

Crowd interpretation: Are participants the researchers of the future?

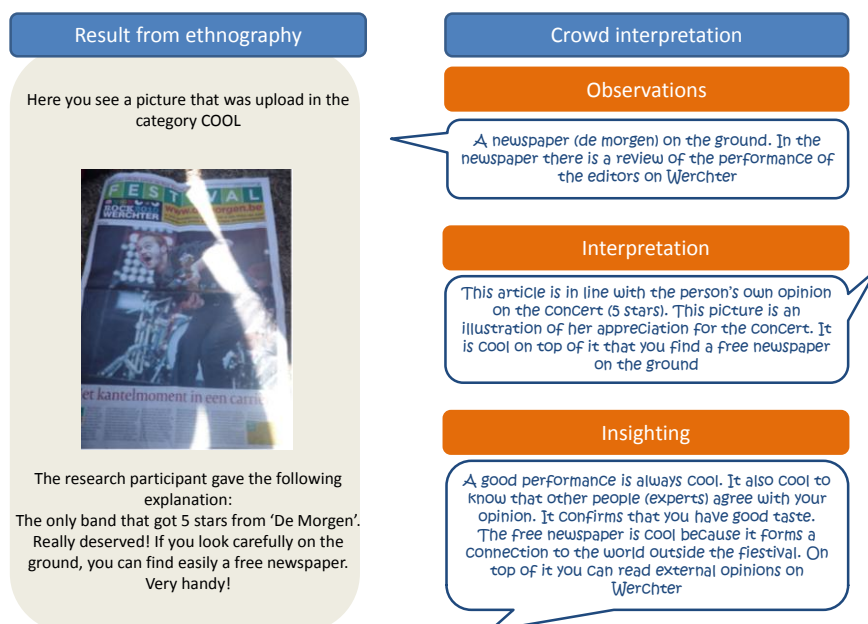
Good insights will lead to the discovery of something that is not yet obvious. They should be recognizable and real and must allow us to translate them into actionable business opportunities. Researchers are considered as experts in insight generation. But is the researcher still the right and only person suited to get the job done in? Can they see and interpret everything? In this paper (this is a summary of a paper we presented at Esomar congress 2011), we challenge this premise by introducing the principle of crowd interpretation: the analysis of research data by a group of research participants in order to obtain richer interpretation of data that lead to insights.

Two principles

Crowd interpretation is based on two principles. The first one is **wisdom of the crowd**, first coined by **James Surowiecki** which states that when grouping the information from different individuals, the decision will outperform the decision made by one single member. The second principle can best be summarized as managers bounded rationality. Bounded rationality is the idea that in decision making, rationality of individuals is limited by the information they have, the cognitive limitations of their minds, and the finite amount of time they have to make decisions. InSites Consulting's Forward Lab tested the power and these principles of crowd interpretation in cooperation with the VRT (national broadcasting BE) and Heinz. Below you'll find the summary of two cases we executed.

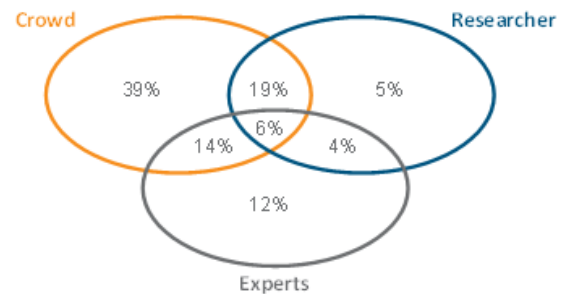
Case1 with VRT: Why Rock Werchter is cool

At VRT we wanted to understand what youngsters find cool on festivals. Through an ethnographic study, youngsters were asked to report on what they found cool / not cool on the rockfestival Werchter. For the crowd interpretation, we recruited 80 consumers that were asked to analyze the multimedia ethnographic data. During the crowd interpretation exercise, we expected the crowd to generate insights based on research data collected from other participants. We asked interpreters to analyze the pictures that were presented. In order to stimulate people to provide us with in-depth insights, we asked them to three levels of crowd interpretation. An example can be found here



To compare the value of crowd interpretation, we also asked two qualitative researchers and a group of youth experts to conduct the analysis independently. As a final judgment, the insights from the crowd, researchers and experts were also presented to the original participants in the ethnography who rated them on their success.

In total the four crowds came up with over 200 valid interpretations of the data which clearly demonstrated that crowd interpretation with participants is feasible and complementary. When comparing the interpretations from the crowd with the interpretations coming from experts & researcher, we found that involving participants in the analysis of data leads to about 40% more additional insights. In terms of quality of the insights, we found no significant differences between the different groups.



Contribution of each group to the number of interpretations and insights

Case 2 with Heinz: Gamification

Results from the first case study clearly show that crowd interpretation is an added value in insighting projects. We still faced some challenges. First of all, we wanted to find an efficient and fun way to integrate crowd interpretation in the process. Also, we found that the quality of the insights of the experts was high. Therefore, we wanted to test the impact of involving clients also in crowd interpretation. In order to cope with the remaining challenges, we set up a second study in cooperation with Heinz. In order to fill the innovation funnel, Heinz is looking for insights on ketchup and cold sauce usage. During three weeks of observation, participants observed their own usage of condiments and reported via an ethnographic blog. The people who participated in the ethnography were invited to take part in the crowd interpretation as well. In order to integrate the crowd interpretation as a fun element in the research process we were inspired by the principles of 'gamification'. We decided to develop an online game for crowd interpretation which allowed different participants could interpret each other's research data. The game was both played by consumers as researchers. Again we found that crowd interpretation has an added value: 20% of the insights came uniquely from the crowd interpretation. The feedback of the participants was that it was a fun experience. The marketers were also excited: it not only stimulated their thinking, it also tested their expertise in consumer know-how, and it tapped into their competitiveness as the game microbe hit.

Conclusion

Both cases illustrate that crowd interpretation is a powerful mechanism. By looking at research data from multiple perspectives, one can discover additional and high quality insights. Does this mean that participants are the researchers of the future? Not necessarily, but it definitely seems like insight generation is not solely the domain of researchers or marketers. Consumers add a valuable and new perspective to research data and should be more involved in the analysis of research results.

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