

Wild Heather Digital Research



MARKET RESEARCH TOOLKIT #4

Online focus groups & interviews

The following section outlines the benefits and implications of online qualitative research. Essentially it is less expensive than traditional methods making it an option for many organisations. We will outline tips and rules to follow to ensure you get the best from your research and you can be assured you have carried it out properly.

Advantages of online focus groups / interviews

Lower cost – Less expensive compared to face-to-face equivalents (reduced incentives due to no travel time, no viewing facility / hotel room hire).

More accessible – Interviewees / focus group participants who would normally be inaccessible (i.e. don't live locally) or hard to involve in research (people with little time for participation) can more easily be involved.

Equal participation – In focus groups, shy or quiet participants may find it easier to contribute and those overbearing less likely to dominate the conversation. As with conventional focus groups it is important that the moderator controls and manages participation.

Improved anonymity and confidentiality – Focus group participants can employ pseudonyms so that their identity can be concealed from the group.

Reduced social desirability bias - Makes it easier for discussion of potentially embarrassing issues and ability to divulge sensitive / potentially unpopular views.

No transcription time or cost– As responses are typed there is no need for the onerous task of transcribing. Online interviews / focus groups are instantly transcribed and therefore improved accuracy and reduced risk of mishearing responses.

Preloaded discussion guide / stimulus material – The moderator pre-load all questions and discussion guide / questions and use these when they're needed.

Disadvantages of online focus groups / interviews

Sometimes less accessible – Only people with online facilities and who can use them are likely to be in position to participate. The key is to know your target population.

Less rapport / engagement - It can take more effort from the moderator to probe further responses and establish rapport when not in a face-to-face setting.

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Less certainty in participants – You cannot be certain that the people being interviewed are who they say they are. Therefore results and findings have to be interpreted rather than taken literally.

Variations in keyboard skills – Although there is arguably more equal participation, variations in keyboard skills may reduce this equality.

As with all Qualitative research, the Moderator must be sufficiently skilled to encourage participation from all members, avoid the session being dominated by any individual and must probe the responses provided (e.g. Why do you think that? Why do you say that? Do others agree / disagree...why? / why not? Etc), to uncover a depth of understanding.

Care is always required to ensure that respondents are giving real insight and not providing 'socially acceptable' or 'politically correct' comments, which do not illustrate their true views.

This sheet is part of series, for more information please see:

Market Research Toolkit #1: Introduction to Market Research

Market Research Toolkit #2: Qualitative or Quantitative?

Market Research Toolkit #3: Online & Web-based Surveys

Market Research Toolkit #5: Survey Design – Top Tips

Market Research Toolkit #6: Types of Questions

Market Research Toolkit #7: Qualitative Research: Practical Advice

This toolkit was prepared by Wild Heather Digital Research. WHDR uses the latest technology to deliver primary research insights to organisations. We offer online quantitative and online qualitative research services, including the development and use of panels, and broad based consultation programmes in addition to online group discussions, depth interviews and online surveys.