

Adapt or die - spotlight on mobile market research

 By Leigh Andrews

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Market research is a tricky topic, particularly when related to mobile use in Africa. Simplify the process by being device-agnostic and keeping literacy and language top of mind...

I attended the opening day of the first ever #MRMW Africa conference on 5 November at the Doubletree Hilton in Upper Woodstock. [Jens Cornellsen](#), MD of global events for the [Merlien Institute](#), opened the day by saying the Wi-Fi password was provided not to check email but to tweet as attendees were meant to be mobile minded. He handed over to [Nicolle Harding](#), chair of the [Mobile Marketing Association \(MMA\)](#), who gave an overview of the MMA and got attendees to introduce themselves to each other, which clarified that the bulk of attendees were actively involved in the research industry.



It was then time for the first speaker of the day, Shirley Harding, executive head of market research at Standard Bank. She gave her personal perspective of mobile as a research enabler. Harding said the average African is much more mobile-equipped than research-equipped, which is why all market researchers need a shift in how they approach surveys.

Also keep in mind that demand for commodities is driving growth in Africa, and key among these is the global need for food as we have a dormant resources potential. In this light, Harding says [M-pesa](#) and [Snapscan](#) are changing the financial industry drastically.

The opportunities and challenges of mobile self-answer surveys in Africa

We have a growing workforce of younger, more affluent people than before living up to the challenge of driving the mobile revolution. Technology is thus obviously drastically changing the way we do things, with many of the people now adopting mobile to connect not having used any other form of technology before. In Africa, there's still huge potential for growth. The fact that the bulk of these still use 'traditional' old fashioned internet banking instead of mobile banking platforms shows that people are accessing the internet from whichever device they have at hand.

Harding says this all comes together to hint at the power of implementing self-selection and self-completion SMS surveys, but she cautions that there are still some challenges ahead. Key among these is that panel establishment throughout Africa would be a challenge in itself, as well as technology for users who rely on the internet, especially where the majority of cell phone users are still on feature phones with limited web access. There's also the elephant in the room of expensive, unreliable data access, and ultimately [2G](#) remains the dominant connection across the continent.

Literacy and language as critical factors for African mobile market research



Shirley Harding of Standard Bank

According to Harding, literacy and language also pose issues if the form of survey employed is one that respondents need to read and complete themselves. They also may not want to complete it in English, even if they understand it. This brings up a new can of worms as translation and contextual understanding remain a problem. For example, how many of the South Africa's official languages would you translate it into? This clearly points to more research being necessary before even getting started. Then, someone has to capture the language not in the way it is formally translated, but in the way it is used as the *lingua franca*. There's still a need for on-the-ground knowledge and expertise of the markets you intend to research.

Harding says SMS is a good platform for critical mass research and [marketing](#) in Africa as there isn't much USSD connectivity. But, keep in mind how your respondents will respond to a message on a cell phone asking for their thoughts, especially if they have not seen a rating scale before or if smiley faces may have no meaning. This all points to rethinking the format of mobile surveys.

Other critical factors include whether the respondent understood the question and answer the way you did, and the fact that especially in Africa, multi-sims are popular, where people share cell phones by switching to their personal SIM card when needed, so you're not necessarily reaching who you think you are. This means the control on lists and panels will be crucial, and market researchers need to always remain sceptical. As you move to device-assisted interviews, use the device that works best for who you intend to survey, so make sure your interviewers are device-agnostic.

Capturing the data - mobile speeds up and complicated the process more than ever before

It's not just about the speed of data capture, even though mobile changes this drastically for the better. You can now enhance quality as you can back-check through geo-location. This makes it easier to interview as the logic is built into the process and you don't have stacks of paper to track. This in return enhances the respondent's comfort. You can even make it fun if you [gamify](#) their participation. Harding shared an example of how mobile devices to conduct market research into trader markets' trading practices in Madina, Ghana gave reliable results on the average stall size and stall owner behaviour, as well as competitor mapping, the number of traders and certain geospatial features.

What this really means: Implications of mobile research for clients

Harding says to remember that mobile technology demands simplicity. Researchers must therefore adapt or die by using fewer questions and returning to pilot testing, doing qualitative research in advance and compiling shorter brand lists for respondents to choose from.

“ Shopping list approach is not good enough when approaching market research through mobile in Africa, says Standard Bank's Harding at [#mmmw- Rambling Litchi \(@Leigh_Andrews\) November 5, 2014](#) ”

With shorter surveys, you need to match samples. You can do virtually anything via an app these days, so it's not just about the actual survey. Also use mobile for reporting, accessible charting and project updates.

Harding concluded that mobile is going to fundamentally alter the research path. You can't keep giving respondents great big wads of paper and expect them to happily complete them.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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