracking and facial coding to help you get a window into your customers' minds.

Did your customers say they're happy with the product? You can confirm that information by analyzing their voices or facial expressions. Want to test the consumer journey on your webpage? Utilize eye tracking to understand how your customers navigate your website.

You can use behavioral techniques for ad testing, concept testing, content testing, prototype testing and more to churn out accurate, proof-based insights to make actionable changes. Another cutting-edge technology is Natural Language Processing (NLP), which provides the tools to enhance and analyze linguistic and statistical data.

Get the best of both worlds: Conducting mixed methods research

Mixed methods research includes using multiple data collection methods (i.e., combining quantitative and qualitative research) to obtain a unified viewpoint. It is essential to the understanding you hope to gain – the What (quantitative insights) and the Why (qualitative insights) – and can help you deliver actual results.

For example, suppose a company wishes to identify issues with its new prototype. In that case, it can conduct a quantitative study followed by a qualitative study to validate the quantitative results, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of respondent opinions and feedback. Or if the company wants to understand the purchase patterns of both in-house vs. online shoppers, they can conduct a quantitative study for online shoppers and a qualitative one for in-house shoppers.

Brands can gain from both the specific, measurable insights of qualitative data and the nuanced, unique insights of quantitative data by combining both forms of research.

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Logistically simplify qualitative research: Embracing in-house, DIY research

Digital technologies have made research accessible to all by lowering barriers to entry. This means more research and insight teams are conducting in-house studies, including people in other roles – like marketers, designers, product managers, and UX teams – who carry out DIY research when

needed.

An ESOMAR study (that surveyed 802 users and buyers of insights and research from 61 countries) suggests that almost 50% of research is being handled internally with DIY tools. DIY research platforms allow brands to define the project's scope, find the right respondents, build surveys and conduct interviews faster, easier and cost-effectively.

While pure DIY platforms are available in the market today, depending on the research objectives, brands can choose a hybrid model as well (for instance, a vendor offering assistance in data reporting and analysis).

Stand out in a competitive market: Introducing research agility

Digital technologies today make it easier than ever to make research processes agile. Studies that used to last months are now completed in days. Moreover, using market research tools can help brands conduct research at a much lower cost without compromising the quality of insights (in fact, they help gather higher-quality insights than traditional qualitative data collection methods).

Even a leading brand like Cisco switched their Subscription Billing Method (SBP), based on the Waterfall method, to the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe), reducing their defects by 40% and improving their defect removal efficiency by 14%. Agile research is the name of the game for brands to build foresight, respond rapidly to changes in the market and beat competitors.

While digital transformation is not a substitute for human intelligence, it paves the way for more intelligent, more effective research. The qualitative research industry has seen and will continue to witness game-changing innovations,

enabling brands to capture superior customer insights seamlessly. Leveraging market research technology to understand your customers better and make practical innovations is crucial, especially in an uncertain economic environment.

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