

Voices from the Panel: Insights and perspectives from survey participants

During Q1, 2024, we ran surveys on two major panels and an exchange in the US market to better understand areas for improvement that would lead to higher engagement and broader appeal. The questions were primarily open-ended, followed by a series of opinions expressed by research participants. The verbatims shown were selected because they illustrate common themes expressed in the research.

Most survey takers are in it for the rewards, and they are engaged in the process of doing survey research. On average, the respondents belonged to 4.5 panels, and they rated the importance of incentives at 4.7 out of 5. At the same time, most research participants say they like taking surveys, although they cite several frustrations with the process.


Research Goal


- | **Understand participants' frustrations.**
- | **Identify ways to enhance the research participant's experience.**

Survey Questions

Question:

Thinking about the survey panel that you most prefer, what do you like best about them?


 "I like that the cash-out process is quick and easy to access."

 "Consistent amount of surveys and quick payoffs."


 "I like that I am able to learn about new things on the market."

Participant Responses:


 "They always have surveys available."


 "They pay well and offer a lot of surveys. Not ones that only pay pennies for your time. I also like it when they side with you during disputes, especially when you can provide factual evidence that you did the right thing."


 "Lots of surveys to do, and they pay ok."

 "It's like helping the people with answers they are looking for."


 "I like it when they're short, so I don't zone out."


 "Ease of cash out, no gimmicks, not getting kicked out of surveys after you have gone so far into it."

 "Getting a couple of points for at least trying to do one even though it says I don't qualify."


 "My favorite part is the daily poll they ask, and I like to see how I compare."


 "Payout options and quickness and ease of cashing out."

 "Payout options and quickness and ease of cashing out."

 "I like that they have lots of surveys to do with all different incentive values and time frames."

 "Consistent and fair rewards."

 "Truthful about points offered and the length of time a survey should take."

 "They have a low cash-out value, so I am about to get rewards frequently, and they have a lot of surveys that are 5 minutes or less."

Survey Questions

Question:

Could you describe what aspects of survey taking you find difficult?

Participant Responses:



“Long surveys require a lot of concentration. Also, the risk of not being awarded after almost completing the survey is a major turnoff.”



“I find it very frustrating when there are survey questions with multiple choice answers that do not fit any of what I believe is the correct answer for me.”



“Surveys being broken or frozen.”



“Repetitive surveys that ask the same questions in different ways, or when there are so many different products or brands that you have to answer questions about and a survey that says it will be 20 Minutes ends up being over an hour.”



“Ones that are very wordy or some just don't make sense.”



“I don't like that you get disqualified often. There are times you'll do an entire survey, and you won't get paid”



“I do not like participating in long, repetitive surveys with low incentives. It doesn't feel fair.”



“Have any screening/disqualifying questions up front - do NOT collect demographic information if someone is being DQed or it feels like you stole our data”



“Monitor more closely. Make sure the designated time is accurate.”

Survey Questions

Question:

Could you describe what aspects of survey taking you find difficult?

Takeaways:

By far, the most common answer was that surveys are too long. The concern was that they often finished the survey but were not paid. Late screenouts were a frequent complaint; perhaps, in some cases, respondents think they have completed a survey but have screened out. Frozen or broken surveys were mentioned numerous times, and the common complaint was that they do not get compensated for their time when the surveys have glitches. Many respondents also complained about surveys taking much longer than claimed.

Survey Questions

Question:

A chatbot has been developed that can ask questions like a human. Do you think that you would rather answer questions from a chatbot or complete a survey? Please explain.

Participant Responses:



“Complete a survey. I find the chatbots to be awkward.”



“The chatbots don't fully understand what you are saying and ask dumb/repetitive follow-up questions sometimes”



“I would prefer to complete a survey over answering questions from a chatbot because surveys typically provide structured questions and response options, allowing for a more efficient and focused data collection process.”



“I think questions from a chatbot would be a nice change of pace! It can help keep me interested in doing surveys.”



