

Mobile tech to transform consumer research

 By [Aggrey Maposa](#) 17 Jan 2014

Mobile penetration is particularly high in Africa, and there has been a trend to take on mobile technology in order to transform research across the continent. However, the implications and challenges of an African context mean it is important to respond to this transformation in a way that is sustainable and appropriate.

The first of these challenges is that until recently, landline telephone interviews were largely inappropriate across Africa, due to infrastructure and governmental constraints.

As a result, most interviews were conducted face to face - requiring a significant amount of time and money and often resulting in a high margin of error due to the manual nature of the interview and the wait time between response and analysis.

The mobility of mobile

The advent of mobile technology significantly alters this way of doing things. TNS, for example, now conducts 70% of its research-based conversations across the AMME region with the help of electronic devices.



Mobile penetration is particularly high in Africa, but... (Image: NASA)

At perhaps the most basic level, this means that interviewers going out into the field can now be equipped with tablets and mobile phones for simultaneous data collection and capture, decreasing the time involved as well as the margin of error.

Telephone surveys are also now a real possibility and are both cost-and-time-effective. This is especially considering that call centres with professional mobile phoning capabilities can also make use of VOIP, so that data collection and capture, while drawn from across the continent, occurs in one or a handful of centralised locations.

Automatic telephone surveys, incorporating Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems, are also particularly useful in that they can be made to contact all respondents simultaneously, with respondents making use of their mobile phone keypads to enter their responses.

Mobile reduces risk of misunderstanding

Choosing telephone surveys is quite useful in Africa, not only because with the use of Random Digit Dialling they are a valid research option that ensures the selection of relatively representative samples, but also because literacy levels and internet penetration remain a real challenge. With only half of the population being literate, telephone surveys mean any misunderstanding may be clarified. Internet penetration across the continent is also still low at 30%, so it makes much more sense to tap into the high mobile use through interviewer administered surveys, as opposed to using online surveys. This is not to say, however, that online research does not have a place in the right research context in Africa: it is a matter of applying methods in line with the target respondent and the context.

No need to reinvent the wheel

What remains most important when considering research in Africa is not to reinvent the wheel, but rather to use the mobile technology that is becoming a natural extension of African people's lifestyles and incorporate it into our studies in a relevant, effective, and efficient manner. This sometimes means re-looking at technology that has already been used in other sectors or drawing parallels between applications of mobile technology in the developed world and how Africa will follow.

Our responsibility as marketers in Africa is to use mobile and digital channels in the context of natural human behaviour and attitudes, to retain and improve the integrity and usefulness of consumer research in general. This should be a starting point for a fresh approach to providing solutions that address the unique needs not only felt across the continent, but by each individual consumer we transition from more traditional to newer ways of doing things.

ABOUT AGGREY MAPOSA

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