

ESOMAR

Community Circle

Tips and findings - 8 October

**Preparing for the 'Next Normal';
Research tips for managing
face to face interviewing in the
post COVID-19 world**





The event started with Nabil Abouzaid who presented a detailed account of the lockdown and the impact of COVID-19 on consumer research in Morocco.

As in many other market's agencies had to adjust to the unprecedented conditions by reducing salaries, set up furlough schemes or downright downsizing personnel and shared a gloomy outlook for the future. The impact also concerned: less business overall (projects cancelled, postponed or downsized) and working methods (shift to online interviewing).

Massimo Cealti continued with a presentation on tips for continuing face-to-face interviewing in the new context.

He pointed to the fact that Science says the greatest contamination risks come from "human to human" contact and that shifting fieldwork activities online is certainly an option BUT cannot be performed for selected research methodologies (e.g. product testing) or

it is specifically discouraged for some particular targets (middle to lower income consumers who are not digitally proficient enough or excluded from access to technology).

Product testing facilities (all types of hall tests from offices to the occasionally rented venue) are usually frequently cleaned however they represent closed spaces where contagion cannot be excluded. In addition initial responses from China, where research has resumed work sooner, show that both consumers recruited "one off" (e.g. street intercept, phone, social media recruitment or other) and research panel members as well are reluctant to join projects as they see an unnecessary risk in these activities.

But product innovation and the agency work should not stop, and the industry can continue working in the current conditions.



Some of the short-term tips he shared include:

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During recruitment:

Screen respondents for current symptoms and eventual contacts with positive people (Trace)

On the day of fieldwork:

Get respondents to **sign a waiver of responsibility** form and an **informed consent** form to avoid unpleasant consequences

Physical Distancing is a must as much as respecting every safety measure requested in your country (these vary greatly): if possible, scan respondents' temperature upon arrival, ask them to wear a mask and wash their hands or use hand sanitizing gel

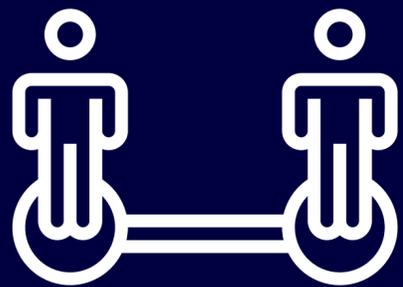
If your **product requires preparation** the technician must use gloves, mask and goggles

Use recyclable disposable materials for product serving

After interviewing is complete:

Disinfect furniture and survey materials after each use: using isopropanol or isopropyl alcohol, or hydrogen peroxide (odorless) or peracetic acid.

In a longer-term perspective CLTs (and qualitative interviewing) and HUTs were also dealt with: Central Location Tests (CLTs) are being hit hardest by the unfavorable sanitary conditions.



Distancing and health practices must be followed but CLTs are much more than a bunch of consumers trying a product in a room: if respondents are not comfortable both physically and psychologically, they will unconsciously adopt defense mechanisms which will affect their preferences and jeopardize the replicability of their assessments.

Psychological anxiety about social distancing practices and related obligations (masks, gloves, hand sanitizing gel etc.), and the unconscious general fear of contagion certainly play a role (which will be very hard to measure and sterilize) in Central Location Tests.

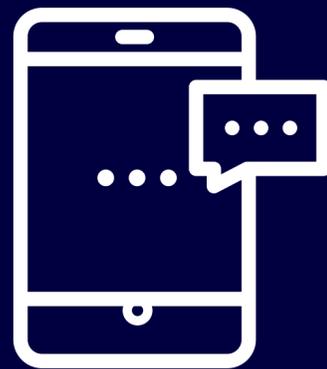
In locations where this is possible to reduce the sense of “oppression” linked to the confinement in a closed space run the test outside, physical distancing is better accepted in open spaces vs closed ones. From a consumer perspective this can be a much better set-up for qualitative interviewing, and so as one-

to-one interviewing and if target allows, privilege respondent self-completion of questionnaires, using phones (this can range from text messages to links according to the numeric literacy of the target).