“I have no preference either way. Chatbot answers sometimes do give a bit more options for you.”



“Complete a survey. Chatbots tend to keep asking what else”



“I would rather answer questions from the chatbot because it just seems more engaging and flows a lot easier”

Survey Questions

Question:


A chatbot has been developed that can ask questions like a human. Do you think that you would rather answer questions from a chatbot or complete a survey? Please explain.


Takeaways:


There are several types of respondents: those who just want to get through the survey quickly to get their points, those who like the intellectual stimulation of taking surveys and are open to a variety of formats, and those who are determined to have their voices heard in the most precise way. If chatbots require more engagement, they will be accepted if the incentive values are equal to or better than those for closed-end surveys. The concerns tended to center around how long a survey takes to answer and whether the points reflect that some types of questions take longer to answer than others.


Additional Dislikes


Participant Responses:


 "I don't like that you get disqualified often. There are times you'll do an entire survey, and you won't get paid."


 "When you go through an entire survey only to be told no credit."


 "Sometimes spend a fair amount of time answering questions and more than the standard qualifying household stats and then being bounced out or disqualified. Sometimes, completing more than 50%. Also, either complete or just about complete the survey, and there's a technical issue. That's the worst."


 "Not all of them work correctly, and I don't receive compensation"


 "Sometimes the surveys are long, and they don't give out the incentive automatically, and I have to report it to get corrected."


 "I don't like the surveys that ask you all these questions after 5-10 minutes, then they disqualify you and pay you nothing."

 "If they are too long and there are so many questions in multiple columns that you lose track of what you have answered"

 "They often take longer than it says. Sometimes, I have spent half an hour doing a survey, and at the very end, I will be told, "Oh, sorry, survey filled up, and my time has been wasted when the requester has already gotten me to fill it all out. It does not happen often, but it feels like a cheat."

 "The amount of time that it takes sometimes to find out that you're not approved and then they don't even give you two cents, and if they do give you two cents, it was still really a waste of time, so it took so long for them to tell you you're not approved."

 "I don't like when I get to the end and they don't pay."

 "That you spend your time doing them only to get rejected, and they don't pay you. It's a waste of time 2 cents isn't even worth it. It needs to be at least 5 cents."

Additional Dislikes

Action Plan to Improve Engagement:

We should agree on a set number of screening questions to allow before a participant earns a short, complete incentive for a late screenout.

Only ask non-quota demo questions after a respondent has qualified.

Assess LOI for each survey. Adjust incentives on surveys that are 50%+ longer than specified on average.

When a survey has known errors that resulted in non-completes, award research participants the points they would have received had they completed the survey.

Consider cognitive load in addition to LOI when determining incentive point values.

Conclusion

The panel companies could address some of the engagement issues raised, while the research designer would need to address others. In this document, we have focused on issues that panel companies can address. Although there was a clear emphasis on the value of incentives, most complaints centered around fairness, lack of compensation for late screenouts, frozen surveys with no compensation, and surveys that took much longer than described.

Over the past several months, I have joined a dozen survey panels and taken several surveys. I kept records of the time spent on surveys and in profiling and screening. While the time spent in surveys for which I qualified came in at \$1.20 per hour, I also lost about 25% of my time screening for surveys for which I did not qualify, which brought my compensation down to under \$1.00 per hour.

Demand for more engaging research activities grows as researchers employ qualitative techniques at scale. My best estimate is that online qualitative work, such as online focus groups, tends to pay about \$100 an hour. The cost of incentives paid by qualitative researchers will limit the ability to scale.

Time Spent in Surveys for Which I Qualified

\$1.20/hr

Time Lost Not Qualifying



25%

Lost Time Brought Down Compensation

Less Than \$1/hr

At the same time, the willingness of quantitative research to participate in online qual will be primarily an economic one. We need to find a way to bridge the compensation gap between quantitative and qualitative researchers if we want to address the quality issues that are plaguing quantitative research or take advantage of the scale opportunities now available via AI for qualitative techniques.