

What is Narrative Research?

Narrative research is a process based on the insight that when people tell stories, they open up more, reveal things about themselves that are difficult to find out in other ways, and that their stories can be analysed in a structured way.

It reveals the language people naturally use (great for messaging research and concept optimization), what they value (great for brand strategy and product design), the pains and problems they have (critical for brand and product positioning), and where/when/how they typically expect to find a solution (identifying category entry points and guiding channel strategy).

There are qualitative, quantitative and social listening approaches to gathering narratives – from a range of different providers.

Today's speakers represent:

- [Irrational Agency](#), whose System 3 tool collects narratives quantitatively from thousands of targeted, profiled users within your category or segments, informing product and brand strategies. Irrational Agency also uses qualitative in-depth interviews to gather deep, personal stories that illuminate how people choose.
- [Pulsar](#), who collect narratives from social media sources to understand trends and find the latest stories.
- [Threadline](#), whose qualitative approach gathers rich and deep cultural insights across many categories from funeral care to automotive.

Where can I learn more about the methodology?

Narrative research is rooted in recent academic work in consumer psychology academic with narrative analysis methods already present in a rich body of [peer reviewed literature](#).

Most of the academic literature focuses on qualitative approaches, but there are also publications focusing on [quantitative narrative methods](#).

However, it is commercial research suppliers that act as the bridge between the academic and practical application for commercial clients. You can read our own work in this area on the [Irrational Agency blog](#).

What research questions is narrative research best used for?

Messaging test

By hearing the language people naturally use when telling stories, you can tailor the language you use in copy, online content and sales. Narratives will tell you how people naturally speak, the names they use for the problems and solutions in your category, and even the category itself. Your copy will become natural and intuitive and speak to consumers in their own voice.

Brand and product positioning

Understanding the jobs-to-be-done and the problems that your product and brand solve for your consumer. Stories are the most natural way for people to talk about problems and solutions – whether they're telling a story of how a product didn't do the job they wanted, or how it did.

Category understanding

If you're launching in a new category, you need to understand the problems customers really experience, which ones are not already met by existing solutions, and where your brand has permission to play. Narratives are a great tool for identifying all of these. You can also testing out new product ideas and try including your brand in a category story to see if it resonates and with whom.

Segmentations, personas and stakeholder understanding

If you need a better way to differentiate between customer segments, the stories they tell are a great way to make the differences very clear. These can be used in defining the segments themselves, or to build empathetic personas for existing segments, helping stakeholders to instantly grasp who they're designing products for, or selling to.

Customer experience research

Stories can also be a brilliant way to collect and analyse customer experiences. Provided you collect them at enough scale, they are more reliable than NPS or experience surveys, and give you much more insight into what the problems are and how to fix them. They are also a very natural way for customers to share their opinions: sending a quick voice note is easier for many people than even filling out a one-question survey.