PROU5T

## REIMAGINING DIRECT RESPONSE RESEARCH FOR THE MOBILE GENERATION

JAY CHIAT AWARDS 2015

WITH PROUST, WE SET OUT TO RAISE THE BAR FOR ONLINE MARKET RESEARCH AND PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT A DIGITAL RESEARCH TOOL COULD BE.

It's the product of a highly collaborative, iterative new product design process involving developers, designers, data scientists, and an exceedingly patient group of beta testers. But at the center of this team was a Strategist who was responsible for guiding the product, driving the R&D, administering surveys to the testing groups, and briefing (and re-briefing, and re-briefing…) based on learnings from each prototype. Strategy is often so integral to the iterative product design process that it is inextricable from the creative, and as Proust was intended for the strategy industry, that was especially true for this process.

The story of Proust is a story of a hit mobile app. But moreover, it is the story of deep questioning, process design, insight gathering, and applied strategy.
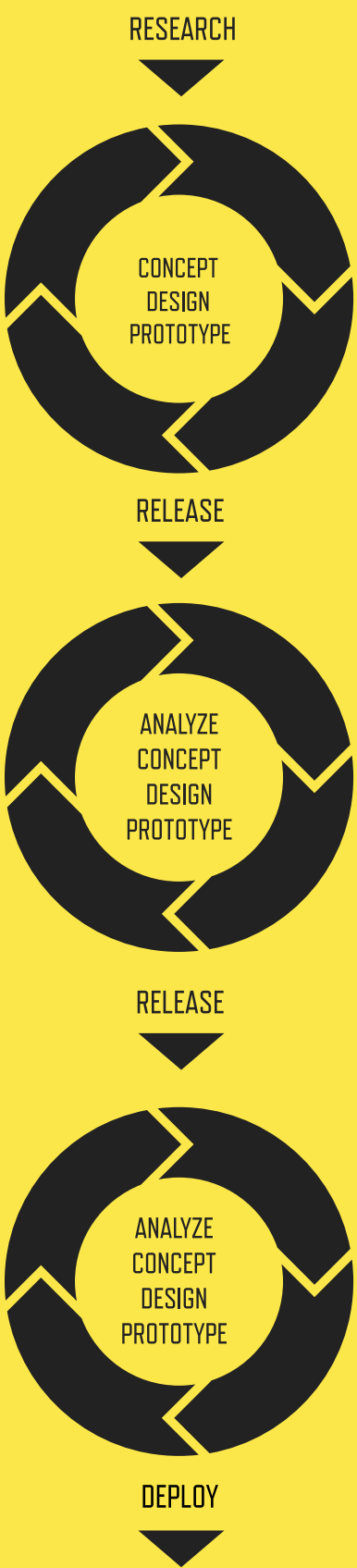
AN INDUSTRY STRUGGLING TO MODERNIZE

As strategists, we spend much of our time conducting and analyzing research. And for even the most quantitatively-minded among us, this can get dull. The reason, at least in part, is that market research methods and tools look very much like they did 20 years ago: focus groups, phone polls, and direct-response surveys. None of these methods are engaging for respondents, and they are downright tedious for the researchers.

Why is this? The web has introduced myriad new ways to engage, get information, and share our deepest thoughts in ways that are not just insightful, but fun. Yet the internet has failed to significantly transform the tools and methods of consumer research.

The most significant recent digital advancement in our field is in listening-driven insight generation. However, the more marketers attempt to leverage networks to glean user data at scale, the more users migrate to smaller networks with higher privacy standards. Note the rise of Snapchat, Secret, Tsu, and Ello in recent years.

"I WOULD, AS I BET MANY OTHERS WOULD, HAPPILY PAY MORE THAN 20 CENTS PER MONTH FOR A FACEBOOK OR A GOOGLE THAT DID NOT TRACK ME, UPGRADED ITS ENCRYPTION AND TREATED ME AS A CUSTOMER WHOSE PREFERENCES AND PRIVACY MATTER."

Zeynep Tufekci, "Mark Zuckerberg, Let Me Pay for Facebook", The Opinion Pages, The New York Times, June 4, 2015

AN INDUSTRY STRUGGLING TO MODERNIZE

Thus, digital market research tends to mimic its offline corollary: interruptive, direct response banner ads, and multiple choice forms... the online equivalent of street teams with clipboards.

