

My friend, the brand

Narrative in qualitative online research

Approaches from narrative and systemic psychology breathe new life into brand measurement, says **Julia David**. She will present two tools that can be used in qualitative online surveys to determine the consumer’s experience of and relationship to a brand.

You may well have come up against problems testing your brand in online interviews: “mind-numbingly” long item batteries, misunderstanding of the items by failing to translate marketing speak into everyday language, bored participants, results lacking differentiation from competitors, uninspiring insights and so on.

BrandView and BrandGraph, our qualitative instruments for brand research, were developed to solve these problems of online surveys. Both methods are intended for qualitative online research, but are actually based on classic psychological approaches: on narrative and systemic psychology.

The narrative psychological approach

Human brains enjoy thinking in stories. Storytelling, as a concept from narrative psychology, stems from the realisation that people create sense, meaning and identity with stories (Frenzel, Müller, Sottong, Storytelling – Das Praxisbuch, 2006). Therefore, stories are cleverly and deliberately used to improve the understanding of important contents. This encourages the listeners to learn and think for themselves as well as spreading ideas. It is no coincidence that successful companies are the ones that bring their brand to life in stories.

We have harnessed the strengths of storytelling to develop BrandView, a tool presenting a brand as the protagonist in stories. The protagonist is faced with various short stories and has to decide between three different actions. For example, what does the brand as protagonist do if it wins one million euros? Does it invest the money safely or prefer to go on a spending spree? Or what does it do if the group gets lost in the woods? Does the brand feel totally helpless? Does it take charge? Or is the group rescued by the brand’s competitor (fig. 1)?

The new neighbour could do with some help to move in. What does ... do?
 ... takes command, organizes the move and gets on with it
 ... is pleased to help. A good opportunity to get to know each other
 ... has more exciting things to do and wouldn't even think of helping

Der neue Nachbar könnte beim Einzug noch Hilfe gebrauchen. Was macht ...?

| | VW | Tesla |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ... übernimmt das Kommando, packt an und organisiert den Umzug. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| ... freut sich mitzuhelfen. Eine gute Gelegenheit, sich kennenzulernen. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| ... hat Aufregenderes zu tun und kommt nicht auf die Idee zu helfen. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Fig. 1: **VW as nice neighbour:**
Short story from the qualitative online tool BrandView

All short stories and possible actions are backed by motive dimensions and Fournier’s brand relationship framework. This allows a valid interpretation and scientific analysis of the results. The storytelling approach of BrandView enables the respondents to experience the usually rather abstract, elusive and implicit image of the brand. The behaviour attributed to the brand in the various short stories indicates how the respondent perceives the brand, taking us straight to the personality of the brand.

The systemic psychological approach

We are all part of a system – be it a personal, professional or family system. Companies, brands and products are likewise part of a system. They operate in a market, interrelate, influence each other, and any change in one place affects the whole system, like in a cobweb (Horn & Brick, Organisationsaufstellung und systemisches Coaching, 2006). Systemic psychology follows the assumption that reality can only be truly represented by depicting the whole system, including the interaction of individual elements.

Based on this systemic approach, BrandGraph is another tool that can be used in online surveys for qualitative brand research. It aims to establish a constellation between the brand and the respondent in the overall system, for instance in the current competitive environment. The respondent is asked to position various brands or market players and himself in relation to each other from his own individual perspective. In addition to the position of the brand relative to the respondent (fig. 2), a viewing direction is assigned. This gives a good idea of the respondent’s

relationship to the brand. The spatial position and viewing direction are regarded as two quantifiable measurements. They are the foundation for computing the relationship KPIs and allocating the brand to one of the eight relationship roles. For example, is the brand the respondent's best friend, a lover, the boss or rather a subordinate?

Besides computing the relationship role, the underlying motives are explored in-depth, mainly from the answers to qualitative questions in the online survey. Visualisation of the system serves as a good template for qualitative inquiry since BrandGraph can be seen as an imaging method – a mapping of the (mental) image so to speak. The respondent can use the connected and dynamic system to visualise and explain his unconscious view of the brand (fig. 4).

The tool provides a complex and standardized measurement of brand relationships through the “intuitive” language of systemic psychology. Consequently, BrandGraph provides new insights for successfully positioning a brand in the market.

Storytelling as brand measurement

By taking a different playful approach, BrandView and BrandGraph introduce novelty into the world of qualitative online market research. The instruments deliver clear insights with countless opportunities for storytelling. They are thus a good addition to the market research tools traditionally used for brand measurement. ■

Fig. 2: **Closeness and distance:** the closer the elements are, the more intense the relationship

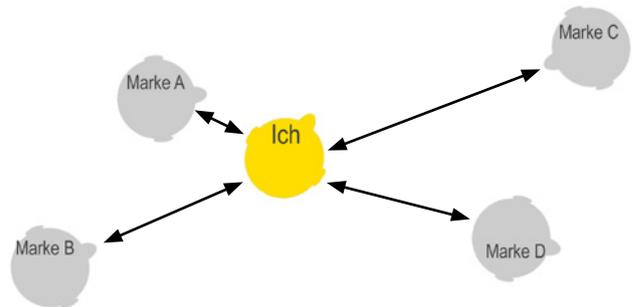


Fig. 3: **Viewing direction:** viewing direction and eye contact give a further indication of the intensity of the relationship

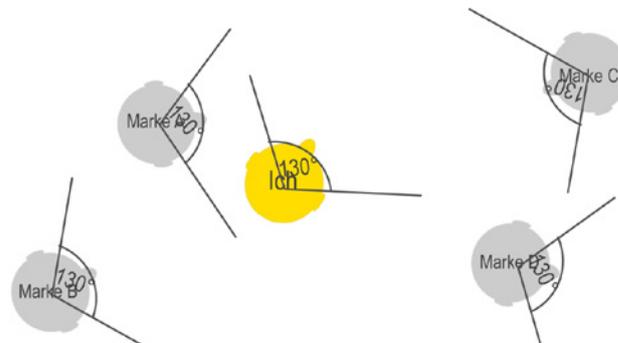


Fig. 4: **Positioning of the brand:** the respondent can visualise his unconscious view



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