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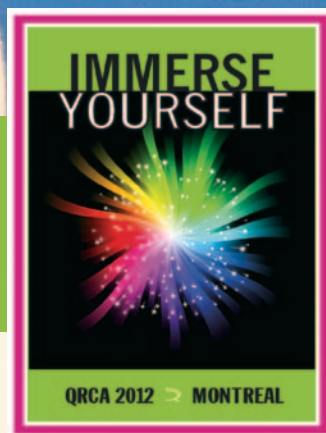
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Taking Advantage of Smartphones

for Responsive, Targeted Findings

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What is the best way for researchers to leverage smartphones that allow research participants to leave voice messages, type emails and text messages, make videos, take pictures and access online forums? We ran a nutrition and lifestyle study that asked young adults living all over Germany to respond across a variety of mobile and computer-based platforms. The findings offer insight into how and when to integrate multiple platforms into one study.

The hybrid multi-platform research design served up several key benefits:

- It reduced our time spent on collecting data (the participants did most of the work!).
- It gave us immediate glimpses into our participants' minds before and after an activity.
- It provided reflective insights afterwards.

Consumers' attachment to their mobile phones gives us access to them wherever they go. They are able to talk, text and share videos with us while cooking in the kitchen, commuting to work or buying groceries. Mobile technology is helping transform our research pro-

jects from stand-alone, project-based studies to a continuous research process.

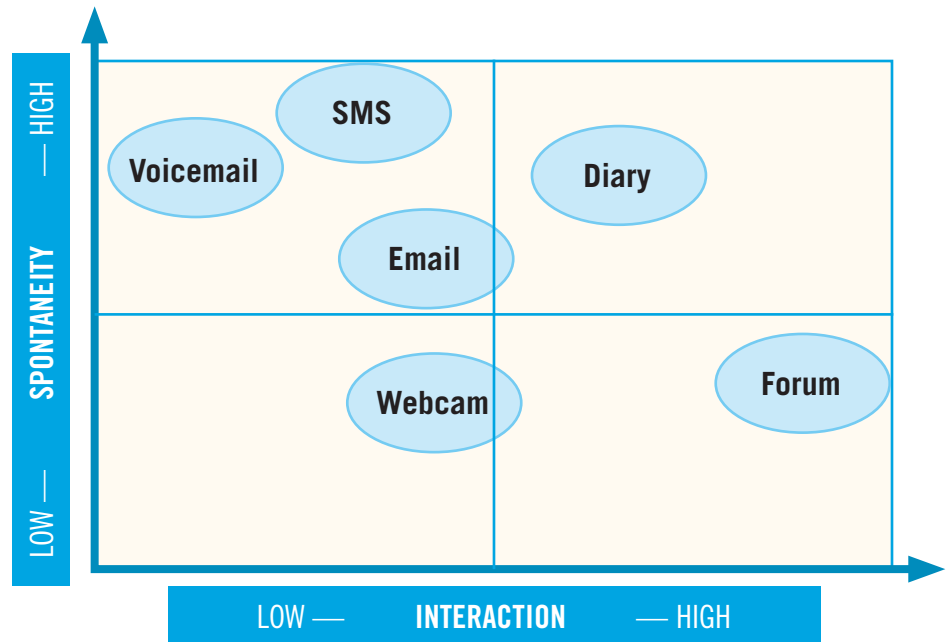
The researcher can integrate all components of a hybrid research program into one single software platform (for our case study, we used FocusForums), and respondents can access the platform through one device (their smartphones), if they choose. Despite the current excitement about the new mobile and online tools available, each communication channel faces drawbacks. Researchers can tailor their questions, however, to take advantage of the relative strengths of each of these channels.

Strengths & Weaknesses of Each Communication Channel — A Case Study

As you design your research, you may want to steer your respondents to one method over another. Your preferred method will be influenced by:

- Where the research takes place (e.g., on the go, at home)
- The complexity of your question and/or task given
- The kinds of answers you expect to elicit

Each communication channel lends itself to answers of varying depth and level of detail or precision. Most allow respondents to be spontaneous and fast, while providing an anonymous atmosphere. The following case study highlights when to use which channel.