These dull, low-engagement tools are far too easy to ignore. As a result, response rates for online market research have plummeted. A Pew Research Center study shows that over the last 15 years, rates have fallen from 36 percent in 1997, to 15 percent in 2009, to just 9 percent in 2012.

RESPONSE RATES

40

30

20

10

0

1997   **1999**   **2012**
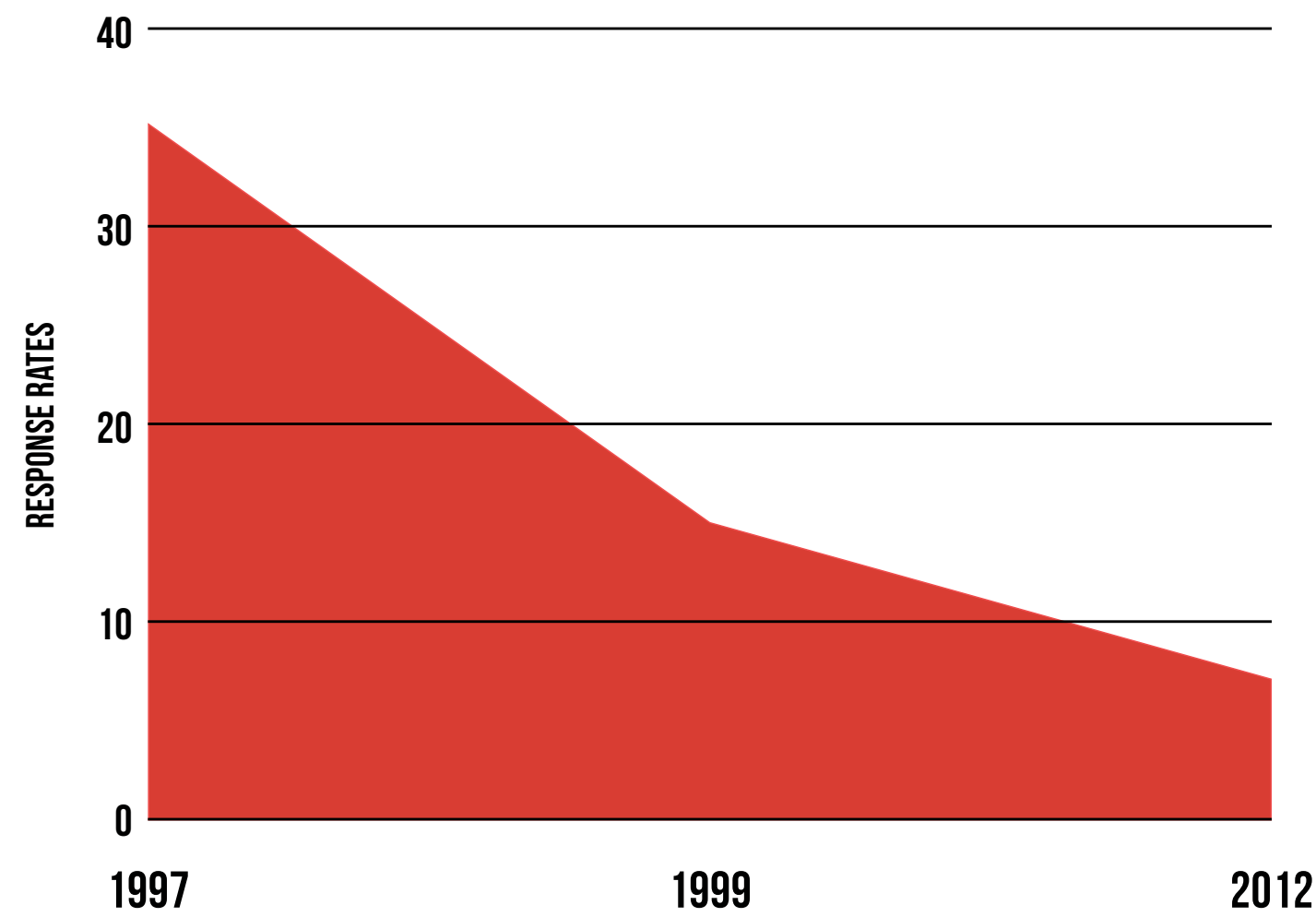
Customer Satisfaction Survey Template

