In-the-Moment Research: Using Smartphones, Mobile Diaries to Deepen Consumer Understanding

By Patricia Graham

Highly valued research can take many forms. Failing to deliver on it creates pessimism in the industry that is often due to the conflict of speed vs. quality and the need for short- vs. long-term consumer understanding.

- Develop new products
- Strengthen the marketing plans for established brands
- Identify unmet needs
- Gauge reactions to stimulus
- Tell a story with quant and qual components

What follows is a description of the two research approaches (smartphone and diary research), and their synergy, that have brought incredible value to the researchers and marketers we serve. I welcome a conversation with you about this new frontier.

Beyond Surveys to Smartphone Research

At Knowledge Networks we have found that, when we apply technology already in the hands of consumers (literally so, with smartphones) as well as longitudinal research techniques (e.g., diary-based), the conflict no longer exists. **We can create both the symphony and the concerto you need to understand consumers, so you can better:**

KN’s completed smartphone research has shown us that we can meet your need for fast facts and insights that are actionable and timely, recognizing that technology always plays a role in how people are participating in information gathering. Our QuantM suite uses smartphones for “on-the-go” and “in the moment” research, enabling you to learn things about consumers, products and brands that were never before cost effectively possible.

This great new capability can be used on a standalone basis or as a deep dive within your more comprehensive A&U’s, concept tests, or
segmentations, combining attitudes with actual behaviors, along with photos and voice-based answers that illuminate the statistics. It is, as a result, the best of both worlds — a combination of “in the moment,” non-recall-based research with your larger, recall-based data capture.

Interest among the KnowledgePanel respondents in the mobile research method, and their willingness to fully participate, is illustrated through their vivid and enthusiastic photographic contributions. In the case below, we simply asked panel members to show us what they baked for the holiday, after baking the item, with a five-minute exercise focused on:

- What the respondent was currently baking
- Who the baked good was intended for
- The recipe of the baked good
- How baking the item made the respondent feel
- How the ingredients were chosen
- Collecting a picture of the baking process and the final product

Speed to Insight

Brand managers want fast facts, and QuantM delivers. It has not been surprising to capture the vast majority of information within a few hours of deploying a research request to a smartphone of a KnowledgePanel member. Keep in mind that the information is typically provided while the respondent is performing an activity – shopping, cooking eating out and the like!

QuantM engages research participants in a whole new way, using smartphone apps to make information requests – be they surveys, other ‘tell-me’ inquiries, or diaries of behaviors and attitudes.

The key constructs of the QuantM Mobile Solution Suite are:

1. Gather information at point of decision/experience/consumption
2. Enrich the data: Associate information with photos and GPS
3. Understand consumers over time (diaries or ethnographies)
4. Recognize that engaging with people in the way they want to be engaged is a means to getting closer to their behaviors and attitudes – and mobile is the place of choice for many people.
Our Quant™ mobile solution suite is comprehensive and can take the form of:

Diary Research Meets Mobile

Paper and pencil diaries have moved to online, yet the natural fit is to also include a mobile component in that online diary-based research to:

- Capture occasion-based, out-of-home attitudes and behaviors
- Eliminate the need for recall
- Gain ethnographic knowledge of who the respondent was with
- Learn about emotions and experiences at the time that evoked the behavior
- Determine media and promotions seen during the occasion

Knowledge Networks has found that longitudinal online diary research in particular can uncover opportunities and potential areas of interest for marketers and researchers – by capturing a rich level of detail in occasion-specific behaviors and preferences missed by other methods. The diary approach has important applications for retail, consumer goods (CPG), pharmaceutical/health care, and other industries.

With data collection extending over a significant time period, the “online diary + Quant™” mobile method can comprehensively reveal:

- Events and considerations that preceded a decision prior to the moment of consumption or purchase
- Alternatives considered (e.g., competitive set) and why they were or were not chosen
- Purchase and use of a variety of products not included in syndicated scanner databases
- Details of how the product was used – in meal preparation, for example, was one product substituted for another? Did the respondent take the right number of OTC medications in a given timeframe?
- Deep dive details on specific occasions of use while they are happening

Let’s put in-the-moment clarity to work in your research!

Patricia Graham is Chief Strategy Officer of Knowledge Networks. Over the past 20+ years she has evaluated the marketing plan performance, advertising and communication plan effectiveness of hundreds of new and established brands

Contact her at pgraham@knowledgenetworks.com or (312) 416-3660.