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••• shopper insights

## Be there now

Leveraging mobile and online qualitative to get inside shoppers' heads

| By Jim Bryson and Jessica Ritzo

### snapshot

The authors detail how to combine mobile and Web-based qualitative approaches to study the complete shopping experience.

Until recently, shopper research had remained largely unchanged by technology advances. Now, consumers' daily use of technology and research technology development has reached a tipping point that gives researchers a 360-degree view of the consumer's world before, during and after the research. For marketers that means far deeper, far richer insights into consumer behavior.

With a greater percentage of younger consumers in the marketplace, use of communication and information technology is exploding. As consumers become more comfortable with online and mobile technology, so, too, must researchers become more comfortable with using online and mobile approaches to drive better and faster insights.

Today, most people have access to the Internet. Of course, access is highly correlated with age, but even older consumers are online. So the days of an online study being inappropriate or even simply less convenient for a specific demographic group are fast coming to a close.



Coupled with online use, everyone, it seems, has a mobile phone. Indeed, the International Telecommunications Union reported that 256 million Americans had a mobile phone with 3G or better service in 2012. And they're certainly not just being used for phone calls. From accessing the Web to texting to taking and sending pictures and videos, phones are now for so much more than just voice communication.

Gartner reports that 85 percent of all mobile phones shipped in 2011 included an Internet browser and consumers are not hesitating to use them. In fact, Kinesis Survey Technologies reported that 25 percent of its quantitative surveys were completed using a mobile device in Q3 2012.

Qualitative research is experiencing the same trend. At 20|20, we see up to 20 percent of our online qualitative research being accessed by mobile devices. Consumers are using mobile technology, even when the research is not designed exclusively for mobile!

For researchers, the mobile boom is a bonanza. For decades we have yearned for a way to communicate unobtrusively with our respondents as they perform normal daily tasks. We have constantly sought to immerse ourselves in consumers' lives to understand their real behavior while impacting that behavior as minimally as possible. Now we have the yearned-for ubiquitous device and, when partnered with Internet-based approaches, we have the ability to better see and understand the full story behind consumer behavior.

### Layering the tools

Combining online and mobile approaches is a powerful way to understand consumers' entire shopping experience, including pre-shop, in-store and post-shop aspects. Though it may seem daunting, layering these types of tools within a single project can be relatively simple.

One approach is to combine an asynchronous text-based method, such as one-on-one in-depth interviews for ongoing feedback and discussion or digital diaries for a foundational understanding of consumers, with mobile engagement to capture in-the-moment feedback during the store visit. By structuring the methodology

to lead and finish with the online component and including the mobile piece in between, you give consumers multiple convenient, easily-accessible formats through which to communicate with the moderator at the times their feedback is sought.

In other words, it lets researchers better connect with consumers on consumers' terms and gives consumers appropriate tools to participate where and how they need to with minimal disruption of their daily lives.

So what does each approach entail and how do the individual pieces combine into one complete methodology? Let's take a look phase by phase.

### Pre-shopping

The first phase of text-based online engagement allows consumers to share rich, insightful details of their pre-shopping thoughts, needs and behaviors using their computer. Using an asynchronous online bulletin board format means respondents can work through the researcher's lines of questioning and group discussion comments (if any) at their own pace, participating each day when the timing works best within their schedules.

Of course, the specific content of this phase will be determined by the research objectives and the duration of the first phase will be determined, at least in part, by the content (though timing and budget considerations have inevitable impact, as well).

As an example, this first interaction may be geared toward better understanding the target consumer and his/her lifestyle outside of the context of any particular brands or products. Or perhaps it includes a focus on pre-shopping behavior (how consumers plan their shopping trips, how they organize their shopping lists, how they plan to approach the store, etc.). Or maybe this phase includes product usage exercises to allow the team to not only read about but also see (through photos and/or videos) which products consumers use and exactly how they use them.

Clearly the flexibility of the online approach lends itself to a wide range of possibilities, which is one key reason it works so well as the first phase of engagement.

Toward the end of this first phase, the online platform also serves as a

convenient place to present consumers with expectations and requests related to the in-store piece of the methodology, which often follows as the second phase. While the consumer feedback provided during the in-store experience will be shared via mobile, oftentimes the instructions consumers need are longer and more detailed than what is easily viewed on a smartphone screen.

