

MOVING BEYOND TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES AND PANELS

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While the past couple of years were certainly tumultuous, many of the changes emerging within the research industry in response to the pandemic have helped to expand the way research is conducted and ultimately, better service our customers and stakeholders.

From advances in Storytelling and Data Visualization to Agile Research, Data Integration and AI, researchers have been able to achieve their objectives with technologies and approaches that are rapidly evolving and maturing. It comes as no surprise then that this GRIT report indicates we can expect to see those hot topics continue to gain attention and build adoption well into 2022 and beyond.

It's those trends – and enabling them in creative and innovative ways - that excites us the most at Recollective for the future state of the research industry. It demands out-of-the-box thinking along with the adoption of new tools, methods and (happily) in many cases, technology.

For example, triggered at the start of the pandemic by the inability to conduct in-person research during lockdowns, a surge in adoption of online techniques has forced many researchers to replace their scheduled projects with an “online equivalent” that utilize live video sessions or online activities. There has been a corresponding surge in technology available to meet that demand which advances the whole industry.

At Recollective, our conversations and observations indicate that that transition is now the new norm. What's more, as time has passed, we're excited that so many researchers can see beyond online as a simple replacement and are embracing new technologies as a way to accomplish even more for their customers, stimulating the adoption and creation of even more online innovations.

On a human level, the transition to the greater adoption of online has also had tremendous benefits for research teams, clients and research participants too. One of the main benefits is the formation of closer connections; the connection between customers and brands, researchers and each other have all been strengthened by the shift to online technology.

That's not surprising of course. The social web has demonstrated how important online connections are to most people and how technology can strengthen them. Seeing those requirements extend into research as individuals connect with brands or the products they use on a daily basis is understandable. However, it poses a new challenge for researchers: how can we help our clients and stakeholders continue to delight their target audience with top quality research insights whilst also creating a unique and customized research experience that participants want to engage in?

Enter: Online Communities and Panels

The simple answer is to create an online panel or community with your target audience. While not a “new” approach, there is a huge opportunity for our industry to reimagine what online panels and communities can be. That involves better understanding their relative strengths and weaknesses and identifying how to can design/manage research and engage participants differently using them.

Panels are great when you need to talk to a large audience or a select sub-group in a quantitative way, but the drawback is that they tend to only provide a one-way interaction between the customer/user and brand. This leaves a lot to be desired from the participant's point of

view because after they share their opinions, there is typically no communication until the next survey opportunity. In addition, it can become frustrating to continuously share feedback with a brand and never hear how the information is being used. All of which can lead to dropout and lower response rates over time.

On the other hand, online communities can provide the degree of access and connection participants now seek. This is done by creating a more collaborative environment that facilitates a two-way interaction between the participants and the research team. The challenge is that online communities demand a lot of effort to successfully manage and maintain them (especially at any significant scale).

In the past, organizations may have selected one versus the other based on a prioritization of their overall needs, also taking into account their available resources and budget. In more recent conversations with our Recollective customers, we see just that frustration - they often find themselves choosing between an approach or platform that specializes in only one area. That selection naturally introduces a compromise that we believe shouldn't be necessary. There needs to be a better solution; one that blends the best of both approaches to establish and nurture ongoing relationships with a target audience.

So what does this mean moving forward?

As organizations push harder for rapid, just-in-time insights and iterative, agile methods require regular feedback, online qualitative communities are being forced to scale to include larger sample sizes. Likewise, quantitative panels must also now accommodate more connection and engagement between members, forcing technology to evolve to meet these emerging needs.

With so many robust technologies for both online qual and quant already available, Recollective believes the solution is to take a hybrid, best of breeds approach in helping to facilitate the evolution of online communities and panels. So, we designed “Recollective Hub” to be a unique solution that lets researchers utilize the best of online qual and quant tools within one platform.

Recollective Hub offers researchers and organizations a robust panel management solution that includes native qualitative components like home pages, communication tools, always-on discussion boards and more with the ability to easily connect any third-party tool such as surveys or UX testing apps so that you can effortlessly utilize them alongside the Hub. This provides a centralized home to engage with all of your participants across any type of research program and avoids lock-in to specific tools, future-proofing the panel for the new innovations that will inevitably arrive.

Within an industry whose continued mantra is “cheaper, faster, better” we need to collectively push ourselves to redefine what “better” can be. At Recollective, better means evolving and adapting to the changing needs of the research industry. As technology companies continue to play a larger role in supporting researchers, we're excited about the upcoming release of Recollective Hub and how it will continue empowering researchers to do more.