OUR STUDY

The participants in this study were young people, living on their own in different cities across Germany. The study covered meal preferences, shopping behavior and lifestyle. All of the participants could access the internet from home and were in the possession of a mobile phone.

Depending on the type of data we wanted to capture, we asked these young adults to answer our questions by using the following channels: online-forum discussion, email, text messaging (SMS), multimedia text (MMS), webcam and voicemail.

Online Bulletin Boards

The first set of questions asked about respondents' living situations and style of living. Respondents took advantage of the asynchronous format of an online bulletin board to give thoughtful, detailed answers.

Q: Please describe how you live and what you like best about it.

A: "Currently, I am living in an apartment-sharing community for three people with two other girls. The location of the apartment is perfect, in a nice and calm street where every house looks different. Moreover, many of my friends live in the same neighborhood. What I like best about my apartment is that we have a balcony upon which the sun shines all afternoon. And,

of course, the lovely, old and creaking wooden floor. It gives the apartment a nice rustic charm."

Email

Up next was a purchase assignment that had to be answered by sending an email after the shopping took place. The email format encouraged detailed responses, and the timing "after the event" created the opportunity for reflection.

Q: Please go and buy yourself something to eat for up to 10€. Send

me an email, and 1) describe in detail the shopping situation, the circumstance, where, with whom, whether it was planned, the brand, the product, price, taste, reasons. If possible please send me a short picture or video clip. 2) Describe the consumption situation in detail — circumstances, with whom, where, taste.

A: 1) Yesterday evening I returned home from my internship rather late at half past ten. The shops





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were closed already. My two friends were still at IKEA: Unfortunately the fridge was empty that's why we (had to) have dinner somewhere else. We decided to go to a pizza place, close to where we live, and get 3 pizzas to go. The order cost around 20€ and thus 5 – 7€ for a Pizza. I ordered a Pizza with ham and mushrooms. 2) We ate the pizza on our balcony afterwards. The taste was satisfying since the pizza itself had little dough and lots of topping.

Texting

We posted questions in the online forum and then followed up with text messages, asking participants to respond by using their mobile phones while at the supermarket. Notice that the responses are short and capture the respondent's thoughts and mood in the moment.

- Q Forum:** Please go today or tomorrow and buy something to nibble, worth around 5 €. I will send you a few questions as messages that I would ask you to reply to while buying something. Send a message to each of the following questions:
- SMS 1) In which shop are you currently buying something to eat?
- SMS 2) What is the time and who are you with? How do you feel?
- SMS 3) Which products do you chose from? Which three do you choose from and why?
- SMS 4) Which product did you choose in the end and why do you prefer this?
- SMS 5) Take a picture of the product and send it to me / upload it.
- SMS 6) While you eat it, please describe how it tastes.
- SMS 7) How do you feel after having consumed the product?

Answers:

- A SMS 1: Tengelmann
- A SMS 2: 16:40
- A SMS 3: little hungry, having the munchies. Looking forward to a delicious Ben & Jerry's ice-cream
- A SMS 4: Just noticed that there is no Ben & Jerry's ice-cream and will now buy an ice-cream from Mövenpick. There is also

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a cheaper version from A&P but I cannot go there
A SMS 5: be sure whether it tastes good. I prefer paying a little more and have the assurance
A SMS6: since it is a product I know already
A SMS 7: very sweet and creamy, very refreshing for a hot summer day!

Voicemails

We asked respondents to leave a voicemail describing their experience, including their decision-making process while in the midst of purchasing. The results included context-rich descriptions about what influenced them to buy.

Q: Please get yourself something salty to nibble, and call this XXX number and tell me: At which shop are you making your purchase? What time is it, and who are you with? Describe

the situation in detail. How do you feel? What were the set of products that you chose from, and which one did you end up choosing? What was it about the product that made you choose it (e.g., brand, price)? When do you think you will eat the product? How would you describe this product to a friend?