1. How professional is our company?
- Extremely professional
- Very professional
- Moderately professional
- Slightly professional
- Not at all professional

2. How convenient is our company to use?
- Extremely convenient
- Very convenient

TAKE OUR ONLINE SURVEY AND WIN!
Click Here To Begin

MEANWHILE, CONSUMERS SHARE MORE THAN EVER

OUR INDUSTRY FAILED TO CAPITALIZE ON THE AGE OF OVERSHARING.

Consumers are answering questions, providing personal information, and sharing their preferences online every day, with no incentive. Why? Because digital products are built to enable people to do the things they actually want to do: entertain themselves and connect with friends.

THE CHALLENGE

We saw no reason why digital research design should lag so far behind current consumer behavior, and we wanted to try to address this industry pain point. So we asked: how do you harness consumers' behavioral tendency to share, but without requiring expensive incentives to participate?
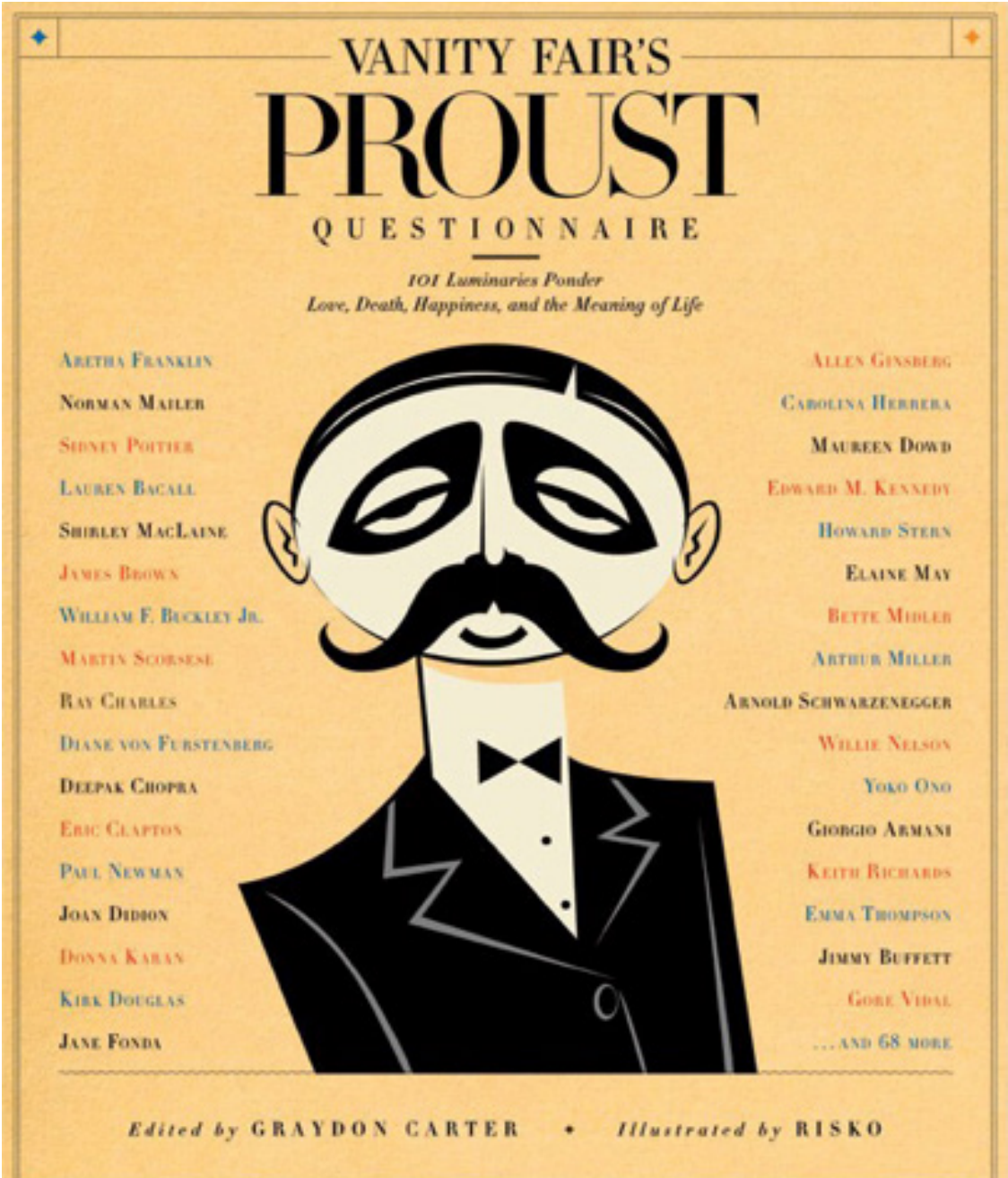
Or more simply…

