

# Feeling at Home

## Could in-context methodologies be the key to facilitating more disruptive concepts?

Stephen has a picture of his dog on the mantelpiece; a black Scottie." She's getting older," he tells me when I ask, "she's still with us but is probably sleeping in the conservatory like most days." We have a cup of tea and settle in to discuss the reason why I'm here: his ongoing battle with diabetes and his reactions to some novel patient support concepts.

The start of a market research interview is a standardised process, yet, starting and conducting the interview in his own home made it far easier to build rapport, than doing the same interview with Stephen in a central location, no matter how lovely so many of our facility partners can be.

But, have you ever stopped to consider the wider implications of interview location on results? With General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) impacting disclosure requirements, viewing, and video streaming, we should be considering what opportunities this offers our industry to increase our use of methodologies like phone, web-assisted, in-home, in-office, and adapted ethnography. Because when the research takes place in patient homes or HCP's offices, we're in their **familiar environment**, when we're in a central location, they're in an **unfamiliar environment**.



And while it sounds incredibly simple, it has big implications: **environment matters**. Humans are incredibly sensitive to their environment and subconsciously affected by it (priming). Hundreds of studies have demonstrated the effect on how people respond. A particular shade of pink paint on walls has shown to reduce violent conduct in prisons. The presence of a 'clean' scent in a room made participants eating cookies brush away twice as many crumbs. A briefcase in the corner of the room and a fancy pen made participants more selfish in financial experiments, than a pencil and a backpack. Cues exist in every environment we enter: if we're looking to research how people think, feel, and behave, it makes sense to ensure that we're capturing them in their 'natural' habitat – not introducing new environmental stimuli that could skew their response.

More critical still, **familiarity matters**. As anyone who has ever worked on a project introducing a new product or concept to a familiar marketplace will be aware of, people value things they know well. In the behavioural sciences, there are endless biases based in familiarity (status quo, endowment, loss aversion to list but a few). For example, most people in pension plans will stick with existing plans rather than change, even if they receive information demonstrating another plan would offer better returns. People perceive situations they hear about regularly to be more probable, than situations they don't (e.g. mass shootings in America, shark attacks). Wine collectors want higher prices to sell their collection than they would pay for equivalent bottles. The tendency to prefer familiar over unfamiliar can have diverse origins; fear, uncertainty, or procedural ease. Scientists hypothesise that ultimately our cavemen ancestors were better able to spot a threat amongst a familiar environment than an unfamiliar one.



But, so what? Why, you might ask, does it matter if people would prefer to be in their familiar environment? Do participant preferences really have an impact on research outcomes? Well, mouse studies would suggest they do. In neuroscience research, mice and rats will explore a new object if they are in a familiar environment but will not explore a new object if they are in an unfamiliar environment. Obviously, humans have developed more complex mental processing ability, but that cognitive aversion will still be there: the tendency to gravitate towards a safe, familiar, reassuring product, concept or offering, may be greater when participants are outside of their everyday surroundings.

Therefore, as the industry looks to create truly distinctive, disruptive, differentiated offerings (support programmes, messages, concepts, and products), the familiar environment of the in-home/in-office setting may give participants the courage to open the door to bolder ideas, rather than subconsciously rejecting them due to unintended introduction of contextual bias.

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