

Crafting Precise Personas: An Application of Q Methodological Research

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Introduction

- Persona development is a common strategy used to distinguish key stakeholder entities for marketing purposes.
- Personas are detailed archetypal characters representing distinct groups of behaviors, goals, and motivations observed and identified through the research process (Guo & Ma, 2018).
- The completion of personas requires an insightful perspective into the psychographics of individuals.
- Q methodology is a research approach grounded in the study of human subjectivity, a concept embodying how an individual's personal opinions and feelings shape one's judgements. At its core, the technique seeks to unveil patterns and viewpoints held by specific audiences (Watts & Stenner, 2012).
- Q methodology's application to marketing and communications is a relatively novel endeavor, particularly in agricultural communications (Leggette & Redwine, 2016).

How It Works

- 1.Data collection is comprised of a series of “Q sorts” in which participants physically rank statements printed on cards according to their level of agreement (Watts & Stenner, 2012).
2. The statements should be broadly representative of the opinion domain and resist from exercising bias toward a particular viewpoint (Watts & Stenner, 2012).
3. Researchers first apply a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to generate an unrotated factor matrix. All factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1.0 are considered as defining sorts.
4. Next, a varimax rotation is applied to generate a rotated factor matrix and select defining sorts for a characterization of viewpoints.

Advice to Others

- The concourse should be reviewed by subject matter experts to “clarify wording of items, reduce duplication, generate new items, and ensure that the Q set provides adequate coverage of the relevant ground” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 61).
- Conducting a pilot test similar to the study's target population serves as an important way to refine the wording of statements
- Q methodology researchers have cautioned against using too many statements, which can make the sorting process overly demanding and taxing for participants (Curt, 1994).
- While the time necessary is largely dependent on the concourse and individual, scheduling 20-30 minutes is recommended per participant.

Implications

- Q methodology builds personas by detecting trends and patterns in participants interpretations of social constructs. Using this approach personas can be manifested from:



Discerning inherent values of individuals



Identifying common preferences between groups of people



Uncovering underlying motivations influencing decision making



Understanding conceptualizations of identity

- The ability to develop personas truly reflective of key audience segments can inform strategic communication efforts and ensure messages are salient.

Resources Needed

- Q sorts can be conducted a number of ways, from arranging statements into the distribution on the floor to creating a board specifically for the purpose.
- To complete the instrument a 2' x 3' whiteboard with magnetized statements is a portable option that affords enough space for participants
- Some budget may be necessary to incentivize participants to thoughtfully participate in the study.
- PQ Method, the data analysis software designed specifically for Q methodology, is free and available online.

References

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- Leggette, H. R., & Redwine, T. (2016). Using Q methodology in agricultural communications research: A philosophical study. *Journal of Applied Communications*, 100(3), 57-67.
- Schmolck, P. (2014). PQMethod manual. Retrieved from <http://schmolck.userweb.mwn.de/qmethod/pqmanual.htm>.
- Watts, S., & Stenner, P. (2012). *Doing Q methodological research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.



An individual conducting a Q sort, placing statements in a template according to level of agreement