The challenges and solutions of telephone interviewing in Africa, a view from the frontline

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Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa, face-to-face (F2F) interviewing has been the main method. CATI and online were limited by the coverage limitations.

Increased penetration of mobiles

CATI benefits: fast turnaround, low cost, quality and reach/coverage

This paper examines the operational aspects and challenges of CATI including **sampling, response rate, data collection processes, fieldwork monitoring and management, language, cultural and gender issues**, and interviewer effects in conducting phone surveys in Africa.

We use the TNS Nigeria CATI Centre as a case study.
Method used to develop this presentation

A case study approach was taken to address these issues, focusing on the TNS Nigeria call centre, and specifically on two recent research projects.

The following evidence was used:-

• Focus Group Discussions with CATI interviewers
• Analysis of response rate and QC data from recent projects (dates and target groups)
• In-depth interviews with enumerators
• In-depth interviews with call-centre supervisors, manager and quality control managers
• Interviews with client-facing teams
• Observations/listening in on interviews
Nigeria CATI centre
The Nigeria CATI center is located in Lagos

20+ CATI workstations

85,000 CATI Interviews in 2015

45 Trained interviewers

Huge infrastructural challenges
The Nigeria call centre

• Quality Assurance takes place on a number of different levels:

  ➢ Live intrusions: The CATI supervisor has the ability to log into any workstation at any time and to listen in on the interview or interaction.

  ➢ Independent assessments – All interviews are automatically recorded hence, an independent quality control officer listens to the recorded file for quality assurance of the successful interviews and also the refusals.

  ➢ Analysis of productivity reports
Why is CATI not more widely used?

What are the key influences on response rates in a Nigeria context and how can we maximize response rates?

What is the best way of conducting CATI research in a multi-lingual environment?
Use of CATI is increasing

But still a wide gap in adoption when compared to face to face interviewing
CATI has grown steadily in rest of Africa but has had a bumpy road ride in Nigeria
Why low adoption of CATI?

Bias
“CATI does not give a representative sample” “what does it represent? We do not know so we cannot commission it”

Too short
“Our questionnaires are simply too long... we are told that 15 mins is the maximum length for CATI. Again we don’t know how quality drops after that”

Inappropriate method
“We usually test products or show stimuli to respondents”

Inappropriate

Low understanding
“Our clients don’t think of CATI and they don’t know the benefits, especially in the area of quality control”

Trust
“Isn’t it difficult to get interviewers to build trust with their respondents on the phone?”

Source: interviews with TNS Nigeria senior researchers and with survey funders
#1 What is the reason for low use of CATI in Nigeria?

01. Lack of understanding of what the sample truly does or does not represent

02. Low knowledge of the benefits and drawbacks

03. Need longer questionnaires than viable
Why is CATI not more widely used?

What are the key factors causing low response and how can we overcome them?

What is the best way of conducting CATI research in a multi-lingual environment?
Achieving response is a big challenge

Survey on Food security in 3 North Eastern states

- Successful: 71%
- Refused/Others: 29%

Sample source: Geopoll database (20% active numbers out of 51163 generated)

National Survey on Internet Adoption

- Successful: 78%
- Unsuccessful (incl. refusals, Others): 22%

Sample source: RDD (47% active numbers out of 36980 generated)
Interviewer influence on response rate is high

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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.40%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
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</table>
Key influences on response

Time of day and day of week when called

1. This defers on project basis, as some project will have extremely low response during the week days and high response by weekend.
2. Political and social research has high response rate at anytime of call given the right season.

Period of calling

2. Calls during festive periods or holidays has high response, as respondent gives answers in a relaxed mood.

Connectivity issues

3. This could be a general issue from network providers or specific location with poor network coverage

Length of interview

4. Long interview leads to drop calls and partial interviews.
5. Statistics from Nig. CATI centre shows 90% of partial interviews are due to interview length over 25mins.

Interviewer experience and soft skills

5. Ability to convince potential respondent to participate in and complete the survey. Details on the next slide
Key influences on response

Poor Questionnaire Design
- Use of long list and attribute.
- Less engaging questions
- Too many verbatim.

Topic of discussion
- Politics could be difficult or engaging.

Security and confidential concerns
- This has to with political and social research, especially in volatile locations.
- Discussing household durables and income is also a challenge.

