

# SSI POV: Offline

## Best Practices: Moving Offline Projects Online

- **When a research study is moved from an offline methodology to online, results will change.**
- **Because they often change in unpredictable ways, weighting the online results to match old data can be a waste of time and effort.**

### 3 Likely Causes of Data Changes When Moving Projects Online

While SSI has successfully supported hundreds of projects moving from offline to online it is important to recognize that biases exist with every methodology and when differences are seen after moving a study online, there are three likely sources:

#### 1. Sample effects:

- a. **Non-coverage** of cell phone HHs with telephone methodology or of non-internet with online
- b. **Non-response** of people who won't take phone surveys with telephone methodology or of people who won't join panels with online methodology

#### 2. Mode effects:

- a. **Interviewer:** With no interviewer present online, participants may be more honest and less likely to give socially desirable responses, but may also be more likely to quit without interviewer encouragement.
- b. **Visual v. aural:** There is more use of end points on a scale when it is read to the participant; more use of midpoints online when the entire scale is constantly visible.
- c. **Access:** Less-affluent participants may have slower internet connections, affecting their experience.
- d. **Visual cues:** When switching from face to face to online, the visual cues in a home, which can provide additional data (e.g. product ownership) are not available.

#### 3. Questionnaire Effects: Use of graphics, variation in question wording and pacing can cause differences. Online the speed of the questionnaire is dictated by participant, while offline the interviewer controls it. AC Nielsen has reported results from parallel tests in different categories and countries, finding that while key metrics usually remain the same, some do not:

- a. In an apple juice usage and attitudes tracker in the US, top of mind awareness was almost identical at a national and a city level; unaided brand awareness was higher online, but the order in which brands were mentioned was the same. Total awareness was identical.
- b. In a digital camera study in four Asian and three European markets (online vs telephone) there was coverage bias since online participants are more likely to own and use digital cameras.

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- c. For a household cleaner study in Asia, usage patterns (online vs. telephone) attitudes and usage patterns were similar but claimed usage of brands was lower online, and closer to actual usage.

## Key Factors to Remember

- When moving projects to online, it's important to remember reported facts are unlikely to change. Opinions and attitudes may.
- Spontaneous awareness measures are likely to increase since online participants feel less pressure to give an answer or move on with the survey; prompted awareness measures are unlikely to change.
- There will be more use of midpoints, and more use of "don't know" (less tendency to "agree" with the interviewer or invent something in order to appear "good" in the interviewer's eyes).
- The "social desirability" differences will vary in direction and strength depending on culture. In countries where internet penetration is low, sampling effects due to coverage are more significant.

## SSI Recommendations

If you are moving studies online, SSI recommends that you:

- Run projects side by side for several iterations to compare results and help understand differences.
- Redesign the survey instrument. Don't put a phone script up online.
- Run a small test of all or part of the new survey before launching the new questionnaire.
- Expect differences, observe, document and understand them instead of weighting to old measures.