Leveraging the online tool to explain what's coming up in the mobile piece of the project links the phases together for participants, gives them an opportunity to read through what will be expected of them in the store and lets them ask clarifying questions without being limited to their smartphone's smaller screen and touchkeys. Additionally, if using a mobile tool designed to work in conjunction with the online platform, information on downloading the mobile application to be used in-store can also be posted in the online space.

### In-store

While the online component works well for thorough, detailed consumer feedback and discussion, the mobile piece of this methodological puzzle is best used for capturing succinct comments and photos during the shopping experience.

One could argue that independent mobile shopalongs enable consumers to shop more naturally than more traditional moderator-accompanied shopalongs. For this to be the case, however, the mobile feedback requested of participants should be brief and on-point so as to cause as little disruption as possible to their typical shopping behavior.

For example, asking consumers to snap photos of products or merchandising materials that grab their attention and briefly explain why they notice these items is a reasonable request. On the other hand, asking consumers to detail their every move through the aisles, describing each purchase consideration along the way, is not so reasonable. For that type and granularity of feedback, there are other approaches likely to serve you better. In-store use of mobile is best kept streamlined and specific; the opportunity for greater detail will come in the final online phase which will enable consumers to take their time, reflect on their shopping experience and provide additional context to their in-store feedback.

## Post-shopping

Continuing the engagement with consumers back in the online platform after completion of the shopping exercise allows for probing and for deeper discussions of in-store choices, considerations and behaviors. The post-shop online phase can also be used to open up conversation between respondents, taking what may have been an individual approach up until this point and making it a group discussion. Additionally, if better understanding product usage is part of the research objectives, this online phase can include questions and exercises geared toward that, such as a self-recorded usage occasion supported through written feedback, as an example.

## Case study

To better develop a new marketing initiative, a client in the beverage industry needed to better understand its target consumer from a broad perspective and gain a sense of how they think about the client's brand. First and foremost, we needed to get to know these consumers as people: What are their lives like? How do they spend their time? What is most important to them? Once we had this understanding of them, we wanted to learn how certain brands, including the client's, fit into the framework of their lives.

To begin immersing ourselves, we started with a phase of text-based in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted via an online bulletin board platform. Over the course of five days, we explored consumers' lifestyles, values, interests and priorities. While this approach was primarily text-based, we also included Webcam responses and photo-journaling exercises to add layers to the feedback and help bring the consumers to life.

Following the IDIs, we incorporated a shopping assignment with a mobile-response component. During the shopping trip, consumers shared photos and brief comments (via the online platform's mobile app) related to impulse purchases as well as products they had planned to purchase but ultimately decided against. Additionally, within the beverage section specifically, consumers shared photos of "new" products (meaning new to market or previously unnoticed by the individual consumer) and their initial impressions of them.

After completing the in-store exercise, consumers returned to the online platform for two more days of one-on-one discussion. As with the first phase, this round of IDIs was primarily text-based but also included Webcam responses and photo uploads. This portion of engagement focused on understanding consumers' relationships with various brands and the role their lifestyles, values and priorities played in establishing brand preferences and influencing purchase decisions.

By the end of the fieldwork, the text-based IDIs yielded a full picture of the target consumer – how they live their lives and what matters most to them – as well as valuable learnings around consumers' perceptions of various brands (including the client's) and drivers of brand preference and loyalty.

Additionally, the Webcam responses included in the first and third phases not only provided a more conversational element but also became valuable footage in highlight reels used to bring the target consumers to life for the broader client team. Further, the mobile shoppalong phase helped uncover in-store elements that captured consumers' attention and prompted purchase consideration, as well as key barriers in the store that prevented consumers from considering or purchasing a product even if they had previously planned to purchase it on the trip.

## Leveraging technology

As we've seen in our work at our respective firms, technology has finally – and dramatically – changed the landscape for qualitative research. With consumers now prolific in their use of both online and mobile technologies, researchers can utilize a variety of methods to obtain in-store insights and the pre- and post-context that illuminates the purpose behind the behavior.

Shopper insights can now truly be a 360-degree experience. ■

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