



GLOBAL RESEARCH BUSINESS NETWORK

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Participant Engagement - How to improve the online survey user experience



Introduction

- The objective of this report is to give concrete advice to clients, research agencies and data collectors alike, as to what they can do TODAY to improve the user experience of people participating in online surveys.
- Improving the user experience is vital if we are to increase response rates, which is not only the key to data quality, but the key to delivering higher quality insights to clients in a cost-effective and efficient manner.
- Not only does a bad experience cause people to give up on participating in research, it has other serious implications for clients and research agencies alike, which you can read in this report. There is also certainly no point, or no excuse, for encouraging people to participate in research and then giving them a terrible experience.
- We hope the report inspires you to ask yourself whether you are doing your best to give participants the best experience you can? The research sector and our clients are heavily reliant on the willing participation of people to give us their opinions or to give access to their data. This is a great gift they give us, which we must treat as such and accept with respect and humility.
- GRBN is committed to increasing participant engagement and improving the user experience, not only in online panels, but across all data collection methodologies, and we have put in place a global Participant Engagement Initiative to do just that. Fortunately, we are not the only ones to be passionate about this issue, and already a considerable number of companies have joined us on the initiative. You can find out who is currently on-board [here](#).
- But we are not willing to stop here. If you agree that participant engagement is critical to the future success of our industry and the clients who rely on us, we ask you to also become our partners. Please contact [me](#) to find out how.

Andrew Cannon
Executive Director, GRBN

About the Survey

- The overall design of the research was led by Andrew Cannon of GRBN, Jessica Broome of Jessica Broome Research and Kerry Hecht from Recollective, with input from all of the partners.
- The survey design included both implicit, as well as explicit measurement, with Sentient Decision Science responsible for the design and implementation of the implicit part of the survey.
- The survey was fielded in Decipher, with a link to Sentient Decision Science's Sentient Prime® platform for the implicit measurement.
- Translations were provided by RP Translate.
- The sample and incentives were provided by both P2Sample and Research Now.
- In total, 6018 online interviews were conducted in September-October 2016. Please contact [Andrew Cannon](#) to find out more about the survey.



- GRBN is extremely grateful for the active participation of all partners in this project.



About this report

- This report tells a story about online survey user experience today.
- The report takes the reader through the key findings from the survey, and gives concrete recommendations on how the user experience can be improved.
- This report focusses on the global data, highlighting only a few of the differences across countries. Whilst the overall findings are very consistent across countries, country and culture-specific differences do need to be considered.
- The report also contains insightful thought-pieces from our partners on this research specifically, as well as on participant engagement and the user experience more generally.
- The report ends with an overview of we, together with our partners will continue on our journey to increase participation in research by improving participant engagement and calls you to join the cause.

