FOCUS GROUPS

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WHAT IS A FOCUS GROUP?

➤ A directed conversation about a specific topic or issue led by a moderator

➤ Generate discussion

➤ Tool to learn how people/groups think

   ➤ Preferences

   ➤ Likes/dislikes

   ➤ Opinions

   ➤ Attitudes

   ➤ What information an audience understands

   ➤ How an audience understands information

BACKGROUND

➤ Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton

  ➤ Determine the likability of preferences of radio messages

  ➤ CBS radio programming

  ➤ World War II

USES FOR FOCUS GROUPS

➤ Market research

➤ Politics

➤ Advertising

➤ Public relations

➤ Film and TV

➤ Academic research

PROCESS

➤ Research question

➤ Select location and time

➤ Determine number of participants and selection criteria

➤ Write questions

➤ Recruit participants

➤ Conduct focus group

➤ Analyze responses

➤ Report findings

PARTICIPANTS

➤ Selected based on similar characteristics

  ➤ Age

  ➤ Race

  ➤ Professions

  ➤ Ideology

  ➤ Preferences

  ➤ Region

➤ Homogeny isn't a bad thing!

➤ 3-14 participants (8-12 is ideal)

MODERATOR

➤ Also called the facilitator

➤ Coordinates time and place

➤ Establishes guidelines

➤ Develops questions

➤ Explains the process, procedures and goals

➤ Moderates discussion

OTHER FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION

➤ Space is important

  ➤ Not too big or too small

  ➤ Conducive for conversation

➤ Between 45-90 minutes in length

➤ Create a comfortable space

  ➤ Refreshments

  ➤ Comfortable chairs

➤ Recorded and transcribed

TIPS FOR YOUR FOCUS GROUPS

➤ Ask open-ended questions

➤ Ask follow-up questions

➤ Be flexible

➤ Listen!

➤ Make sure everyone speaks

➤ Be friendly, but be neutral

➤ Be cautious of body language

➤ Stay in control

ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

WHAT IS AN ONLINE FOCUS GROUP?

"A selected group of individuals who have volunteered to participate in a moderated, structured, online discussion in order to explore a particular topic for the purpose of research."

Peacock, Robertson, Williams & Clausen

POPULAR AND COMMON USAGE

➤ Health research

➤ Education research

➤ Social science research

➤ Internet/tech research

➤ Market research

TYPES OF ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

➤ Asynchronous

  ➤ Message boards

  ➤ Forums

➤ Synchronous

  ➤ Instant messaging

  ➤ Chat rooms

  ➤ Video conferencing/chatting

ADVANTAGES

➤ Self-conducted online focus groups are affordable

➤ Fast and convenient

➤ Provides a comfortable atmosphere for participants

    ➤ Candid conversation

    ➤ Anonymity

➤ Allows for a wide-reaching sample of participants

➤ Detailed, thoughtful responses

    ➤ Especially true with forums, message boards

DISADVANTAGES

➤ Conversation can be less controlled

➤ Especially true in instant messaging, chat rooms

➤ Lack of interpersonal communication cues

➤ Difficult to discern tone

➤ Distractions may be present

➤ Technical difficulties may arise

➤ Anonymity

HOW TO CONDUCT

➤ Skype or Google Hangouts

➤ Create "dummy" accounts or have participants use/ create their own accounts

➤ Provide instructions for participants

  ➤ How to use the software

  ➤ On the focus group itself

➤ Have alternative means of communication in case of technical difficulties

  ➤ Text messaging can be helpful

GOOGLE HANGOUT

➤ Creates an event

  ➤ Links are easily disseminated

  ➤ Easy to invite and remind participants of focus group

➤ Allows you to stream media at the same time

➤ Interchanges screens based on who is speaking

➤ 10 people to conference at a time

➤ Allows instant messaging

➤ Allows you to stream "Live On Air"

  ➤ Saves/records broadcast

TIPS FOR YOUR ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

➤ Use headphones!

➤ Ask open-ended questions

➤ Ask follow-up questions or have participants elaborate

➤ Be prepared

➤ Pay attention to the way you moderate discussion