A: I am just buying something at EDEKA, it is 6pm. I am alone and on my way home from work. The EDEKA is on the way and that's why I went there. I am feeling good but a little tired from work and happy to be able to go home now. When buying, I had to make a decision between Peanut Flips, roasted peanuts and crunchy peanuts — since I don't like chips that much I wanted to get some kind of peanuts. I decided to get

party-nuts which is EDEKA's own brand. They cost 89 cents. There are also NicNacs which are the same but cost double so I chose to get the cheaper one. I will eat them probably tonight when watching TV — not sure yet but probably I'll eat them tonight when I have nothing to do and am sitting around... [A detailed product description followed.]

KEY LEARNINGS

After trying each of the different communication channels, we allowed respondents to choose how they answered subsequent questions. All discussed their experience and perceptions surrounding the different channels. The following summarizes what channels work best, depending on your research needs and respondents' comfort.

Table 1. Comparison of channels.

	Voicemail	SMS	Email	Webcam	Diary	Forum
Situation	1on1	1on1	1on1	any / group	1on1	any / group
Answers	Longer	Short + precise	Longer + detailed	Longer + detailed	Longer + detailed + precise	Building on other respondents is possible.
Spontaneous	Yes	Yes	Limited to smartphones and contract	Limited to task	Yes (if timely)	No
Detail	More details	Limited space	Yes	Show behavior, environment or context	Very detailed responses	Active discussion with other respondents
Nonverbal	Limited to voice	Limited to icons	Limited to icons	Adds other nonverbal communication to voice	Media add details.	Media add details.
Spur of the moment	OTG	OTG	Limited to smartphones and contract	Limited to task	Limited to smartphones and contract	Limited to smartphones and contract
Attachments	No	Limited to mms	Photo, video, audio, link	Demonstrate products	Upload	Upload
# of Questions	Single Qs	Single Qs	Multiple Qs	Single Qs	Multiple Qs	Multiple Qs
Follow-up Q+A	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intrusiveness	Intimidating	Less intrusive	No	Intimidating but forget quickly	No	No
Watch out:	When voicemail is sent.	Can be time consuming.	Format of attachments	Perspective Zoom Privacy issues Availability	Can be time consuming.	Retrospective

Voicemails

Best used to respond to single explanatory question in a private location.

We discovered that voicemails delivered in the moment (during an assignment) tended to be richer in immediate and emotional details. Those who responded from home (after an assignment) were less specific and focused on motivational details.

For example, here is a transcript of a voicemail made while consuming a meal. Note how this respondent spoke directly about the food itself — what it is like, and what it tastes like — and more contextual details (he is hungry, and it is almost bedtime).

I am just eating spaghetti and tomato sauce. It is quarter to nine in the evening. I am alone at home and quickly cooked it since I am hungry and I am already really looking forward to eating. It is not fresh but a ready-meal from

Miracoli. It cost around 2, 50€. The meal is very delicious — of course a little tomatoey but not so much as when making it oneself.

Those who left the voicemail later described less about the food and more about why they chose that particular meal.

Today, I had lunch at a Chinese place close by. Together with a friend from school we decided to go there spontaneously since we haven't been to a Chinese restaurant for some time and we both wanted some fried food with spicy sauce. When we arrived we ordered the buffet twice and a Sprite each.

The mobile device allows respondents to describe feelings, thoughts and details at the point of use or sale, precisely capturing their in-the-moment emotions. The drawback to voicemail is that sometimes participants are intimidated by having people around them

who might be listening. Calling into voicemail from home has the clear advantage of providing more privacy. Participants can offer detailed feelings and information without fear of being overheard, although they lose the advantage of being able to describe the experience as it is happening.

Texting (SMS or MMS)

Best for generating quick, simple responses.

