

Advantages of Online v. In-Person Studies

Online and in person lab studies each have their own advantages. In the online study, testing a larger quantity or wider variety of people is much easier and faster. After creating one test, you can send this test out to as many people as possible. When you have a much larger test pool, the results will be more robust and statistically significant. Additionally, online studies enable users to complete the task(s) in a very native environment, as they would normally complete it. Instead of the external pressures that come with being in a in-person lab study, people in online studies are more likely to be brutally honest and to give up in a time range that would occur in a native environment. As the tester is not actually there, users will be willing to report things that are bad about the site without feeling like they are offending the tester. A third advantage to online testing is the ability to analyze the data via more complex computer-generated algorithms and graphs. Generally online studies are done through a platform that automatically imports the data into an API that will display certain results. This makes sifting through the data and finding the important results easier.

In terms of in person testing, the main advantage is being able to flexibly observe the user and their interactions with the products. Although online testing might have a web camera, this is not always available and may not accurately portray the users reactions. In person, body language and gesture queues will enable the tester to glean more information. Another advantage to in person testing is that you can dynamically change and create the test as you go in person. If you see something interesting, you can pursue it further and ask additional follow-up questions that may not be present in the online study. This method can give you more depth into certain areas of your study. A third advantage to online testing is that people may give more thorough or extensive feedback due to the social pressure of the tester being in the same location. With online testing, it is easy to skip questions or not fill out text boxes, but in person, users will feel social pressure to help the tester and thus will generally answer all the questions asked and provide more feedback.