

Project summary

# The multi-grid as a tool for measuring brand-image association

This study investigated the effect of the multi-grid format on data quality and respondent experience. It found no compelling arguments in favour of the multi-grid, and plenty of reasons to avoid it.

**Background:** The multi-grid is a stacked pick-any answer format. When used to measure brand image association, attributes are typically presented as rows, with brands as columns and each cell requiring its own yes-no judgement (e.g. Is Adelaide good for shopping? Is the Great Ocean Road fun for families?).

How would you describe the following holiday destinations?  
Please select all that apply for each column.

	Sydney	Barossa Valley	Darwin	Gold Coast	→
Good for shopping	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Romantic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Rich in natural beauty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Exciting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Fun for families	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Rugged and Wild	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	↓				

Proponents of the multi-grid tend to favour it because of perceived efficiency in the field (i.e. faster to complete) and a belief that the format yields a more accurate picture of how brands, products or services are perceived, as each is described in context, alongside the alternatives.

However, the literature and text books are largely silent about the format, offering little guidance about its use.

The multi-grid is inherently a large-screen format. Given that online surveys are increasingly being completed on small screens (smart phones and tablets), does this

mean researchers should abandon the multi-grid in favour of a more compact format that is ‘device agnostic’? Or is there a compelling argument for continuing to use it, even though it may limit sampling frames just to those who will complete the survey on a computer?

**Method:** The performance of the multi-grid was evaluated through a split-ballot survey experiment. Survey participants were asked to describe four, eight or 12 tourist destinations in Australia, using 15 attributes. Half were given the multi-grid, while the other half were shown a simple pick-any list for each destination, one after the other.

The sample (n=940) was drawn from the Survey Village panel, with programming and fieldwork managed by yellowSquares.

**Results:** The larger multi-grid, with 12 destinations, was one-third faster than the repeated pick-any task. However, this speed came at a high cost, yielding:

- poorer data quality (stronger evasion bias and weaker predictive validity);
- higher rates of non-completion (drop-out); and
- a less positive experience for respondents (less clarity about the question and how to answer it, poorer perceived self-expression and higher levels of self-reported fatigue and distraction).

At the smaller end, the 4-destination multi-grid did no real damage to data quality or the respondent



better design | better data | better decisions  
www.business.uq.edu.au/bettersurveys

experience. However, neither did it do much good. Although the small multi-grid was 16% faster than the simple pick-any list shown four times, the task itself was so small that the net benefit was only 17 seconds: unnoticeable for participants and immaterial for reducing field costs. Further, given that the small multi-grid offered no advantage in predictive validity, the claim of ‘comparative judgement’ leading to more accurate data cannot be supported.

The middle-sized grid fell in between: faster than the repeated pick-any, but showing clear signs of strain in terms of evasion, limited self-expression and distraction.

	Number of destinations		
	4	8	12
Speed of completion	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Evasion	–	×	××
Stability	–	–	–
Predictive validity	–	–	×
Drop-out	–	–	×
Participant experience	–	×	××

✓ = Multi-grid stronger than repeated pick-any  
– = Difference not statistically significant  
× = Multi-grid weaker than repeated pick-any.

**Recommendations for practice:** New surveys measuring brand-attribute associations should not use the multi-grid format. Tracking surveys already using the multi-grid format should phase it out unless two conditions are met: the number of brands, products or services must be small; and there must be other reasons for restricting the survey to computers only.

Rintoul D, Dolnicar S, Hajibaba H, Milne G & Mawn C (2014) Select all that apply: Is it time to kiss the multi-grid goodbye? Australian Market and Social Research Society Conference, September 2014. (Winner, Best Paper)