Language barrier
- Response rate is lowest with minority languages where respondents don’t speak any of the major local languages or pidgin.

Incentives
- The influence of incentive is less significant for most CATI surveys but is higher influence on panel studies.
The influence of incentives on CATI survey

The table below shows example of CATI projects with incentives its influence on the projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>ABC</th>
<th>DEF</th>
<th>XYZ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Contact</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>17321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Successful</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3814</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incentivised respondent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2088</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unincentivised respondent</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1726</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TNS Nigeria CATI Centre

The influence of incentive is less than 10% comparing the three adhoc surveys in the statistics above. And less than 30% for panel study.
Response rate varies by type of audience

Some audiences are less likely to participate than others:

- Higher socio-economic group respondents
- People with a high work-load / busy jobs
- Females in the north of the country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>Completes</th>
<th>Refusals</th>
<th>Def. appointment</th>
<th>Non-def. appointment</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>B2B</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
<td>15.19%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>24.80%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Political Research</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>Consumer Survey</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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</table>
## Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of call</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
<th>Getting response in difficult topics</th>
<th>Questionnaire design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Time of call should be determined based on project specifications.</td>
<td>Insist on length of 15 mins or less</td>
<td>Train and retrain interviewers on gaining trust</td>
<td>Avoid long lists – break into two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Productivity to be checked for the first few days of calls</td>
<td>If long interview needed: -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dates of appointment are to be used to best call times</td>
<td>• use specialist team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Split interview / panel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reward interviewers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mixed modes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender biases</td>
<td>Poor connectivity</td>
<td>Biased response</td>
<td>Season of interview</td>
</tr>
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<td>Transfer calls to appropriate gender of interviewer</td>
<td>Additional budget to wait out connectivity issues</td>
<td>Use of quotas by age, geography, gender etc</td>
<td>Explain to clients the effects of unrest on response and quality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Screener</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Pre-defined sample list</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility with survey time for difficult to reach groups</td>
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</table>

- **Gender biases**: Transfer calls to appropriate gender of interviewer
- **Poor connectivity**: Additional budget to wait out connectivity issues
- **Biased response**: Use of quotas by age, geography, gender etc
- **Season of interview**: Explain to clients the effects of unrest on response and quality
What are the key factors causing low response and how can we overcome them?

01. Keep interview length to a maximum of 15 minutes
02. Take cultural peculiarities into consideration e.g. gender relation and language
03. Constantly train and retrain interviewers
What is the best way of conducting CATI research in a multi-lingual environment?
Why is CATI not more widely used?

What are the key factors causing low response and how can we overcome them?

What is the best way of conducting CATI research in a multi-lingual environment?
Nigeria is culturally diverse...

- **500 Languages spoken**
- **280 Ethnic groups**
- **68%**
  - Hausa (29%)
  - Yoruba (21%)
  - Ibo (18%)
  - Others (32%)
- **8th** Most populous country in the world
- **Pidgin** Widely spoken across ethnic groups

Pidgin English (a local variant of the English Language) is spoken across all tribes and is relatable to people with little or no education. It is particularly predominant in the South South.
Language use in Nigeria CATI enumerator team

- Interviewees who do not speak any of the major languages are dropped and this reduces response rate and introduces bias.
- For specific studies interviewers who speak smaller languages are recruited.
- A study on food security in the North East involved recruiting speakers of Kanuri, a language spoken by 4% percent of the Nigerian population.

The higher representation of Yoruba speakers is a function of the location of the CATI center.
#3 What is the best way of conducting CATI research in a multi-lingual environment?

01. Ensure at least 70% representation of languages spoken in country

02. Develop network to help with minority languages as needed

03. Make every effort to balance the language representation among interviewers to keep projects on track and manage interviewer involvement
Conclusions

We would therefore recommend that:

• On the one hand, Clients need to be oriented on the fit of CATI for specific research needs while on the other hand they need to convinced of the advantages of CATI over conventional F2F.

• Adequate emphasis has to be placed on the quality and frequency of training of interviewers as their role in ensuring a high response rate is very key.

• In a multi-cultural society like Nigeria, the need for a culturally diverse interviewing team is all too imperative.

• Meticulous planning has to be given to study design (including time of call) to improve response rates.
The challenges and solutions of telephone interviewing in Africa, a view from the frontline

Thank you

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