TRY MY UI

Get the user's view

WHITE PAPER

Qualitative, Quantitative

What's the relationship between the two sides of UX research?

Qualitative and quantitative information provide two distinct vantage points from which to understand usability. Together, they paint a comprehensive picture of your UX that goes broader and deeper than either side does on its own.

Greater than the sum of its parts

Is quantitative data alone enough? Can qualitative feedback by itself provide you with the knowledge you need to improve your website? In fact, each is valuable in its own right, but neither is sufficient to fully understand your website's usability challenges.

Like a telescope, each research approach zooms in on your website, revealing a close-up perspective on your UX; paired together, qualitative and quantitative methods, like a pair of binoculars, provide a broad, in-depth view that puts usability into a broader, meaningful context.

Looking through dual lenses

"Unlike a (monocular) telescope, binoculars give users a three-dimensional image: for nearer objects the two views, presented to each of the viewer's eyes from slightly different viewpoints, produce a merged view with an impression of depth."

- Wikipedia

"Because they allow use of both eyes in a natural way, they are more comfortable than single telescopes, provide depth perception, and improve visual acuity by giving the human visual system two sets of data to process and combine."

- Encyclopedia Britannica

Qualitative tells stories

At the very core of user experience is the subjective and emotional response of the individual user – in short, the way a website makes visitors *feel*. These feelings run the gauntlet from delighted, impressed, or hooked to confused, frustrated, and angry. All these welling emotions, and the ones in between, have one thing in common: they won't show up in the numbers.

Your data may tell you which pages people visited, how long they stayed, where they came from and where they went to, but the story itself is missing – Did that user stay on your site because their interest was captured by a great piece of content, or because they were fruitlessly searching for an "About" section? When that visitor clicked to a new page, did they move a step closer to their objective or had they just mistook the page for something else? And if so, what were the cues that led them to that wrong turn?

Listening as a user narrates their journey, hearing their reactions as they navigate the ins and outs of your site, fills in those blanks. The ups and downs, the irritations and confusions, the *aha* moments, the satisfaction of a task completed, all come together to tell a story, and the best and worst things about your website immediately stand out like warm bodies through infrared goggles. Qualitative feedback tells the "why" of the user's experience at a level that otherwise remains out of sight.
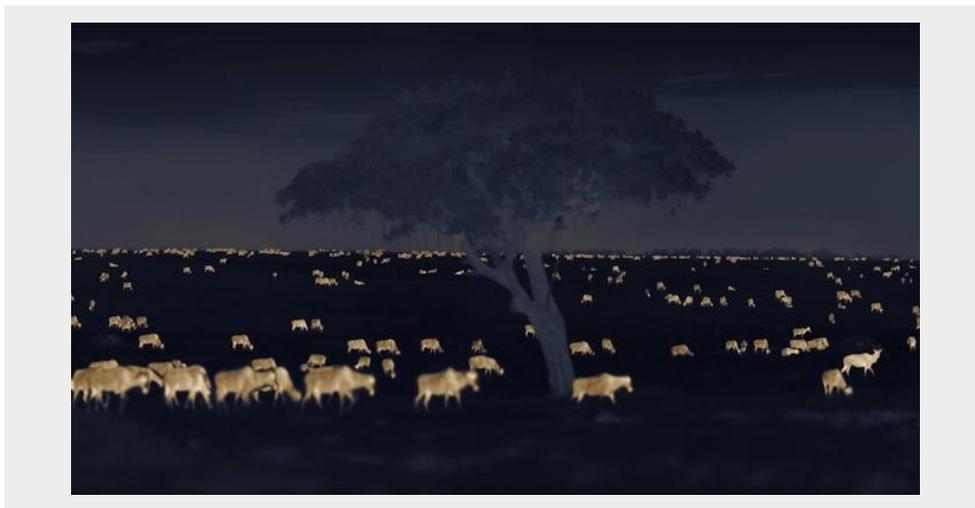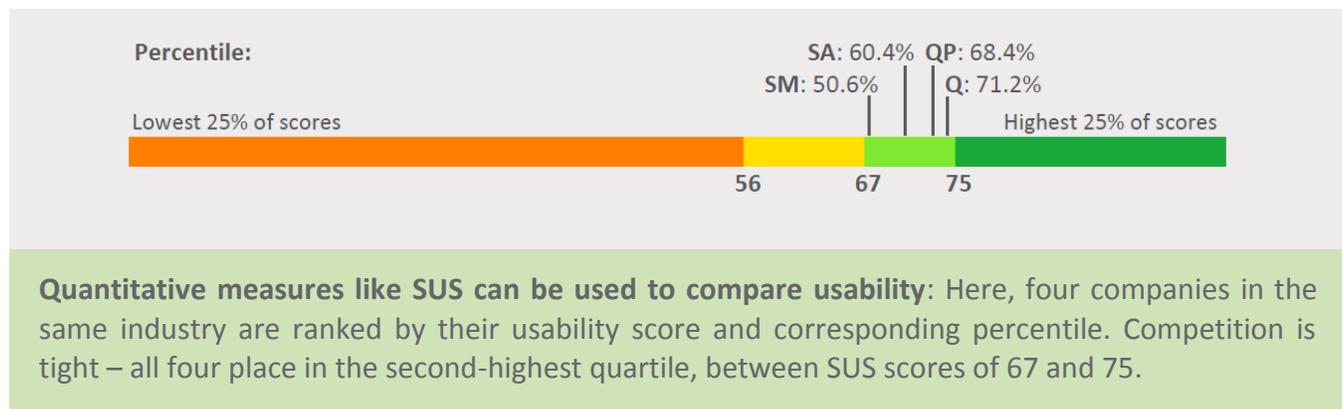

