

Deep Insights

Online communities as a new key to insights for market researchers

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It takes the right kind of inspiration to launch successful innovations commercially. Online communities create an opportunity to develop new ideas in collaboration with consumers. **Julia Koch** and **Natali Pohlschneider** additionally show why communities may also provide ideal conditions for subsequent constructive co-creation processes.

Innovations are usually not a lucky shot. Instead they require hard work and the right kind of inspiration. In many companies, market research has already been established as an important source of inspiration. Approved methods like in-depth interviews or focus groups uncover hidden needs, which are subsequently used to generate ideas. Nevertheless, about 70 per cent of all innovations turn out to be flops. This is also due to the lack of proper concept and prototype tests. Therefore market research should actually start much earlier: Market researchers play an essential role in this age of co-creation, which entails the development of new products or services in collaboration with external partners and consumers. Market researchers have the necessary means to link companies with their target groups, and to promote joint innovations. Therefore they accompany the whole process right from the first inspiration.

Important for the innovation process

Online communities have turned out to be an especially promising approach to innovation processes. The communities combine two important aspects: They allow researchers deeper insights, and at the same time they provide ideal conditions for subsequent constructive co-creation processes. In addition they provide insights into motives and needs, which set the scene for the following innovation process on the one hand, and on the other hand they define the scope for the development of specific concepts.

From the customers' point of view

Insights are established by concentration on and approximation of the topic, for example in forums or chats. In contrast to workshops, community members deal with the topics

for a much longer period of time. As a result, the insights into the participants' living environment are usually much more profound. In addition to traditional forums or chats, the online community platform IN|**SPIARY** – moderated by Produkt + Markt – provides a plethora of additional possibilities, ranging from creating collages to simple questionnaires and sorting tasks to photo documentaries of everyday behaviour. There communication is nearly unlimited. Due to newly gained mobility thanks to smartphones and the like, pictures and videos may be easily uploaded. Hence, looking through the consumers' eyes becomes the norm. The client is able to access the community any time and may also control the insights process in real time. Subsequently, the market research institute and the client together reflect on the insights and derive fields of action for the innovation process.

Time to process

The innovation process itself benefits from the runtime of the community. Traditional workshops usually produce new ideas within just a few short hours. As a result, those ideas often only include obvious product advancements. In contrast, the communities often run for several weeks. Hence this approach corresponds to the fact that the brain needs a certain amount of time to process new tasks and impressions before turning them into new ideas. Truly innovative ideas emerge when existing knowledge is subconsciously combined with the problem – this may happen also quite stereotypically in the shower.

Put in perspective

Last year Produkt + Markt conducted an IN|**SPIARY** study on groceries. The participants were introduced to the topic by means of a forum discussion on their general eating behaviour. The results of the discussion were enhanced with a food log, where the participants documented all of their food and beverage intakes for 24 hours. Hence their previous utterances could be triangulated and put into perspective. Nevertheless, the further course of the discussion revealed that the topic grocery shopping would be a significant issue. In addition to affordable prices, the available selection as well as the openness of the shopping facility was particularly important to the participants. Long queues at the checkout and winding aisles were most frequently mentioned as negative impressions. The participants' reports on shopping facilities and their general demands on groceries allowed us to define search fields, which served as clues to generate new ideas.

Facilitated exchange of ideas

The carousel strategy – each participant advances another participant's idea – lead to the idea of a navigation app: As soon as we get into the car, the app shows us, which

shops are currently crowded and which shops are less frequented. In addition, the app also knows the aisles of the supermarket and calculates the optimal route based on our shopping list. The app vibrates when we reach the necessary food items, and sends us on detours, for example when there is congestion in front of the fresh meat counter. Eventually these ideas as well as others were presented to the whole group of participants and the community selected their favourite idea.

Online communities are also suitable for specialist target groups. For example, in a study conducted with farmers, the participants discussed their handling of pesticides and developed approaches to improve the packaging. They i.e. identified the problem that 5-litre canisters lack a ventilation hole. This causes the liquid to splash when it is poured, which makes it difficult to dispense the chemicals with due safety and caution. Consequently, reports from practice allowed the client to pick up on the farmers' ideas for improvement and examine the farmers' own canister modifications – Co-creation at its best.

Globally connected

Online communities do not just combine a phase of profound insights generation and provide a safe space for co-creation processes; instead they are also suitable for highly diverse target groups. The Internet is ubiquitous and connects people nationwide – no matter how particular the target group. Medical specialists, farmers, or B2B decision makers – everyone can access the platform and submit opinions or ideas at any time of day. Therefore it is also possible to connect participants worldwide. All they need is a good internet connection and a little bit of inspiration.

The Authors



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