Andrew Cannon
Executive Director, GRBN



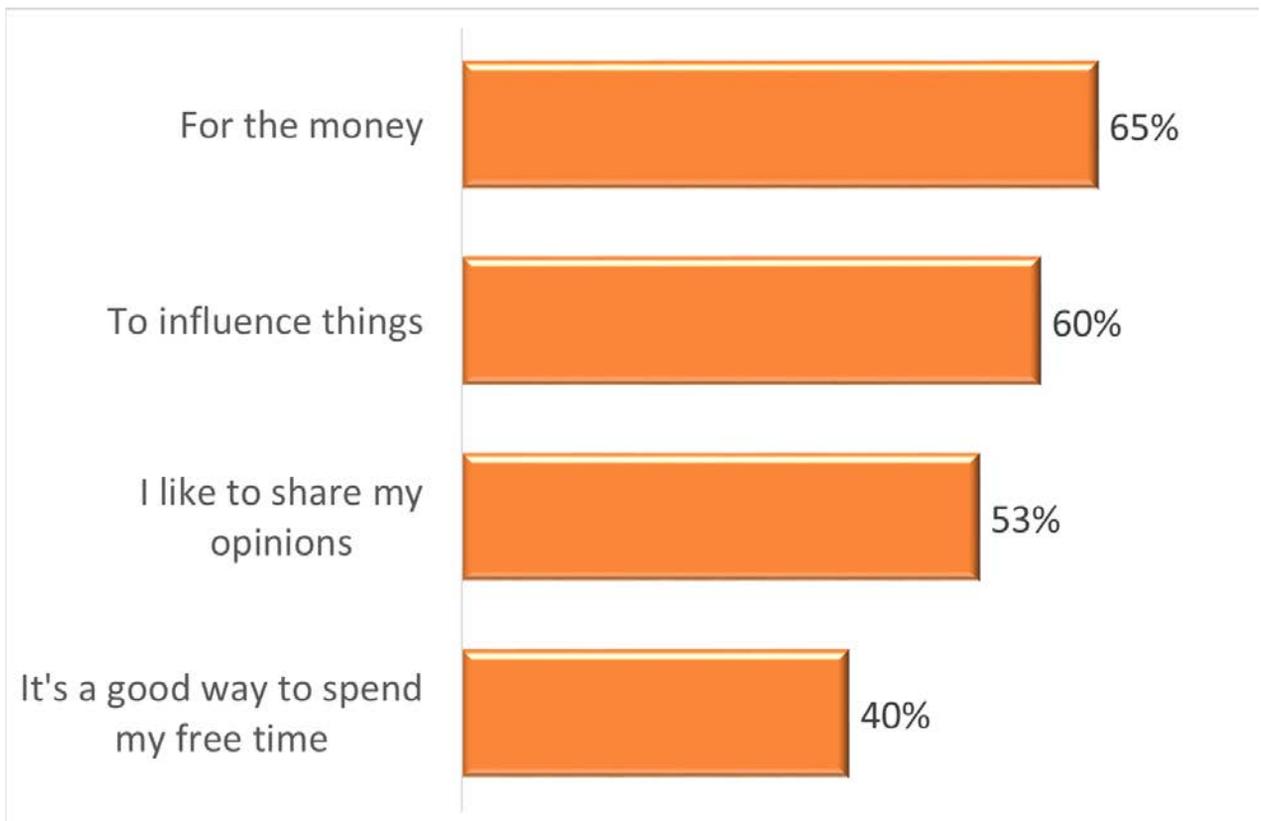
Why people participate in market research

- Whilst financial incentives are important, other factors also play a part in why people participate in market research.
- Of particular interest is people's desire to influence things by participating in research.

Take away:

Stop calling people respondents and start calling them participants.

Main motivators



Driving Trust in Research Through Better UX

The time seems to be ripe in our industry to really start examining the participant experience and how it affects things like trust, database quality and brand perception. To that end, GRBN had been exploring the trust angle, while Jessica and I had been exploring the participant experience across different kinds of research. After Ilex NA, we decided to join forces and take this initiative global.

Results from this phase of the project were both predictable and surprising. Detailed results will come through at some upcoming conferences; so here, we'll just touch on things at a high level with a focus on China vs. Japan. These two make an interesting story because of their geographic proximity and cultural differences.

BEHAVIOR

The majority (average across countries - 61%) of our participants report taking less than 10 surveys a month. Most participants also report being signed up with multiple survey companies: 3.77 on average. Panel members in Japan report being signed up with the most companies (4.69), and those in China the least (2.23).

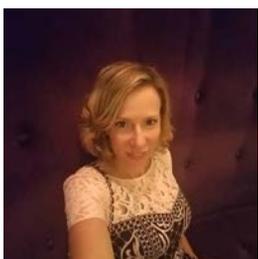
It's also worth noting that far more Japanese participants (71%) than those in China (22%) have been taking surveys for more than 3 years,. Additionally, the people polled in China report that they also participate in telephone surveys, in person interviews, and focus groups both online and in person; Japanese participants do far less. I did wonder, while reviewing the rest of the data, whether Chinese participants' feelings about research were colored by experiences outside of surveys.

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES, DIFFERENT ATTITUDES TOWARD TAKING SURVEYS

It's not surprising that participating in surveys for money is a motivator for most people (65%). What did surprise me was the difference between China (47%) and Japan (80%). The Chinese also feel like participating in surveys brings them closer to companies, report never having had a bad experience much more frequently and are significantly more likely to recommend taking surveys to a friend than the Japanese.

With that, there seems to be a correlation between how important the more intrinsic benefits of participating in research are and how positively they view their experiences.

It's worth exploring further that the more we, as an industry, do to support the intrinsic benefits of research the happier our participants will be and the more they will, in turn, help us grow and maintain quality databases.