Quantitative gives context

The second lens on a set of binoculars lets the viewer gauge depth by taking advantage of parallax, allowing the mind to compare and reconcile two overlapping but distinct images to understand the object at hand in 3-D.

Similarly, quantitative feedback allows you to understand your website's usability in the

context of its virtual surroundings. Unlike qualitative information, it can be used to make easy, reliable comparisons – usability tools like SUS (the System Usability Scale) and SEQs (Single-Ease Questions) that measure and quantify usability can map the user experience, chart usability increases and decreases over time, and show how a website performs compared to others.

Quantitative measures like SUS can be used to compare usability: Here, four companies in the same industry are ranked by their usability score and corresponding percentile. Competition is tight – all four place in the second-highest quartile, between SUS scores of 67 and 75.

This last function is perhaps the most important, because your site does not operate in a vacuum; it exists within a diverse online world that offers stiff competition and furnishes visitors with pre-instilled notions, expectations, and habits. Seeing where you rank in that world breaks open a whole new level of self-knowledge. Not only does it concisely demonstrate how much work you have to do to improve your standing in your field, but it also points out the way forward – if you can use this newfound context to learn from your competitors.

Putting it all together

Looking at site data without qualitative feedback is like reading the chapter headings of a book and skipping the content. You might get a basic understanding of the framework and motifs, but there's so much more to the story that you're missing out on. Delving into the minds of individual users enormously broadens your perspective and increases the value of your research.

Pure qualitative feedback without the numbers, though, misses just as much. With the

right quantitative information, the depth of your perspective multiplies – empirically robust usability measurement tools add context, making it clear where your UX ranks among other websites. Then, when you implement solutions to fix the issues your qualitative research uncovered, you'll have direction and inspiration – and a complete, holistic understanding of your website's usability.

See a full-length sample version of our hybrid qualitative/quantitative Competitive UX Report

For more information
"UX Feedback that helps you learn from your competitors":
http://www.trymyui.com/user-testing-blog/2014/11/ux-feedback-that-helps-you-learn-from-your-competitors/
"Binoculars":
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binoculars
"Binocular (optical instrument)":
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/65717/binocular

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Page 1: http://clarkplanetarium.org/wp-content/uploads/Binocular-MW.jpg
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