The ability of respondents to respond quickly to questions and tasks allows researchers to collect follow-up thoughts and comments quickly. Texting also makes it easier to recruit geographically dispersed and difficult-to-access consumers. Our participants especially liked being able to capture their experience while their memories were still fresh.

One drawback is that respondents might incur additional texting costs, which might deter them from answering in detail. To mitigate this possibility, we offered refunds to those respondents who did not have a flat-rate text-data plan. However, these respondents still texted less than those with a flat-rate plan.


Given rate limitations, expect short answers. Our responses were most on target when the questions were kept simple, short and asked in succession. Otherwise, you risk having only some or parts of questions answered.

As your questions become more complex, use online forums.

Online Forums

Best for generating thoughtful, more detailed and interactive responses.

In this study, participants mentioned that they most enjoyed being anonymous in the forum. Respondents logged in several times per day and spent a lot more time online than initially asked for. Secondly, they enjoyed working on the different tasks and reading what others wrote. The resulting feeling of being part of a community encouraged long-term engagement. One participant stated, "I enjoyed the discussion here a lot. I could sit down, relax and work on the tasks; also I liked to read the other contributions, yet under an anonymous name, which made it very pleasant." The total anonymity is probably one of the biggest advantages of the online-forum discussion over a face-to-face discussion.



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Bernadette Coley, Founder & CEO

In your research design, build on the strengths of each of the communication channels.

Email

Best for generating longer responses from any location.

The advantages of emails are similar to the ones we found with online forums. The difference is that they are not interactive. Yet, since it is easier to write an email with the phone than log onto a forum, we found that participants tended to write emails on the go. These immediate, at-the-point-of-purchase emails provided rich insight.

A Few Last Pointers

We found that those respondents who could access the online forum through

their phones were more active than those who were limited to “only a computer.” If your study requires capturing point-of-sale or other on-the-go data, consider screening participants for those with smartphones that have internet access.

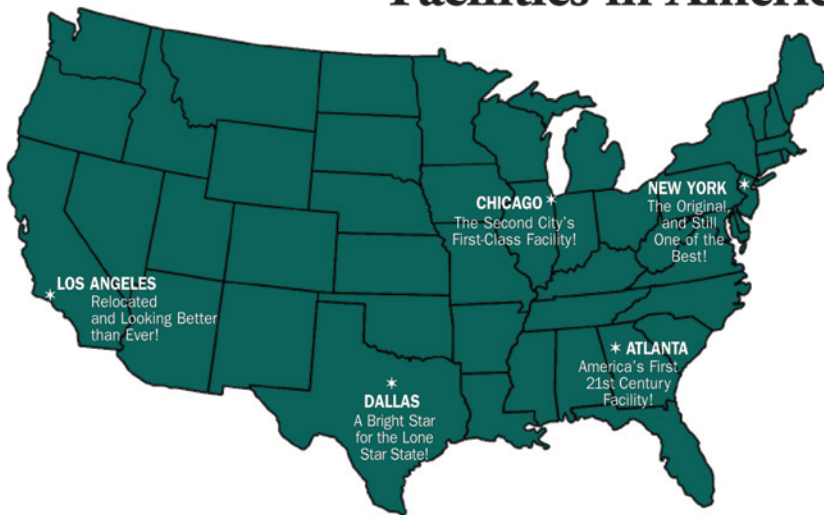
Some of our respondents said that they found using all the different communication channels to be somewhat confusing. They said that having only one kind of communication (e.g., posting in the forum or emailing with pictures) would have been easier. While you can screen for familiarity with texting, emailing and using voicemail, your respondents will appreciate clear instruc-

tions on how to access and use the online forums and how to email or upload photos.

Give your participants flexibility in how they communicate with you. Respondents’ preferences for different communication channels vary almost as much as the features on their mobile devices.

And last, in your research design, build on the strengths of each of the communication channels. Mobile phones, tablets and the internet have opened up opportunities to combine immediate, in-the-moment findings with reflective research. Take advantage of it! 📱

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