HOW DO YOU DESIGN A DIGITAL RESEARCH TOOL THAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY WANT TO USE?

BUILDING A TEAM, ANCHORED BY RESEARCH LEGEND MARCEL PROUST

We began an iterative product design process with a general idea of the output: "Buzzfeed meets Millward Brown." We assembled a cross-functional team of designers, engineers, researchers, and a handful of beta testers to keep us honest.

For inspiration, we looked at successful research methods throughout history, and were drawn to one that has not only remained in use, but carries entertainment value to this day: The Proust Questionnaire.

In 1885, the French philosopher Marcel Proust popularized a list of questions designed to reveal the tastes and aspirations of the respondent. He was said to use it as a game at social functions, having guests answer the questions and analyze their responses.

The questionnaire was so revealing that it remains in use in a variety of contexts today.

Inspired by the relevance and entertainment value of the Proust Questionnaire, we set out to bring the spirit of this format into the digital age.

Jame's Lipton's *Inside the Actor's Studio* interviews borrow heavily from Proust's Questionaire.

AN ITERATIVE PRODUCT DESIGN PROCESS

Our prototyping process was fast and open. No idea was off the table. But to ensure that concepts were on brief, each prototype had to meet these criteria:

• Question-based
• No monetary incentive
• Generates consumer insight
• Mobile-first

We prototyped half a dozen products, each playing with the idea of asking and answering questions in a different way.

With every prototype, we followed our testers as they used the tool, looking for areas we could improve. We administered surveys and used that feedback to reorient our design teams, removing friction, increasing fun, and enhancing the experience.
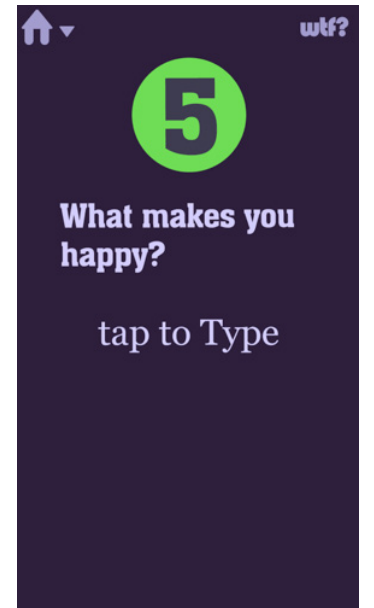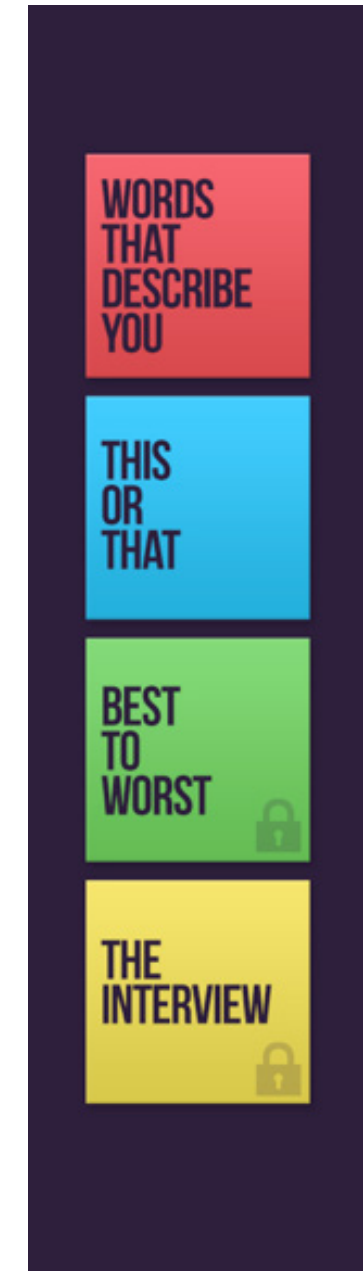
AN IMPASSE WHERE FUN
AND INSIGHT MEET

