The Brand's Pocket Guide to Online Qualitative (& Digital Dialogues)

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LONDON

Online qualitative

Contents and coverage...

Why Online Qual?

Why not? A 'digital' society is upon us, fully interwoven into how we think, act and do. The digital and non-digital worlds are no longer viewed as separate ecosystems - they both form part of the integrated 'whole'. In summary new research experiences should be:

Digitised: People are online constantly throughout the day - whether they are at their work laptop, using a tablet on the sofa, and/or using a mobile during their commute. Online makes people more accessible.

Socialised: The emergence of social media has radically altered behaviour - with people increasingly comfortable to 'share' and interact online. A raft of digital research tools have evolved to facilitate listening to these interactions.

Personalised: All good research should be participant-led, and conducted in a manner (and ideally via a channel) that participants are most comfortable with – increasingly, this is in a digital space.

Think of online qual as Digital Dialogues.

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The drivers of change 02

As in all areas of life, mobile and social technologies are having a transformational impact upon qualitative research - and we are only at the start of the journey. From where, when and how we engage respondents, to the breadth and depth consumers are prepared to share their lives with us - the landscape has changed markedly.

However, qualitative research needs to be more creative and innovative in the tools and techniques employed - to keep respondents fully engaged, but also maximise what the digital world has to offer, so therefore needs to…

Embrace the experiential - Brands are increasingly seeking research methods that deliver experiential learning that immerse them in consumers' worlds - allowing them to interact with, and/or role play as, their consumer - to gain a much deeper, human, understanding of their customers'/prospects' emotions, attitudes and behaviours.

Move from insights to empathy - More and more, we are realising that treating consumers like humans yields richer insights and more genuine connections between brands and people. When you think of research as a conversation, rather than as a 'test', a deeper, more meaningful dialogue begins to open up.

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The main methods

The following is a brief summary of the major online qualitative research approaches deployed and the digital dialogue options:

Online Qual Options

Insight communities

Sessions are longer than a one-off group, and run for weeks or months

User diaries/blogs

Recording behaviours and / or thoughts over a set time frame

Live chats

Chat-room is set up - participants login and answer the specified questions

Video focus groups

The moderator 'posts' a question and then participants leave their replies (along with any associated rich media)

Mobile & Wearables Qual

Video focus groups

With group of participants using webcams, you can set up a video conference style session - capturing live footage

All of the above approaches can incorporate full use of rich media content (images, video, animations, etc.) as stimulus.

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Socialising qual

Good research is built upon establishing a connection with participants - and every successful new platform offers potential engagement opportunities.

Why not use a **Pinterest** page to collect visual data from participants? Or set up a **WhatsApp** group to regularly communicate with a group of teenagers? Or ask participants to submit task based short videos to **Vine**? Or use **Instagram** tags to take participants through a scenario?

The possibilities are endless.

It is important though to understand that the data collected, via these social platforms, is often not private. It is not owned by you, and the platform could change in the blink of an eye.

With a thorough knowledge of the opportunities and limitations of social media sites though, it is possible to establish how and when to best integrate social into your insight programme - to maximise participant engagement and enrich the illumination gained. The classic win-win.

Recommended: embrace new channels and platforms but only if relevant/ useful to your audience/ customers/users

In-the-moment insight

With online qual, when a moderator comments on a post, the respondent instantly receives a push notification. This enables the moderator to probe the response in-the-moment and uncover the real motivations and emotions behind real-world consumer behaviour.

Online qualitative tools facilitate **rapid, illuminating, reporting** - providing brands with a periscope into real-world, real-life, consumer **behaviours and emotions**. Videos, photos and notes are seamlessly dashboard-ed in real-time for analysis and moderation.

Platform algorithms can **automatically classify** and tag user generated content and display it in a **dashboard** format - which can then be grouped and/or categorised as appropriate.

Clearly, online qualitative is an approach that is particularly appropriate for visual, social and millennial centric (youth) brands.

ONLINE QUAL GOES MOBILE   **GOES WEARABLE**

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We all want to avoid mistakes. Based on our experience, over the years, here are a few things to avoid - to ensure your application of online qualitative is a success…

Move beyond the static discussion guide - Yes, the discussion guide needs to be clear, concise, and dynamic. But, it should also reach beyond a battery of open-ended questions. Ideally, mix in interactive & engaging activities such as respondent video, collages, perceptual maps, social/mobile activities, as well as storytelling.

Lack of communication - Communication with respondents, from project start to end is key. Be clear with respondents at the outset why they are important to the study, as well as what is expected of them (in terms of both time & activity commitment). The moderator should keep the comms 'high', at the very minimum sending a note to everyone, each day, providing encouragement and outlining their activity for that day.

Insufficient incentives - Nothing will discourage a respondent more than doing a lot more work than they anticipated when recruited. Online is no different to 'traditional' qual in this regard. Typically, a multi-day study should require a respondent to commit at least 30 minutes per day – they should be recompensed accordingly. Of course, if the study is interesting and well-designed, respondents will often spend a lot more time sharing because they feel they want to.

Remember: 2-way digital dialogues, not surveys.

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So, we've now flagged the mistakes to avoid. Given we've conducted thousands of online qualitative studies and learned much about delivering project success along the way, here are a few 'nuggets':

Socialise not sterilise

Introduce yourself as the moderator, bring in some of your personality. Allow respondents to share and converse. Socialise the method.

Share with stakeholders

There is an opportunity to pull less engaged stakeholders in more during the fieldwork, through the sharing of great insights and respondent contributions - as they happen.

Feed and suggest

Daily notes (and/or video updates) to respondents are ideal for keeping your participants engaged. Another effective tactic is to use an online research platform's probing tools.
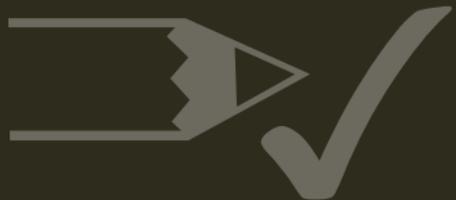
Qual is Qual

At the root of it, is online qualitative (with the growing array of digital tools and techniques) that different from 'traditional' qual? In our view, no. To deliver programme success, the core principles of accurate recruitment, explorative moderation, in-depth analysis & illuminating reporting apply.

Furthermore, why does there need to be a binary online/traditional qual trade-off? Can the benefits of online qual not be employed as an enhancement to more traditional approaches, and vice-versa?

That said, to ignore or dismiss online qual is blinkered in the extreme. Digital is a reality and mobile and social technologies - as previously highlighted - are already having a transformational impact upon society. So let's embrace the tools and techniques that can better help us understand the connected consumer.

Skopos London has been supporting organisations in the delivery of market research & insight programmes (including online qualitative or digital dialogues) since 2001. We would be very happy to talk things through with you, with no obligation. References and testimonials are, of course, available from our extensive, blue chip, client list.

The Pocket Guide to Online Qualitative is part of a set created by Skopos London.

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