Kerry Hecht



Jessica Broome



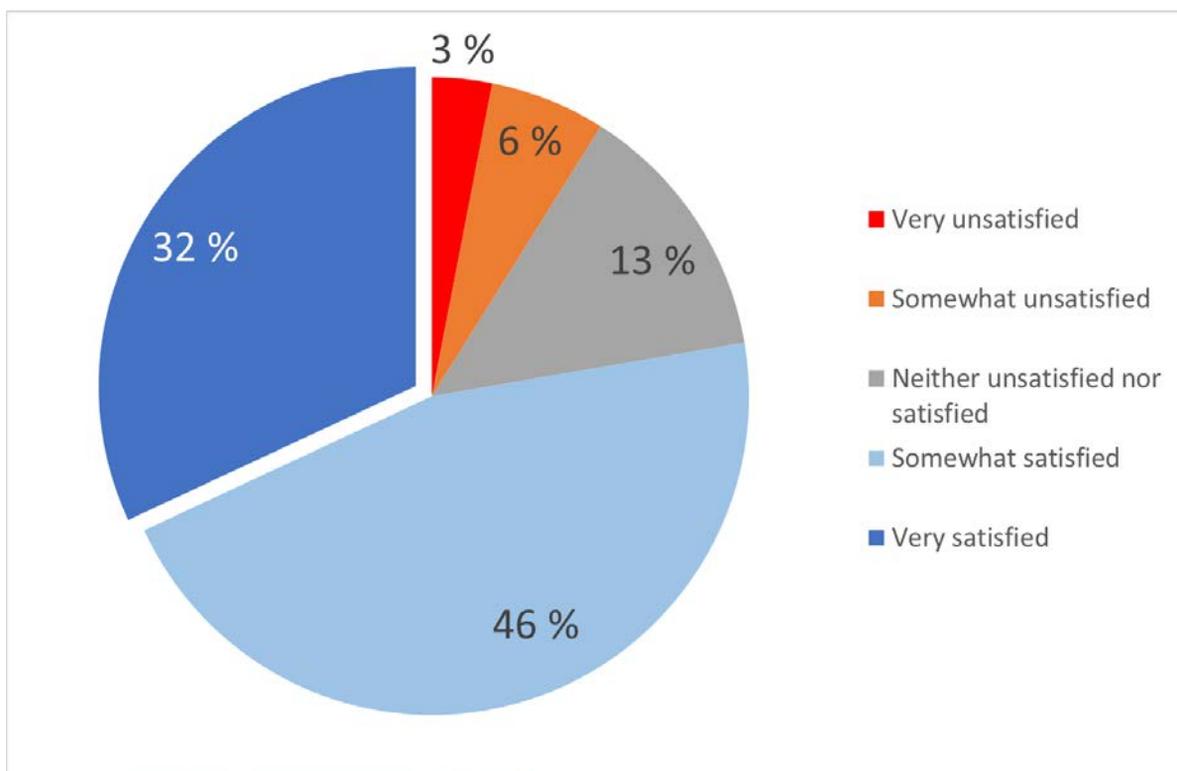
Are people satisfied with their experience?

- Yes, overall people in panels are satisfied with their experience, and most of their experiences are positive.
- However, as many as 7-in-ten say they have had a bad experience recently.

Take away:

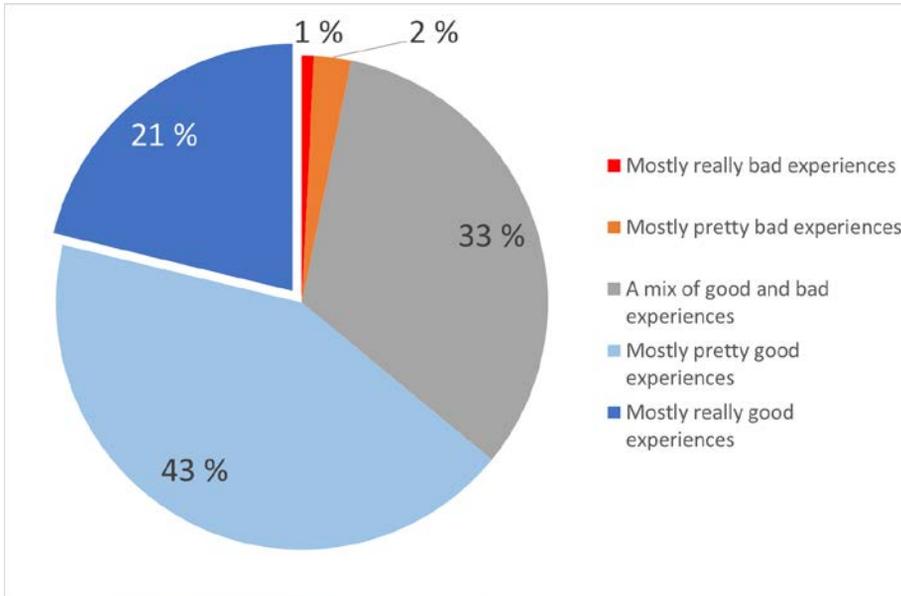
Too many people are having a bad experience too often, and that needs to stop.

