Is online eCommerce simulation able to reflect offline reality?

Our market research methodologies rely a lot on eCommerce mechanisms; clients often ask how relevant our results are, given that online purchases are not the majority of their total sales.

Let's not talk about small appliances or some specific countries like China or South Korea, where eCommerce is, in many cases, more prominent than offline purchases. In this case, clients immediately understand the advantages of testing with us versus using traditional research methods.

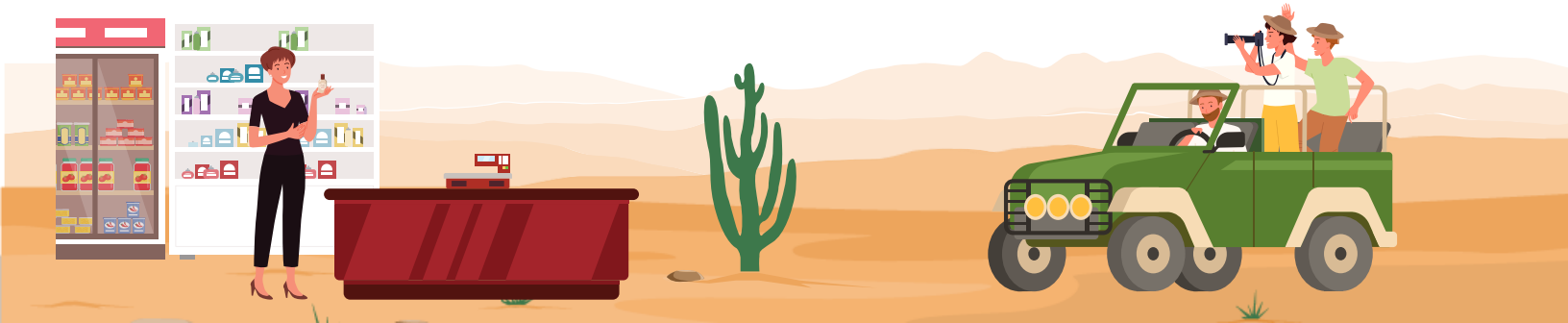
Let's consider completely different categories/ geographies where online sales are still much smaller than offline. We have been recently put to the test by a client in this very situation. They wanted to see how our data would compare to their brands' and competitors' actual market situation. The only thing we requested was to receive the list of the 100 most popular products in the category to place them in a realistic eCommerce situation, mimicking the mechanism of a popular retailer.

The setup of the study

We used a Tesco in the UK layout so shoppers could easily understand how to navigate this website. Brand, type, and price filters were activated to ease the navigation experience. The order of appearance of all products was randomized. In the past, we tested two different set-ups for this type of project: products ranked by sales performance and ordered randomized. The correlation was much better, 0.6 vs. 0.9, with the order of appearance randomized, and we stuck with this way of working for the following tests.

We had 100 products across five brands with different price points for this category. Those products included multiple brands, price points, and flavors. We covered over 80% of the market, including the clear brand leader and the niche brands. We only went up to 80% because we wanted to consider the products in almost every store available and not bias our results due to a lower weighted distribution.

In the second step, we recruited 200 category buyers who could connect through the device they preferred (mobiles or PCs) to the e-store we recreated (Tesco interface was changing based on the platform they use to make it as smooth and as natural as the real shopping experience). Respondents could buy one product, multiple products, or none (the only thing they were asked to do was think about the last time they bought something for the category and behave the same way they did for that occasion). It is also important to remember that respondents starting the screener were representative of the UK population to be as close as possible to the profile of real category buyers.



The outcome of the study

This project's key objective was to confirm brand and segment size in unit share compared with the reality of the market in 2022. On both the brand and segment levels, **the correlation between the shares generated by our platform and the reality of the market was superior to 0.9**, which was impressive given all the parameters that could negatively influence this correlation (frequency of purchases, out-of-stock products, not all retailer brands available and many more).

This data helped us convince the client of the robustness of our methodology to test potential future launches in the category.

Comparison of actual data vs projected brand shares

BRAND	REAL SHARE DATA	SHARE GENERATED IN e-Mazing STORE
Brand 1	51.2%	50.6%
Brand 2	24.1%	25.6%
Brand 3	13.9%	11.5%
Brand 4	5.4%	6.8%
Brand 5	5.4%	5.5%

Comparison of actual data vs projected segment shares

SEGMENT	REAL SHARE DATA	SHARE GENERATED IN e-Mazing STORE
Segment 1	37.6%	37.5%
Segment 2	19.3%	17.3%
Segment 3	18.7%	19.9%
Segment 4	10.6%	9.6%
Segment 5	8.7%	10.6%
Segment 6	5.0%	5.1%

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