Treating online survey participants like people

> **Are you developing an online health survey questionnaire or a patient reported outcome measure? If so has it ever struck you that potential respondents have a life apart from completing your survey sitting at their computers, or viewing their iPads and iPhones? If not then it's time you did.**

Introduction

The objective of all surveys is to achieve valid and complete data. However, unless we think of survey respondents as people, this will be difficult to achieve. A good survey respondent's experience is essential for achieving their cooperation.

We now live in a mobile world and the rapid adoption of mobile technologies - notably smartphones - has impacted on everyday life. A recent analysis of MaritzCX survey data from 2011-2015 shows that respondents are increasingly using mobile devices to access web surveys. Thirty-nine percent of all survey 'starts' were on mobile devices in the second quarter of 2015, with 31 percent on mobile phones and eight percent on tablets.

So how do we ensure our survey provides a good respondent experience?

We should considers three key areas when designing surveys for mobile devices:

➢ Programming standards
➢ Question presentation
➢ Survey length

The first problem is that the majority of online surveys have been designed for the computer resulting in respondents trying to complete a web survey which has not been optimised for mobile completion, in which respondents will be less motivated to complete. Therefore, when the link to the survey is clicked, the device type should be identified and respondents directed to the relevant mobile or non-mobile template.

Whenever possible one question per screen should be presented and drag-and-drops and slider scales and matrix question formats should be avoided. If scrolling is required horizontal scrolling should be avoided as this causes respondent fatigue.

The welcome screen should be motivating and needs to emphasise the ease of responding and shows respondents how to move to the next page.

There is evidence that the first question on the screen can have a significant impact on whether the respondent continues to complete the questionnaire or not. So make it easy to answer.

Survey length and completion time. While it might be considered the shorter the survey the higher the completion rate, this is not necessarily true and will depend on the survey topic, the respondents interest in the topic and design of the survey. However, [Cape & Philips](#) have clearly demonstrated that the quality of data suffers towards the end for long questionnaires. This they contribute to the cognitive length of the questionnaire.

In terms of completion time this raises interesting issues in terms of completion times on mobile device including, load page speeds and the environment respondents are completing the survey on a mobile device.

Below are listed best practice guidelines for mobile survey design:

❖ Respondents can deal with vertical scrolling; horizontal scrolling leads to fatigue, higher abandon rates and data quality issues

❖ Do not alter scale presentation from one device to another (a horizontal display on non-mobile and a vertical display on mobile, for example); changes in scale presentation will often result in score differences between device types

❖ Heavy images will cause page-load delays on some mobile devices; when background images are required, they should be mobile-optimized

❖ All else being equal, shorter scales will provide a better respondent experience (larger font and easier for respondent to choose desired response)

❖ It is more difficult for respondents to type verbatim responses on mobile phones; new mobile technologies that allow respondents to provide feedback without relying on a small keyboard should improve the quantity and quality of open-ended responses

❖ Most "engaging" survey designs like drag-and-drops and slider scales lead to higher abandon rates and data comparability issues than traditional question displays. Respondents tend to prefer exercises that are familiar and short; In most cases, those exercises are in simple question format.

About Health Outcomes Insights

Health Outcomes Insights is an independent research consultancy serving academia, life science researchers, healthcare agencies and the pharmaceutical industry, get targeted answers to patient behaviour, experience and health outcomes across a range of conditions and diseases – with particular expertise in diabetes.

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