

# Qualitative Research into Social Media Strategy and Activity

By Meredith Bourgery

## Background

Qualitative research is widely recognized as having value in helping to develop great advertising. It provides deep understanding, helps to stimulate thinking, and delivers insights about consumers and their relationships with brands and advertising. At Firefly Millward Brown we believe that many of the same principles of qualitative testing also apply to social media.

## Defining your social media strategy

Early stage qualitative research can be used to answer the following types of questions around your social media strategy:

- Does incorporating a social media component into my overall brand strategy make sense for my brand?
- Who is my social media target?
- What do they like most about my brand?
- What aspects of my brand are most talkworthy?
- What is it that my target consumers have in common with each other?
- Why are they participating in a specific community?
- What do they like to do, and what is it about these activities that they find naturally talkworthy?
- Is there a lifestyle, passion, cause, that the brand and community participants share?
- How does my brand or product fit in with the previous questions?
- Which social media activities resonate the strongest for my social media target?
- How can my brand or product's presence in the community improve the experience for participants?
- What could my brand contribute to the community it wishes to join?
- Is it topical/of the moment?
- Will my social media strategy create a bond between my brand and consumer?

## Exploring your social media activities

Qualitative research can be used to explore and optimize your social media activities, similar to traditional advertising. However, given the importance of engagement on the social web, we believe that some creative ideas should be tested earlier on at the "idea" stage. Other ideas, that rely heavily on execution, should be tested later on once the execution is sufficiently developed to represent the final experience.

Qualitative research can help identify how the digital or interactive material works to engage consumers and then generate interaction, entertainment or utility depending on the nature of the creativity.

In terms of whether to test earlier versus later, some key questions to ask are:

- Can we do justice to the digital idea with words and images alone?
- How critical is interaction to the social media activity?
- If critical, can the interaction be simulated?
- Is it about entertainment, where the execution is often critical, or about utility, where the core idea is what matters most?

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If the idea relies on consumer interaction and entertainment, it is very challenging to test it using words and pictures on a static board since this will not do justice to the idea. However, if the idea is more utilitarian in nature, a "concept" board with some key images may be enough to get the main idea across and to initiate consumer discussions. Here are some concrete illustrations:

- **Gaming:** The interest and appeal of games tends to come down to the potential for interaction and entertainment. Interaction is quite challenging to evaluate if it is overly conceptual. For example, think about how many games there are with racing cars...the success or failure of a new game will depend mainly on how it is executed. We recommend testing a well developed execution and would need to simulate someone playing the game. This means on the whole early stage research is not ideal.
- **Apps:** The appeal of an app is often more utilitarian in nature. Therefore, it is possible to evaluate the interest and appeal of an app at the idea stage. You can describe the app and how it will be useful/the purpose it will serve. A video of how it will work could also be used.
- **Bought display/video:** This can usually be researched as a rough idea. However, the best online ads do involve interaction and this should be simulated via seeing the video or display ad evolve with the interactions. We can also test multiple finished ads using Link for Digital.
- **Fan pages:** Even if your brand does not currently have a fan page, we

can look at and explore other brands' fan pages to find out what works/ doesn't work for the target audience and investigate relevance for your brand. For existing fan pages, Millward Brown can also conduct quantitative research using FanIndex.

- **Socially enhanced material** (e.g. taking your Facebook contacts and saying person X and Y liked this ad); The effect of this cannot be simulated as it entirely depends on the people that are endorsing it from each individual's friend list. We can test Facebook ads using Link for Digital.

We would recommend using a digital methodology such as IdeaBlog™ to test social media executions as it uses a digital platform to test digital executions so that the activities are experienced in the same environment as they will be when they go live.

## Contact

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