We noticed one consistent challenge among all our early prototypes. Even with a fixed set of questions - a la Proust - any good answer required lengthy text inputs. We observed that no matter how entertaining the interface may be, nobody enjoys typing in long fields of copy. Twitter's 140-character limit is a popular constraint, but if the goal is to generate insight, it is insufficient. Ultimately, reliance on typing came at the expense of our primary product benefit: fun.

WE WERE STUCK.

FUCK! (MARRY/KILL)

We layered on an additional constraint: no typing. It seemed crazy, but when we started looking at some of the most popular mobile interfaces like Tinder, TriviaCrack, and Instagram, we saw huge potential. So we asked ourselves: what are some games that reveal insight, but don't have any "blank fields" that require the user to input their answers?

We convened our beta testers to brainstorm around this question, and one popular party game rose to the top: Fuck/Marry/Kill.

From a design point of view, it's brilliant. The mechanics of the game involve sorting a list of three things… and when played with others, the reward is debating how you sorted the items afterwards. Everyone agreed that this was a fun and potentially insightful territory for a research tool.

KILL-FUCK-MARRY

RSS ARCHIVE

The Rules of Kill-Fuck-Marry:

When given a choice of three names, the players must decide who they would prefer to kill, fuck or marry.

For example this round of K-F-M, we'll go with Cameron Diaz, Angelina Jolie, Lindsey Lohan

Player: I'll marry Cameron because she's funny, fuck Angelina because she'd be crazy in bed, and kill Lindsey because she sucks at life.
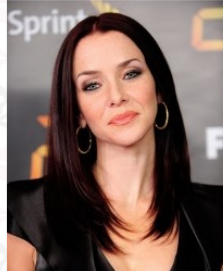
MAY 1, 2012

Fuck, Marry, Kill

Showing: ♂ Guys ♀ Girls

Annie Wersching	Naomi Watts	Nolwenn Leroy
Fuck Marry Kill	Fuck Marry Kill	Fuck Marry Kill

Click one

How to play Fuck, Marry, Kill

Fuck, Marry, Kill is a hypothetical question game. Three things (generally people) are proposed as the subjects and you choose which would be the most desirable to fuck, to marry, and to kill.

- **Fuck:** This is your hit it / quit it option. It could be great while it lasts but they're better suited for a booty-call than a relationship.
- **Marry:** This one's good for the long term. Bring 'em home to mom, buy a home, raise a family, and spend a lifetime with them. You're stuck 'til death do you part.
- **Kill:** This is the one you can't stand the site of this one. Rid them from your life completely.
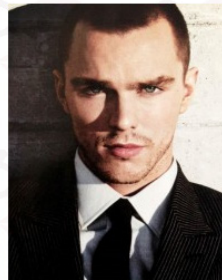
Fuck, Marry, Kill

Showing: ♂ Guys ♀ Girls

Tommy Marr	Alex Gaskarth	Nicholas Hoult
Fuck Marry Kill	Fuck Marry Kill	Fuck Marry Kill

Click one

OUR EUREKA MOMENT

The crux of F/M/K, as well as the original Proust Questionnaire, is seeing how your friends judge and rank the world, and then debating how your own judgments compare.

It's built on a simple truth: knowing how people judge and rank the world around them gives you a deep understanding of their values and personalities. Plus, it's good fodder for a lively conversation.

IT WAS STARING US IN THE FACE THE ENTIRE TIME.

