THE RISE OF THE SMARTPHONE

• How to leverage the emergence of mobile in data collection
• Tips for mobile friendly survey creation

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A FLUIDSURVEYS WHITEPAPER
As current mobile trends develop, it has become apparent that mobile devices cannot be ignored in marketing research initiatives any longer. In fact, mobile devices are providing, arguably, the biggest opportunity for quantitative researchers since the advent of online surveys.

THE GROWTH OF MOBILE DEVICES AROUND THE WORLD

In the developed world, ITU’s statistics show that there are more mobile device subscriptions than there are people! This dramatic change in the way we communicate comes as a direct result from the lower prices and conveniences that come with using mobile phones as opposed to landline options. This is not breaking news, as scholars have been predicting this shift in communication for some time. As far back as 2003, Le-Marie Thompson wrote a journal article entitled ‘Death of Landline,’ where she analyzed this exact phenomenon. Beyond the fact that almost all adults in the developing world own a cell phone, Thompson identifies that the one “group that is fostering this shift towards mobile phones is young adults” (Thompson, 1). The vast majority of young adults that leave the comfort of...
their parents’ homes have opted to have no landline phone at all, and instead rely solely on their mobile devices for communication. This has forced market researchers to recognize the growing importance of including cell phones as a part of their research methodology.

MOBILE-BROADBAND AND WI-FI IS ON THE RISE

More recently, smartphone technology has taken this shift one step further. With the emergence of powerful devices that seamlessly blend telephone and computer, individuals no longer use their mobile phones strictly for phone calls. Whether through Wi-Fi or broadband connections, people are using mobile smartphones to access the internet at an increasing rate. This became evident in 2010 when, for the first time, smartphone sales surpassed PC sales (Arthur). Since then, smartphones have continued to rise in sales at a furious pace, while PCs have stagnated. The smartphone boom can be directly linked to the increased speed and power of these devices. With today’s technology, smartphones are fully capable of performing the tasks the average computer user would need, like browsing websites, checking a map, or sending an email. In fact, in 2012, it was measured that 10.1% of all internet page views were done on mobile smartphones, a dramatic increase from the year before, which measured 5.8% (Global Mobile Statistics). According to many professionals in the field, it is predicted that by 2015, mobile internet usage will overtake desktop internet usage (Charlton).

Furthermore, when comparing desktops to mobile smartphones specifically through the lens of email usage, there are more important developments. The increased internet capabilities of mobile phones have led to the widespread phenomena of using mobile devices to check emails. From 2010 to 2012, the total percentage of emails opened on mobile smartphones as compared to desktop computers reached an astounding 27% (Holden-Bache). In addition, in 2012, a reported 50% of American cell phone owners reported using their device to send and check email, with the percentage at over 60% for individuals between the ages of 18-49 (Duggan). Add to this statistic that 70% of cellular email checkers admitted to immediately deleting emails that didn’t render well on a mobile device (Holden-Bache), and it becomes paramount for any research professional tool to accommodate for this audience.

The popularity of mobile-broadband has redefined marketing research forever. With the proliferation...
of the smartphone, it no longer makes sense to conduct online surveys with a structure and set of questions designed only for computer or laptop mediums. Instead, researchers must work to include the increasing portion of the population that use their mobile devices for all their online purposes. This transition in online marketing research to encompass the needs of mobile smartphones holds several challenges. Researchers need to take into account a wide range of screen sizes, technical capabilities, and the overall response experience on handheld devices. However, these challenges also provide some incredible opportunities to conduct research like never before.

**BUILDING MOBILE-FRIENDLY SURVEYS**

When constructing surveys that will be taken on mobile devices, several factors need to be taken into account. First, consider that many respondents will be on the go. Unlike with desktop computers, checking emails or browsing the web on a mobile device is not a sedentary activity. It can be done while getting a coffee, walking to work, cooking dinner, etc. The experience for respondents must therefore be fast, easy and interactive. In addition, a variety of screen sizes and resolutions need to be taken into account. If a survey does not display well on a specific device, the likelihood of eliciting a response is greatly reduced. Various devices will also have different technical capabilities, meaning that factors such as loading times, multimedia elements, page length, etc, must be carefully considered.

The remainder of this whitepaper will offer tips and suggestions to overcome these obstacles and assure that your surveys are optimized for mobile smartphones.

**AVOIDING SLOW NAVIGATION TIMES**

No one likes being held up by long wait times, especially when it comes to technology. But when conducting a mobile survey, prolonged loading times can be catastrophic to response rates and will put respondent fatigue through the roof! There are two major reasons that loading times can be slow on mobile, and they are easily avoidable:

1) **The Number of Questions per Page:** Unlike computer surveys, it is common for mobile surveys to place a large number of questions on the same page. This limits the number of times a respondent must wait for the next survey page to load. However, the number of questions per page can significantly slow down a survey’s loading times. Placing any more than 10 questions on the same page can result in long waits between pages. To find the correct balance, a good rule of thumb is to place no more than five questions per page.