And how do we measure the effects of physical distancing on how consumer respond? If possible, replicating an existing test run prior to the pandemic and comparing the results in the 2 different contexts should shed some light on the matter.

Massimo showed some new Technological solutions which allow to create portable connections virtually anywhere, even where there’s NO internet connectivity as well.

HUTs are becoming more relevant since they can adapt to the change in context more flexibly allowing for “remote project management”.



Product consumption is performed in “true-to-life” conditions in the real world and this can sterilize many of the biases highlighted by behavioral economics. Product usage conditions will not be easily controlled: to limit this bias and make participants understand the importance of standardized product usage conditions respondents properly brief them.

Product preparation and usage can be filmed to check for non-compliance, and incidentally this “ethnographic” process is very likely to reveal a number of actionable unexpected insights!

HUTs are becoming more relevant and are becoming HYBRID:

RECRUITMENT: respondents can be selected using “remote” methods (not just panels, but telephone recruitment, street intercept, e-mail, social media, fidelity

cards use, groups and associations, “snowball” etc., as well).

PRODUCT TEST LOGISTICS for HUTs is becoming a key success factor and innovative ideas flourish: from the « drive in » (participants come and collect the product with their car) to the actual purchase of products in a store/on the web by consumers who try then the product at home.

Logistic companies are boosting their capabilities for transporting « delicate » goods as super-fresh or dangerous items and offer cost competitive alternatives.

RECALL: respondents can be also be reached after product trial using a range of “remote” methods (telephone, e-mail... even surface mail).



Massimo then introduced Nicolas Siega who spoke about the solutions logistic companies are devising for shipping products in the COVID-19 era.

During lockdown they worked with some fieldwork agencies to develop ad-hoc solutions for the “new” situations because reaching people at home effectively, rapidly and economically has become the new paradigm and these solutions also included some African countries.

He shared some of the universal logistics challenges that apply to the 54 African countries:

1. Address: in many African countries there are striking differences between urban and semi- rural or rural areas and it is not infrequent that even in mayor towns outskirts, in semi-rural and areas streets

have no name and houses no number; frequently there are popular unofficial names. Nicolas showed pictures of « difficult » actual cases.

2. Shipping and Delivery Safety: concerns both the content of the parcel (dangerous goods like alcoholic fragrances or aerosol deodorants) and the delivery itself (you do not want parcels loss or theft). Parcel Tracking is not universally available in Africa and since the pandemic delivery signatures have become impossible due to the distancing needs.

3. Land Coverage: airfreight has been put under and enormous strain by the pandemic (less planes are flying and therefore prices have increased), some places are becoming more and more difficult to be attained these days.



4. Price: Nicolas shared some cost-effective delivery solutions (e.g. shipping to collect centers both existing or temporary, using an interviewer to centrally collect and re-dispatch the product samples), optimizing size and weight of the shipment, prices vary by transporter and offer opportunities for cost saving.

5. Packing: agencies have gone from shipping 3 parcels to a test center to shipping 300 to the respondents' homes for the same study, this puts a strain on the agency internal organization but

there are outsourcing solutions whereby logistics companies have started offering packing and assortment of the samples as well.

So that the new name of the game is delivering thousands of different items rapidly, precisely, and effectively...one item at a time in each of the 54 countries in Africa.



During the final part of the webinar a **debate on the topics discussed** was encouraged and several questions were asked:

- How to continue interviewing people face-to-face at the manufacturing facilities of a soap manufacturer? (question from South Africa)
- How to test snacks, and specifically chocolate snacks for the local market? (question from the Ivory Coast)
- How-to knock-on people's doors wearing a mask without « scaring » the potential respondents? (question from Congo, that's when Massimo recommended to use a transparent face shield which would enable respondents to see the interviewer's face...)

- Are mixed-mode data collection methodologies acceptable for collecting consumer and B2B data in the current situation? (question from South Africa)

- What lies ahead for face-to-face interviewing in Africa?
The prevailing mood from the audience was « hopeful» and committed that solutions can be found, that industry associations like ESOMAR are expected to facilitate sharing of the “new” best practices, to bring people together (virtually) and to foster discussion generating new solutions to the common and universal issues our whole industry is facing.

Thank you.