IT'S FUN TO JUDGE

A CLEAR PATH TO A PRODUCT

With new product inspiration, and a strong guiding insight, we further honed our brief to build a prototype around two truths:

- Ranking lists in order of preference is fun.
- Seeing how your rankings compare to someone else's is revelatory.

Our newest prototype was the simplest product we'd built. Through the app, users could rank lists of five things from "best to worst", share the lists with friends, and compare their rankings.

They could then chat about their results, all inside the app. It got a great response from our beta testers:

"SEEING YOUR COMPARISONS WITH OTHERS IS FRICKIN HILARIOUS. IT'S GOOD WAY OF SEEING WHERE YOU AGREE AND DISAGREE."

"ALL YOU HAVE IS YOUR OPINION AND RATIONALE TO JUSTIFY YOUR HONEST OPINIONS. THERE'S NO 'RIGHT WAY TO PLAY' OTHER THAN TO JUST BE YOURSELF."

VALIDATING THE DATA

We were encouraged by the positive response, but we had to make sure it had merit as an insight generator. We engaged Dr. Noah Youngs, a PhD in Computer Science, to dive into our data set and analyze the clusters of relative preference we'd gathered during beta testing.

Alongside our team, Dr. Youngs ran relative order prediction models on dozens of list clusters, and found, with statistically significant certainty, that ...

**IF YOU RANK WEREWOLVES OVER VAMPIRES,
THEN YOU'LL RANK LINKEDIN OVER INSTAGRAM**

**IF YOU RANK XMAS JESUS OVER EASTER JESUS,
THEN YOU'LL RANK FRITOS OVER FUNYUNS**

**IF YOU RANK NACHO CHEESE DORITOS OVER COOL RANCH,
THEN YOU'LL RANK JOCKS OVER PREPS**

VAMPIRES V WEREWOLVES	True	False
Younger than 26	·	●
Is Male	●	·
Emo > 1 slot below Jock	●	●
Pot > rank 3	·	·
LinkedIn > 1 slot above Instagram	●	·

EASTER JESUS V XMAS JESUS	True	False
LinkedIn not last	·	·
Jesus > 2 slots above beer	·	·
Fritos > 3 slots above funyuns	●	·
Capn crunch > cocoa pebbles	●	●
Hands > 2 slots above feet	●	·
Jesus > 3 slots above sex	●	·
Summer vacation > 1 slot below radical honesty	·	●

NACHO CHEESE V COOL RANCH	True	False
Is Male	●	·
Cin Toast Crunch > 1 slot above Cpn Crunch	·	·
Preppy > 2 slots below Jock	●	●
Easter Jesus > 2 slots below bsatt Jesus	·	·
Cin Toast Crunch > 2 slots below Trix	·	●
Vampires ranked 1st	●	·
Grandmas Cooking > 1 slot above a big weenis	●	●

These relative order predictions gave us confidence that not only did we have a strong user-facing product, but a tool that could generate consumer insights with statistical integrity.

LAUNCHING PROUST

We knew we were on to something special. Though it had no precedent, we felt it only right to pay homage to our original inspiration by naming it Proust.

THE POPE

KIM KARDASHIAN

ELVIS

ANTI-SEMITIC ELMO

GHANDI

EPIC

BUTTERFINGER
KIT KAT
TWIX
MILKY WAY
SNICKERS

TWIX
BUTTERFINGER
SNICKERS
KIT KAT
MILKY WAY

NOTHING

I love that Simpsons campaign as much as the next guy but Twix is incredible. You get two of them! That's a bargain!

But u get 5 w a KitKat -- and butterfinger will just always b my fav. Unless there is a charleston chew, then my mind explodes

Also do you hate peanuts? Because Milky Way is just snickers without peanuts. Again, bad deal.

Remind me to never bring my kids by your house on Halloween

CUSTOMER REVIEWS ★★★⯨

Proust was one of the most successful app store releases of the year, garnering significant coverage from consumer, entertainment, trade, and gaming press outlets.

The retention and engagement rates proved our thesis: that you could create a research tool that people actually enjoyed using.

