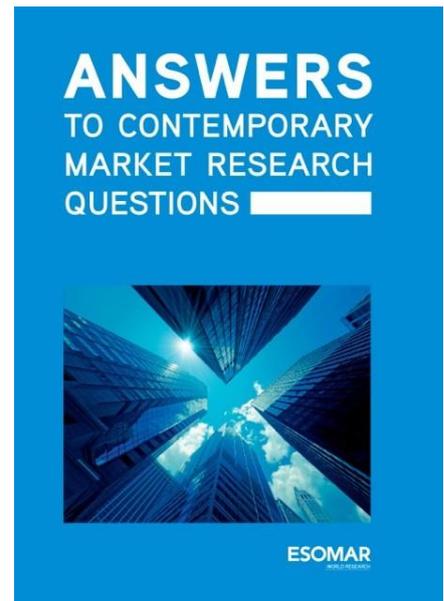# Mobile Market Research
Questions and Answers?

This note sets out a proposed addition to the ESOMAR book, Answers to Contemporary Market Research Questions. This new chapter will be added to the book in early 2014, along with chapters on International Research and Polling.

If you have any suggestions, corrections, or ideas, you can email them to admin@newmr.org or join in the conversation in the LinkedIn NewMR group.

Copies of the book can be bought from ESOMAR's website, in the publications section, at a cost of 20 Euros. The book was edited by Ray Poynter and Sue York and is the result of the collaboration of 18 authors, with more authors joining the project for the new chapters.

A 'taster chapter' from the current book (on B2B research) can be downloaded from the website. The taster chapter comes with details about the book, the authors, and the full contents page.

Contents

Can my research can be conducted entirely via smartphones?

With any sample, the question is whether it is a good enough proxy for the population of interest. If the research is not supposed to be a mathematical match of the whole population, for example when conducting ethnography, then the restrictions on the composition of the sample are more lax than if the study is supposed to produce quantitative data that can be directly projected on to the population.

If the research is qualitative, then the question is often about a suitable sample. If the research is quantitative, then most researchers would want the smartphone penetration in a market to be at least 50% before they started to use it for general research studies.

What are feature phones and how are they used in mobile research?

A feature phone is a label that tends to be used for any phone that is not a smartphone. This creates a massive variation in the attributes of feature phones. Some feature phones are very basic, they may not even have a camera or any form of internet access. At the other end of the spectrum they can be as feature rich as smartphones, with large screens and internet access, but not fit into the current market definition of a smartphone.

The smartphone keeps evolving and improving and the definition changing, which means that today's smartphone may be tomorrow's feature phone. However, when researchers talk about using feature phones for research, they often mean relying on SMS only, or failing that on very simple internet access, such as via WAP.

When should I conduct 'mobile only' mode research?

The general trend in market research is towards giving respondents the ability to choose which device to use when responding to surveys, be that a mobile device or a PC. Consequently, studies should be 'mobile only' when they need to be.

The key types of research that need to be 'mobile only' are listed below.

- Where the research is conducted 'in the moment', for example when participants are taking part in surveys triggered by location, time, or activity.
- Where the device is using passive data collection, for example tracking the participant's location.
- Where the study utilises features that are not usually found on a PC, such as a camera for taking photos on the move or recording action videos.
- In countries where CATI, face-to-face, and internet are all too expensive, slow, or impossible. This tends to occur when conducting research in developing markets, using feature phones.

Should all online research be designed as mobile friendly?

Given that the trend is towards allowing participants to determine which device they use to take part in research projects, the general answer is yes. However, there are exceptions, for example projects that require a large screen, or studies that require bandwidth amongst participants who might have access to via their mobile device.

If a study is not suitable for mobile devices, then the survey instructions should make that clear, and the device being used should be queried by the software.

What are the key uses of mobile in qualitative research?

Mobile devices are used in a variety of ways in qualitative research, with uses as simple as arranging meetings, finding locations, and in the case of tablets as providing stimulus material. At present the key uses are:

- to collect or aid in the collection of diaries;
- to enlist the participants to collect data about their lives and/or the lives of people around them; and
- as a method of connecting to insight communities (which may encompass both qualitative and quantitative research).

What do I need to think about when designing mobile surveys?

There are several key issues to consider when designing mobile surveys, including:

- What sort of device is being used? Feature phone, smartphone, tablet? Each type of device has its own limitations and possibilities.
- Screen size. Mobile surveys need to utilise the screen efficiently, to minimise scrolling, and to avoid horizontal scrolling.
- Dexterity. Small boxes are hard to click on a touch screen, make targets as large as possible, and minimise the effort required to enter information.
- Length. The general consensus is that mobile surveys should be shorter than has become the norm for online surveys. Recommendations vary from 5 minutes to 15 minutes.
- Internet coverage. If the survey requires a connection to the internet then the researcher should consider the sort of connection that participants are likely to have in that market.
- Design optimisation. Maximising the use of the features of the mobile device whilst ensuring usability. For example, ensuring that items to be clicked or dragged are large enough and avoiding horizontal scrolling.

What is a research app and when are they used?

