Ipsos MediaCT
The Media, Content and Technology Research Specialists

Bite Sized Thought Piece
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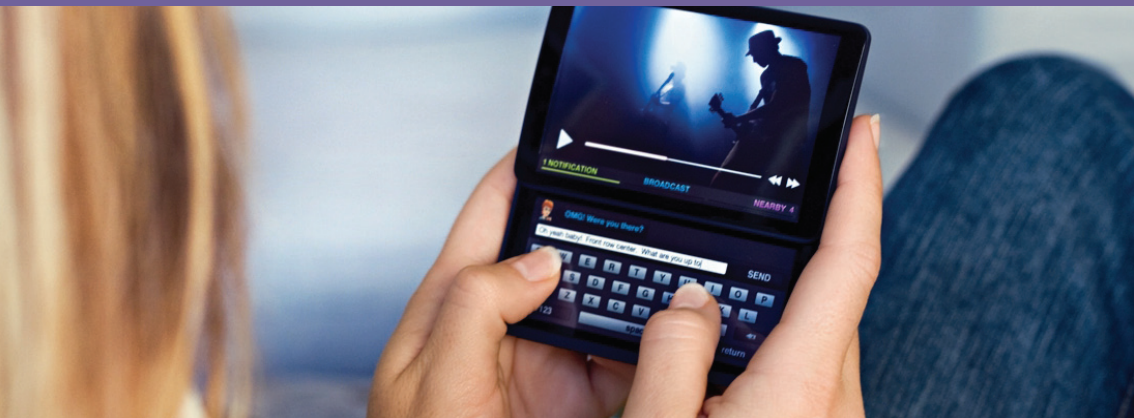
Going Mobile in Media Research - The Future is in Our Hands

The time has come for mobile

“In the future almost every consumer will carry a research device for 19 hours a day. Researchers can communicate with them at any time, ask questions, receive images, videos and location information to collect ‘in context’ feedback at the exact point of experience.”

Ten years ago we would have laughed at someone saying this - but today, that time has come.

The time is now right for mobile research because improved coverage and penetration of mobile phones enables us to access more research participants. Furthermore, consumers are using their phone to do much more than make calls and are more accepting of its multi-functionality. Indeed, feature rich mobile phones are becoming more available and affordable, while access to the internet is becoming cheaper, faster and more reliable. The iPhone has led the way in usability and has created the mobile app revolution.



More than just a survey tool

But it is also time to change the way we think. While we may consider the feasibility of moving a relatively long face-to-face survey to online, we cannot do this for mobile. This is because the mobile device is more than a survey tool with its ability to permit passive monitoring, push content / alerts to handsets, connect with other devices, allow location awareness, add/remove functionality remotely and record photo, video and audio.

We also need to be smarter with mobile survey design by understanding its limitations and playing to its strengths. With the limited screen size, we should replace long survey text with intuitive design. Survey length is also limiting, so we may need a 'little and often' approach to data collection. It is important to maintain engagement through improved contact, test usability and keep improving - the experience must not be taxing, negative or boring.

Ipsos conducted an online versus SMS media recall experiment where we tested media recall amongst sub-groups of Ipsos panellists following prime time UK TV shows. The results showed that mobile performed better than online on various quality index measures including accuracy, speed of response and future research intent.

An active and passive measurement device

Mobile is replacing PDAs and pencil / paper collection methods as a faster, more robust and flexible tool. An example of this is in the USA with TouchPoints. Apollo Mobile developed a mobile survey application, interface and back-end tools for the survey and we will be hoping to do the same for TouchPoints 4 in the UK.

However, mobile is not just a new option for surveys as it provides the opportunity for passive data collection. The device knows a lot about its user with its various applications, alarm clock, GPS / location, email, calendar, phone, Internet, media player, etc. It could probably construct a reasonably good media, content and technology profile of the individual without any survey intervention.

During the summer of 2010, Ipsos MediaCT piloted a technology solution powered by Zokem which enables the passive measurement of media consumption and other contextual behaviours directly on the mobile phone. The initial findings, presented at the 2010 MRG Conference, provide some interesting direction for those looking to engage smartphone users with advertising and marketing communications on their mobile device.

The Ipsos MediaCell development is a software solution downloaded onto a mobile phone that detects radio listening via encoded broadcast signals. In the second half of 2010, we are piloting and running a panel in London using these devices and the early results look very encouraging. It seems a natural consequence to combine passive and active data collection on the mobile device for media consumption – an area we are currently exploring.

What the future holds

Ipsos MediaCT envisages the following five technological developments will revolutionise mobile and media research over the next five years:

1. Mobile device ubiquity – devices will become even 'smarter' and more cost effective. Many new entrants to the market will drive down cost.

2. Pervasive connectivity – WiFi will improve, plus unlimited data packages, eliminated roaming charges and the option of reversed billing will all but wipe out the data capture cost to complete the research.

3. Social networking / Real-time web – the ability to collaborate and co-create via mobile phones will become the increasingly popular way to conduct mobile research.

4. Development of mobile senses – the mobile phone will develop new and more accurate sensors including GPS, movement, biometric, biomedical, environmental, emotional and social interpretation, which may provide compelling qualitative measures to enhance traditional audience measurement.

5. Augmented Reality and Automatic Media Capture – voice and image recognition, barcode scanning (of interest to the print medium), synthesis of location-aware devices and co-ordinates-based databases all combine to make it ultra fast to capture media exposure and share ideas.

Helping to pioneer

Ipsos MediaCT is at the forefront of demonstrating that the device offers far more than just surveys, enabling a 360 degree, 24/7 understanding of the (media) consumer. We recognise that mobile has its limitations and we should play to its strengths via usability testing and improving. It's a new, fast evolving ecosystem offering exciting innovative opportunities for media research.

Mobile research is not the future, it is the now.

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