MRS Report
State of Mobile Adoption & Optimisation
Best Practice Guidance

December 2020
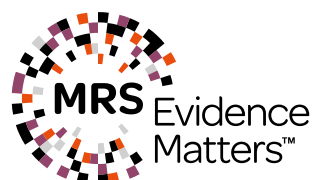
What is Mobile Optimisation in Research and Insight?

Why is research needed?

What is best practice for mobile optimisation?

Resources

MRS Evidence Matters™

What is Mobile Optimisation in Research and Insight?

Mobile optimisation is the process of adjusting research designs to ensure that when participants access data collection tools, such as surveys and questionnaires, they have an experience appropriate for the device they are using to access the research. Optimised research content should, for example, flow easily between desktop and mobile devices to provide participants with consistent and satisfactory experiences.

Optimised design should be the default for the design of all online research that is produced. This guidance applies to most mobile based research and should be the foundation for any additional sector specific (e.g. b2b, healthcare research) guidance on this topic.

Why is research needed?

Since 2018, MRS has been facilitating an annual research project to explore the impact that poor mobile design and lack of mobile optimisation has on participation, completion, data quality and response rates in research.

In an unprecedented project of collaboration, four data collection companies - Dynata, Kantar, Lucid and Toluna – have been working with MRS giving access to their response rate data to identify trends in participation and response rates.

The first wave of the research was first undertaken in 2018, comparing two years of data, the results of which are available here.

The research was expanded for 2019 assessing three years of international panel data from the four data collection companies reviewing patterns between mobile and non-mobile measurements. A webinar discussing the second wave of the research and a copy of the 2019 presentation is available here.

The third wave of the research has just been undertaken and for the first time a supplementary participant satisfaction project was undertaken to understand more about panellist's device of preference for survey taking. A webinar discussing the third wave of the research and the results from the participant research is available here.

So far, the research has identified:

Increasing numbers of participants are accessing research via mobile phones, particularly in the younger age groups

Global trends predict that in future the majority of online participants will access research via mobile devices

Participants are less likely to complete on a mobile phone than on a desktop/PC, that gap is narrowing year on year

Abandoned research is a major driver of overall participant and research panel attrition

The maturity of markets affects the percentage of research that allow completion by mobile device

Allowing participants to choose their preferred device for research completion is important for research representativity and feasibility

From the research it is clear that all main types of devices should be considered in research design to ensure that best practice is being delivered.

What is best practice for mobile optimisation?

1 **Design appropriate research** which is adaptable and optimised for multi-screen sizes.

2 **The design of research remains essential.** To provide a positive participant experience requires good research design on whatever device participants use to access and respond to research.

3 **Use platforms which are mobile-friendly, adaptive and intelligent.**

4 **Keep questionnaire design short and simple.** Research surveys, including those via mobile, should have a research length (e.g. survey length) on average of no more than 20 minutes.

Length of research (e.g. surveys) is not necessarily the sole determinator for research success[1]. There are other design considerations which can have significant impact - see tips on page 4

5 **Make research readable.** Ensure text size is easy to read on a mobile screen, including when text is overlaid on images and when delivered in portrait (vertical) and landscape (horizontal) positions.

6 **Don't waste participants time.** Participants spend circa 65% of survey time reading questions and question responses. Keep questions short, ask questions in the most optimal way and only use response options which are useful.

7 **Test and pilot usability** of research on mobile devices across the major device brands before issuing, to ensure any research will work successfully across multiple mobile devices. Keep in mind that whilst browser spoofing can be used for testing via some platforms, these are not infallible. For example, clicking with a computer mouse is a precise tool, whilst most mobile participants will complete research using their fingers which are much less precise.

8 **Keep your design agile.** Technology is evolving all the time to improve the participant experience and improve response and completion rates. New formats are also being developed e.g. new questions types or features. Remember to build agility into your research, including trackers, to enable you to flex your approach, to benefit from such changes as required.

9 **Pay attention to dropout rates.** Participants do get interrupted more when completing research surveys on mobile - dropout rates above 15% should be a concern. If less than 85% of participants who successfully complete a screening process do not go on to complete a research survey this is a sign that there is some usability or engagement issues that need attention. The impact of this can be to increase non-response bias in the data.

10 **Correctly calculate drop-out rates.** Do not include participants who are screened out of your research when calculating your drop-out rates.

For example, 100 participants start a research survey, 70 are screened out, resulting in 15 completing research surveys and 15 participants drop-out before completion. This is not a 15% drop-out rate, it is 50%.

11 **Check your research design (such as survey questionnaires).** Ask participants about their experiences by using participant satisfaction question(s) within mobile research.

12 **Make mobile research engaging and enjoyable.** If you as a practitioner don't enjoy the research experience, change it!

Other mobile design considerations

◄ Research topics and their degree of engagement with participants.

◄ Concise questions and response options in plain language.

◄ The memory requirements for participants of mobile data collection, such as:

◄ The impact of long statements
◄ Long lists of response options
◄ The extensive use of open-ended response options

◄ When designing mobile research technical design considerations which ease the burden on participants should be considered, such as:

◄ The impact of fast scroll on the quality of response
◄ The use of 'sticky questions' (which lock questions to the top of a mobile screen)
◄ The use of response boxes which appear only when previous responses are complete,
◄ Including options such as don't know and prefer not to say

◄ Specific additional points for research surveys delivered via mobile devices:

◄ Consider the range and number of open-end questions; if used open-ended questions should be direct, response spaces appropriately sized and text completion software available

◄ A 'prefer not to say' or similar option should be provided for all response options including open-ended responses

◄ Scales should be fully visible, readable, and clickable without scrolling in vertical or horizontal

◄ Limit vertical scrolling unless there is a good design reason to use such an approach, and do not use horizontal scrolling for grids

◄ Consider the layout mode for different types of response options and select the mode which maximises readability and accessibility for participants; e.g. grids should be in portrait mode, whilst pictures might be better in landscape mode

◄ Use question groups/nests to reduce scrolling

◄ Resist using all mobile phone functionality when delivering research surveys; by doing so could disadvantage those on other types of devices

◄ Participants should not be expected to rotate their screen

Resources

Here are some free resources to consider using to determine if research is mobile friendly. [Note: MRS is not responsible for any third-party sites.]:

Google mobile friendly tester:
https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly
including guidance on designing mobile friendly web-pages

Google: The Mobile Playbook:
http://www.themobileplaybook.com/en-us/#/home

Think with Google:
https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/experience-design/speed-is-key-optimize-your-mobile-experience/ and https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/experience-solutions/

Simulate Mobile Devices with Device Mode in Chrome DevTools
https://developers.google.com/web/tools/chrome-devtools/device-mode

Survey Design Mistakes That Can Ruin Respondent Experience:
https://luc.id/blog/survey-design-mistakes-that-can-ruin-respondent-experience/

5 Critical Lessons to Learn from Your Survey Drop Rate:
https://luc.id/blog/5-lessons-to-learn-from-survey-drop-rate/

Endnotes

1 Does Length Really Matter? Exploring the Effects of a Shorter Interview on Data Quality, Nonresponse, and Respondent Burden
Scott Fricker, Brett Creech, Jeanette Davis, Jeffrey Gonzalez, Lucilla Tan, Nhien To

Bureau of Labor Statistics
https://s3.amazonaws.com/sitesusa/wp-content/uploads/sites/242/2014/05/Fricker_2012FCSM_IX-B.pdf

The Effect of Interview Length on Data Quality in the Consumer Expenditure Interview Survey October 2014
Brian T. Nix
https://core.ac.uk/display/103408454