Mobile Testing:

Why expanding your testing outside of the lab walls is a smart business decision.

In the last 20 years, mobile devices have come to shape the way we do just about everything. From communicating with one another, to managing our bank accounts, booking travel, to even monitoring our home security system – almost anything can be done from the palm of our hands. Whether you're an avid techy lining up to get the newest phone on the market, or a nostalgic observer of simpler times now passed, there is no denying that mobile isn't just an option, it's a necessity for today's consumers. As a culture, we want our information fast, easy, and engaging, and sensory and consumer research is definitely no exception.

The idea of mobile testing is far from novel. Since becoming a widely-adopted form of communication, researchers continue to explore ways in which mobile devices can be used as an effective consumer testing tool. Whether through email, text message, WhatsApp, or any one of the many mobile-compatible messaging platforms, panel recruitment has become almost instantaneous.

However, completing consumer surveys and questionnaires on-the-go is what researchers are most interested in implementing. Researchers want a way to capture insights and product experiences at various moments in the consumer's interaction with the product. This could include while perusing the grocery store store shelves, point-of-purchase, to even eating a cheeseburger in the car after visiting the drive-through. Mobile testing allows for the collection of data anywhere your consumers go.

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Accessibility and Growth

The global internet landscape continues to change and mobile-only internet use has, for the first time, surpassed the number of desktop-only users. In fact, according to a white paper produced by ComScore, in the US, "21 percent of Millennials [are] no longer using desktop computers to go online." And there seems to be no sign of this slowing down. "Across every age demographic, there is a substantially higher percentage of multi-platform and mobile-only internet users than the previous year. (Lella and Lipsman), and further still, "the 55-years-and-older consumer segment is actually the fastest growing faction of mobile users, increasing its combined multi-platform and mobile-only share of audience from 60 percent to 74 percent in the past year" (Lella and Lipsman). In short, web use is quickly becoming the standard, and if consumer-facing products and services don't want to be lost in the noise, having a mobile-friendly platform is an absolute must. Even more interesting is the rapid growth of

mobile users in global developing areas. A report conducted by Ericsson estimates that Smartphone subscriptions in the Middle East and Africa region will grow more than 200% between 2015-2021 (Ericsson Study).
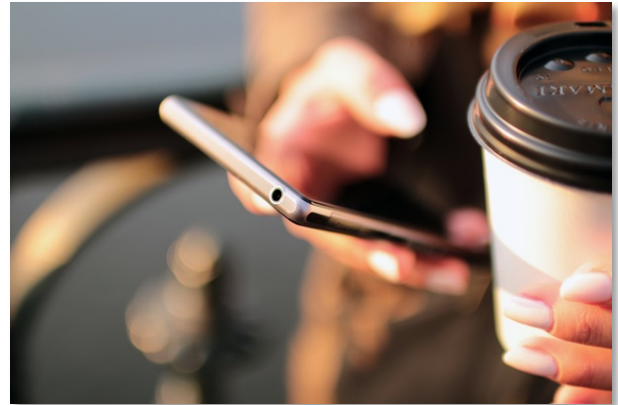
Ecological Validity

Ecological Validity refers to a testing structure that seeks to recreate the environment in which consumers would typically consume that product in the real world. For example, a consumer may enjoy their coffee in the morning, wearing their slippers and from their favourite mug. These details may seem trivial, however, all of our senses have a role in the way we experience products, and if consumed in a vastly different environment, such as a sensory laboratory, the very same coffee could taste drastically different to that consumer. Christopher Simons and his team at Ohio State University's department of Food Sciences and

Technology, has conducted research surrounding immersive technologies and how different sensory stimuli in the testing environment can affect a consumers' sensory perceptions of a product (Bangcuyo). Mobile testing allows for the flexibility to take testing outside of the sterility and order of the lab and into the hands (and kitchens) of consumers.

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Cost Efficiency

Executing mobile tests can prove to be quite cost efficient, especially compared to traditional central location testing. There are no panel leaders or lab space required. Panelists complete tests on their own time without supervision.

Also, when developing mobile tests with a quality, modern platform, tests are compatible with virtually any device or device size. Tests, in turn, are much more flexible, accessible, and budget-friendly. There is no need to create multiple tests for various devices.

Reach Further and Dig Deeper

Mobile testing also allows for you to reach beyond local markets with little to no additional cost or effort. For example, a test can be developed in California, and run to any global location. All that is required is a simple link.

This ease of global reach can allow for regional differences to be discover, including purchasing habits and product preferences. The global reach that mobile testing offers could very well make the difference between a catastrophic product flop, and widespread acceptance.

Challenges

Consumer engagement has always been key in collecting quality data; as soon as interest is lost, the quality of data suffers. According to a 2015 Microsoft-published study based on 2,000 participants, our attention span is declining. (Microsoft study). In 2000, the average human attention span was 12 seconds and has

since dropped to 8 seconds, falling just below a goldfish at 9 seconds. What's to blame? Technology. If a questionnaire is too tedious to complete, or a task too long, a consumer is likely to disengage very quickly.

Even though mobile testing has the ability to engage consumers outside of a typical testing environment, close attention must be paid to the design, layout, text and test length, or consumer disengagement could be a real challenge. Incorporating visual stimuli such as images and video can also help improve engagement. Mobile testing also allows you to capture your consumer right at the moment they are most engaged your product. It's not two hours, or two days later after it's been forgotten about. It's in the moment.

Looking Forward

The continued growth of mobile data collection in the area of sensory and consumer science is inevitable. With a smartphone in everyone's back pocket, researchers and marketers are able to get closer to their consumers than ever before, and they're listening with keen ears. The access barriers that mobile testing conquers, its ability to capture consumer's true-to-life interaction with products, and its cost effectiveness, makes mobile testing a great addition to many sensory and market research programs. However, mobile tests need to be designed with the testing scenario in mind. Consideration must be given to the subject, length, type of task and its level of engagement before implementing a mobile testing initiative. Employing the appropriate cloud-based testing software is also imperative to the success of any mobile project. An effective testing tool should provide straightforward panelist and product management, real-time access to collected results, insightful data analysis, and the confidence to apply your findings to important business decisions.

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Sources

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