2) **The Number of Options per Question:** Much like the number of questions per page, the more
options per question the longer the loading time. This only starts to become an issue when there are more than 20 options. Limiting your number of options will ensure that the transitions between pages are much more fluid.

**CHANGING SURVEYS FROM COMPUTER TO MOBILE**

Though mobile technology has made great leaps in their user interface, most of this innovation has created a large gap between how we use computers and mobile smartphones. These differences have to be acknowledged and addressed by surveyors, because directly transferring an online survey that was effective on computers to mobile can result in many problems. Instead, you should make modifications to the survey that will make it more applicable to a mobile interface. Here are a few rules you can stand by when improving the mobile respondents’ experience:

1) **Less Open-Ended Questions:** In most online surveys a healthy mix of closed and open-ended questions is the best way to collect data. This provides the researcher with both quantifiable data through closed-ended questions and rich exploratory information through open-ended questions. However, open-ended questions do not transfer well on mobile smartphones for two major reasons. First, some of these devices are difficult for respondents to type with, which will result in respondent fatigue for answers that require more than a couple sentences of explanation. Second, people using a mobile smartphones to fill out a survey will most likely be ‘on the go’ somewhere (riding the bus, on their lunch break, etc.). This means that your survey will probably not have their full attention. This makes open-ended questions which ask for in depth, unique responses and require a lot of critical thinking a poor choice. Instead, stay very straightforward with your questions and provide clear options for respondents to choose from. In other words, stick to well organized close-ended questions when creating a mobile survey.

2) **Customize Questions to Mobile Capabilities:** When creating an online survey for computers, it makes sense to provide links and images to make the respondent’s experience more interactive and fun. A researcher has to be wary about trying this tactic for mobile surveys. Mobile smartphones vary greatly in their capabilities and different user settings. This makes it hard to tell if your links or pictures will work on every device. That is why keeping your survey simple and leaving out external resources is usually the best policy for mobile research. Otherwise, you should provide a testing page for the respondent to see if their device is compatible with all aspects of the survey before they begin.

3) **Take into Account Different Screen Sizes:** As mentioned earlier, most smartphone users will delete emails and exit surveys that do not fit well into their mobile device’s screen. This is not hard to believe, since an oversized survey will make navigating survey pages and reading survey questions and response options an absolute nightmare! With the knowledge that different brands of
smartphones come in all sizes, it is incredibly important to ensure that you are using software that will automatically adjust your survey to fit the screen size it is being viewed on. Many survey software companies do not offer this feature. Fortunately, FluidSurveys includes in its account the FluidSurveys Mobilizer. This feature dynamically modifies a researcher’s survey template to automatically conform to any screen size, resolution and orientation.

4) **Pretest Your Mobile Survey Separately:** It cannot be stressed enough that an online survey transferred from a computer to a mobile smartphone could have many unforeseen problems! For example, light settings are usually lower on mobile smartphones to save batteries, which can lead to changes in colour contrast. In some cases, colours that are clearly different on a computer screen can blend together on a mobile device, making questions difficult to read. The easiest way to avoid problems like these is to pretest your survey on various mobile devices and make modifications to the survey based on the feedback.

5) **Go Outside the Computer Comfort Zone:** When transferring a survey to mobile, most people do the bare minimum to make it compatible with both technologies. Instead, make your mobile survey great by testing out the different options you have with the mobile app’s question types. Remember respondents will be using their fingers instead of a mouse to provide you with answers. This difference may seem irrelevant, but many questions made for a desktop can be annoying on a smartphone. That is why the FluidSurveys development team continues to create mobile specific questions, that make full use of the drag and drop style promoted in the touch screen world of tablets and iPhones. By embracing unique mobile device options, you should be able to bring your survey to the next level!

**IT’S A MOBILE WORLD**

The emergence of mobile technology and its increasing capability for internet usage have made it the future of communication and marketing research worldwide. As smartphones overtake desktop technology in sales and quickly close the gap on being the most common device used for internet activities, it is no longer valid to equate the internet to a desktop only phenomenon. An increasingly significant and growing portion of society use smartphones as a primary way to access the internet, check their emails, and respond to surveys. If researchers want to conduct studies that will provide optimum response rates and avoid bias, they will have to create surveys that cater to mobile device users.
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ITU –Committed to Connecting the World
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Lee Rainie & Maeve Duggan

FluidSurveys is a powerful, easy-to-use online survey platform that enables organizations & individuals to create, distribute & analyze surveys, forms, polls & questionnaires.

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