

The Mobile Generation

Reaching respondents on the phone

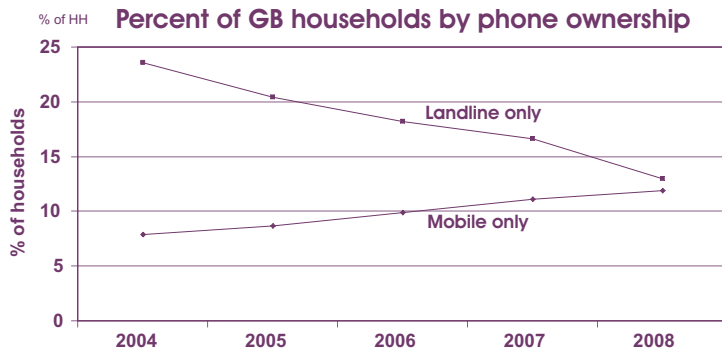
Bite Sized Thought Piece

2009

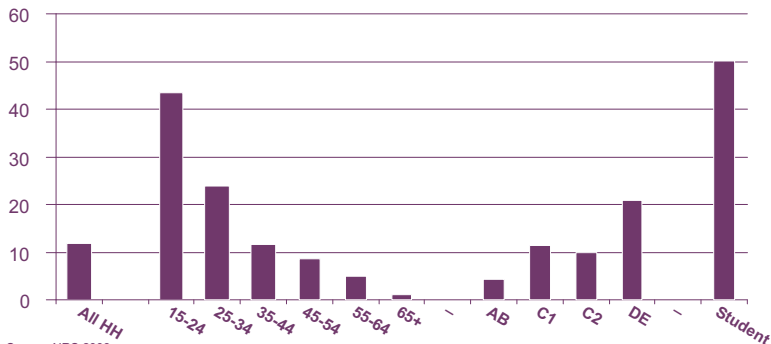


Landline penetration has been falling steadily from its peak ten years ago as mobile phone ownership has increased. Mobile phones are now being used as a main telephone rather than a secondary communications device. In 2009, we predict that the percentage of households that are mobile only will exceed the percentage that only have a landline telephone.

Figures from the 2008 National Readership Survey show that mobile only households account for almost 12% of the total, a proportion that has been steadily rising over the past few years. Incidences vary for different groups. There is a higher incidence of mobile only ownership in households with young people aged 15-24 (43%), students (50%) and those in social grade DE (21%). This presents a significant problem when conducting a telephone study that is intended to be representative of the population. While weighting of the results may correct for some of these biases, differences in other variables such as household tenure or length of time living at the current address are much more difficult to control.



% of HH **Profile of head of household in mobile only households**



Source: NRS 2008

Conducting Mobile Telephone Interviews

Whilst most telephone interviewing is still conducted on landline phones, there has been a gradual shift to interviewing on mobiles. Some perceived barriers to mobile interviewing have turned out to be false and, in some cases, there can be significant benefits for interviewing on a mobile. Long calls are less of an issue than it might be imagined - the majority of respondents are perfectly willing to undertake a survey of twenty minutes or more. Advances in technology are resulting in longer battery life on handsets. A large proportion of the younger population, who are notoriously difficult to reach, find it natural to be constantly using mobiles and are willing to engage, even when out and about. Indeed, for some age groups, calling on mobile phones is the only option for conducting a telephone survey. Our experience shows that cooperation rates on mobile surveys are at least as good as those for landline.

For example, in order to boost the younger representation of the BARB Panel, Ipsos MediaCT conducts booster recruitment interviews with householders aged between 16-24 in order to recruit these households on to the panel. It had become increasingly difficult to reach this age group by landline and in 2006 we introduced mobile interviewing on a limited scale in order to try and reach them. The proportion of interviews conducted in this way has steadily increased to a point where we are now recruiting 80% each month over a mobile phone as opposed to a landline.

Challenges

There are challenges when working with mobile samples. Care has to be taken with regard to the safety of respondents – for example automated screening is built into our scripts to check that the respondent is not driving or operating machinery making it unsafe to talk. This question is asked immediately when calling a mobile – interviewers quickly resetting the number to call back should the respondent be in a potentially dangerous situation.

There is no indication of geography attached to a mobile number as there is with a landline number where geography can be ascertained via the area code. A mobile number could be anywhere in the country. This means that geography must be ascertained from the respondent – and makes random digit dialling (RDD) studies targeting particular areas impractical. For surveys where a mixture of mobile and landline interviewing is required, it is possible to get around this by carrying out mobile interviews first, following up with landline interviews to fill in gaps.

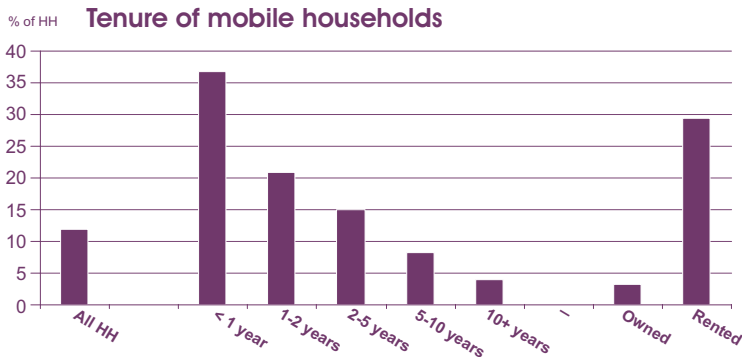
There are also methodological issues when trying to conduct a random probability sample with a mixture of landline and mobile RDD numbers. A landline phone is primarily a shared household device while a mobile is a personal device. This means that weighting needs to be applied to account for the probability of selection – requiring additional survey questions and more complex weighting.



Future Changes

One of the benefits of working with mobile phones is the speed at which the industry moves, resulting in new technology and fast paced innovation. For example, it is possible to identify geography and location of mobiles from GPS data or triangulation of mobile network masts.

This potential needs to be balanced carefully against user privacy. This could become less of an issue if mobile users embrace marketing technologies that send targeted advertising as they pass by certain products or locations - this is likely to require them to have given their consent to be contacted by such a method.





The Future of Telephone Interviewing is Mobile

In our opinion mobile or mixed landline/mobile interviewing will become the norm for telephone surveys. The methodological problems of mixing landline and mobile RDD interviewing can be overcome. Bearing in mind that the percentage of the adult population owning a mobile phone was 87% in 2008, and that this is still rising, it increasingly makes sense to incorporate mobile interviewing into telephone samples.

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