- 750,000+ DOWNLOADS
- AVERAGE DAILY OPEN RATE: 4X
- AVERAGE # OF LISTS/DAY: 10
- AVERAGE USER INVITES 1.5 PEOPLE TO PROUST

CONTINUING TO ITERATE

With the success of the app, we're finding ways to spread our "stacked ranking mechanic" around the web. We've piloted an embeddable publisher tool that allows writers and editors to embed dynamic ranking lists directly onto their sites. We call it Proust Polls (proustpolls.com).

We've run successful pilot tests with major web outlets and are preparing for a broad launch to the publisher community in 2015.

We've also been in talks with some of the larger global consumer research companies to integrate Proust into their suite of tools. Our goal remains to improve the quality and usability of online market research, so we will continue to build on our success in the consumer app space, and try to bring the market research industry into the mobile age.

Check us out on the app store: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/proust/id741716897?mt=8

And that is basically all you do — you rank lists from best to worst (best on top), you submit your own, you chat about them with them with the people who submitted the lists in the first place (or the people who choose your list to rank). It's that easy.

You sign in via Facebook, so this is mainly a discussion app between friends (though it's possible to connect with strangers, especially if you select one of the chats they've submitted publicly).

After signing on you'll see a group of lists whose items are available for ranking:

GUN CONTROL

MORRISSEY

THERMONUCLEAR WAR

FRED FROM YOUTUBE

THE PLAGUE
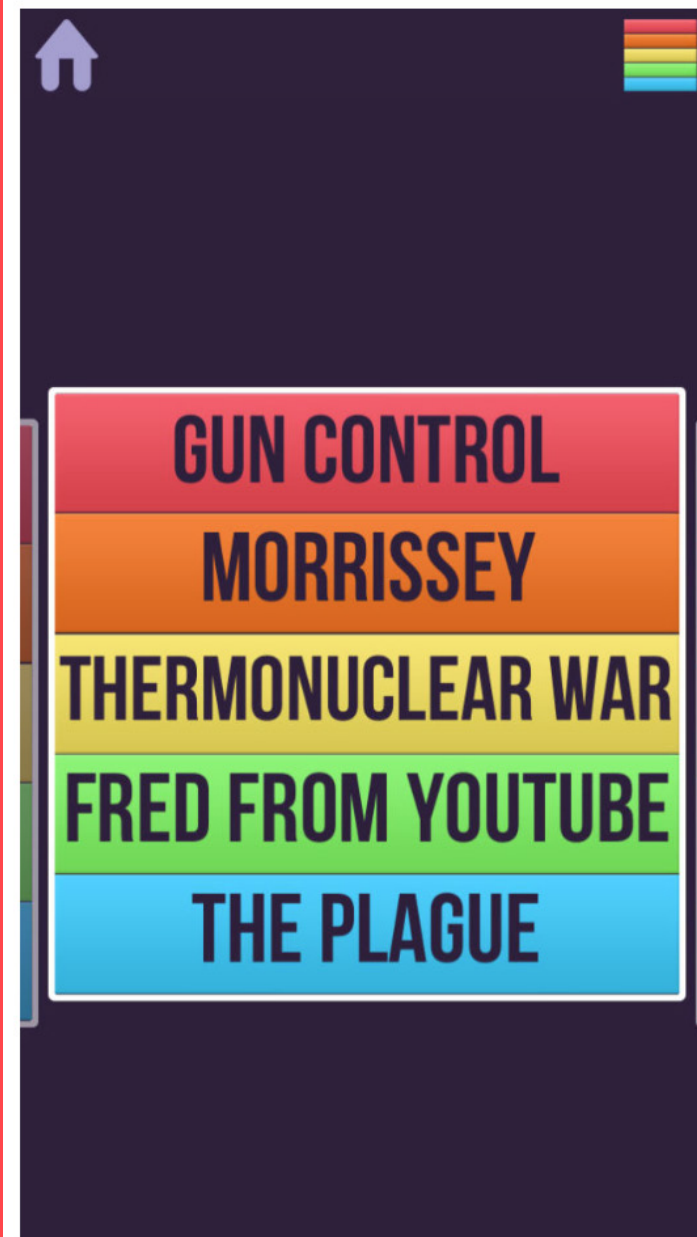
THANK YOU FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT

PROUST