An app (or mobile application) is a piece of software downloaded onto the mobile device. In market research apps can be used for a variety of purposes, including surveys, passive data collection, and qualitative research. Some apps are free standing (i.e. they do not require the internet to be available all of the time) and some are based on connecting to the internet when in use.

The key advantages of apps are:

- Some apps do not require the internet to be available all the time. Research can be conducted when needed and the results sent back to the server later.

- Actions can be triggered by the mobile device or by an external signal, not requiring the user to initiate the action. For example, an app can be programmed to use GPS tracking to initiate a survey when somebody visits a specific location, for example a specific superstore.
- Apps can access the sensors and features of the phone, for example collecting information about phone usage, location, and environment.
- Reminders or notifications can be sent to the app to remind or trigger a user response.

There are two key drawbacks to the use of apps:

1. Apps have to be downloaded, and persuading participants to download apps can be a challenge and there can be competency issues.
2. Apps have to be written specifically for each operating system – which can be both a financial and logistical challenge. In addition, operating systems will evolve and therefore apps will need to be kept up to date.

What is passive data collection?

Passive data refers to collecting information without the research participant having to do anything, other than consenting to the process. For example, an app could record the location of a participant every time they make a call or use the internet from their mobile device. This data collection carries on, once started, without the participant having to do anything.

One of the key benefits of passive data collection is that it can be more accurate than data entered by the participant, as it does not rely on memory or focus.

How are mobile participants recruited and contacted?

The two main sources of participants, especially for quantitative research are **customer lists** and **access panels**. The main limitations, at the moment, are that not all access panels offer mobile sample and that customer lists do not necessarily hold information about the type of mobile device, email address, and phone number.

Beyond customer lists and access panels there are a range of alternatives for finding participants to take part in mobile studies, including: recruiters (particularly for qualitative research), mail, telephone, social media and point of sale.

Does mobile research give the same answers as online research?

Research-on-research has been conducted on the difference between online and mobile responses, particularly between online and smartphones, however, the findings should be treated as provisional.

There are two types of differences that can occur when using mobile devices as opposed to online surveys. These are **sample frame issues** which are caused by different people participating in the research; and **mode issues** which arise from using one device/format as opposed to another.

The majority of results to date suggest that the mode differences between online and mobile are modest. One difference that has been noted is when multi-select grids are used. Grid questions when displayed on a PC screen have been reported as attracting fewer selections than when they are shown one at a time on a mobile device. Other researchers have noted, that when conducting exercises such as a pantry check, participants "recall" more items when using a mobile device, perhaps because they use their mobility to check in the pantry.

Several studies have reported sample frame differences between online and mobile studies. For example, it is not unusual for mobile samples to be younger, more outgoing, and more modern. Most of these effects can be mitigated by sample balancing. However, this difference should not be necessarily seen as a weakness, one of the reasons to utilise mobile research is to reach people missed by online studies.

How is geolocation being used in mobile research?

Geolocation is a term that is used to cover a range of techniques that utilise features of the phone to locate it geographically. The location of the phone can be used in a variety of ways, but the two key ones are:

1. To track where the person with the phone is, either on a macro scale (e.g. from home to work to the shops) or a micro scale (e.g. which fixture in a store did the participant visit); and
2. To cause some research action to be triggered, for example a survey about a retail store can be triggered when the participant approaches or leaves the store.

Geolocation can use a variety of approaches, including:

- GPS – this requires the device to have GPS, and to have it enabled, and for the participant to have a line of sight to at least three satellites – which usually means the participant has to be out-of-doors.
- Cell tower location – this requires the co-operation of the mobile phone providers and locates a phone using the mobile phone service.
- Short range communications – these can vary from Wi-Fi, to Bluetooth, and NFC (near field communication). With the appropriate hardware, these short distance approaches can track participants indoors. Other technologies are also being investigated, for example, sound frequency recognition.

One limitation of geolocation is that it tends to require apps, i.e. the user has to download something to their phone or tablet.

What are the key legal and ethical issues for mobile research?

The key issues around mobile research relate to informed consent, as they do for most forms of research. However, as with any new form of research, mobile gives a new context to the issue of informed consent, raising questions such as:

- Does the participant understand what information they are sharing when they agree to take part in the research, especially if passive data is being collected?

- What uses have the participants consented to? For example, have they consented to their data being transmitted across international borders?
- Is data being collected about third parties and has their consent been obtained. For example, if pictures or videos of other people are collected (and pictures of faces count as personal data) has their consent been obtained, or have their faces been obscured?

In addition to informed consent, two other concerns are cost and safety. In some markets mobile research might cause the participant to incur costs, this needs to be addressed and recompensed in some way.

In terms of safety, care needs to be taken that the participants do not put themselves at risk for example through one of the following:

- taking part in a survey whilst driving or operating machinery;
- taking part in some activity whilst walking;
- taking pictures in a place where photography is not allowed;
- taking photographs or videos of subjects that are inappropriate – for example other people's children; or
- allowing sensitive information to be vulnerable, either through a non-secure communication process or through allowing inappropriate access to a participant's device.