How satisfied are you with your experience taking online surveys?



Are people satisfied with their experience?

Thinking about all the online surveys you've taken in the past few months would you say they were....



Most Participants Enjoy Most of Their Experiences, But....

64% say most of their survey experiences are **good**



71% have had a **bad** experience recently

Keeping User Experience Top of Mind

Over the past year, I've observed an increase in talk about the importance of respecting research participants and ensuring they have positive experiences. This is good. And while I've seen many clients continue to nod their heads in these conversations yet write longer and less palatable questionnaires than before, I have also seen many more clients move from "talk the talk" to "walk the walk."

Drawing inspiration from the aggregate data from our study, I've come up with are three key things to remember if you want to join those of us keeping user experience top of mind. Come on in, the water is warm!

1. DESIGN FOR MOBILE

In our study we saw 25% respond on a mobile device (smartphone + tablet). In some markets, people responded on mobile devices at a higher clip, such as the US (39%), China (33%), and Australia (39%). These numbers shouldn't surprise anyone allowing and tracking mobile traffic into their studies. It reinforces that it is absolutely crucial to use survey platforms that utilize responsive, mobile-optimized design principles and ensure questions can be easily answered on a smartphone. If they are fit for a smartphone, they will be fit for a tablet or PC as well!

2. WRITE QUESTIONS LIKE A HUMAN

One of the biggest challenges in designing for mobile is screen real estate. The amount of words you can fit on a screen dwindles significantly from what you can fit on a PC. This is a blessing and a curse. It's a curse for those wedded to big nasty grids (which to be honest are a chore on a PC too). But it's a blessing in that it forces researchers to write better questions. Our study found that two key drivers of someone quitting a survey relate directly to poor questionnaire design. 41% would quit a survey if the topic was too boring. And 51% would quit if the questions were too repetitive. What does this mean? It means that we need to break old habits of writing like a researcher and write more like a human. Yes, researchers can be humans too!

Q1. Which of these questions would you rather respond to?

- A. Thinking about any advertisements (e.g., television commercials, blogs, magazines, online advertisements, etc.) you have seen in the past month, please select from the list below the brands which you recall seeing.*
- B. Which brands have you seen ads for recently?*

If you answered B, congratulations, you appear to be human, just like research participants. If you answered A, I think we should talk.

3. BE HONEST AND ETHICAL ABOUT TIME COMMITMENTS

62% of participants said that a survey much longer than they were told will drive them to quit. Who can blame them? We need to be up front on how long a survey will take – and I'd lobby strongly that estimated LOI should come from testing on a smartphone, not a PC, or at least be adjusted for device type. If you want quality data, let people know how much time they can expect to devote to a survey. Other research has shown that bad survey taking habits increase towards the end of long surveys. Can you blame someone for speeding through the last 10 minutes of a 30 minute survey they were told would be 20 minutes long? I can't – and neither should you.

We're looking forward to diving into the data from this study over the coming months and continuing to champion the importance of user experience and putting participants first. Please join us in fighting the good fight.



Roddy Knowles



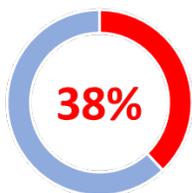
Reactions to Bad Survey Experiences

- Whilst most people “vote with their feet” when getting a bad experience, over one-quarter also “vote with their mind” by thinking negatively about the companies/brands in the survey.
- Negative word-of-mouth amplifies the problem, with 15% either telling their friends/family about the bad experience or posting about it on social media.
- Thinking badly about the companies/brands in the survey is actually the most common reaction to a bad survey experience in the US, in Brazil and in Mexico.

Take away:

A negative survey experience impacts the end-client’s brand negatively and visa-versa.

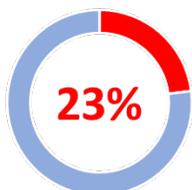
Thinking back to your most recent bad experience with an online survey, which, if any, of these did you do?



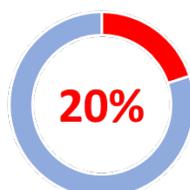
Quit the survey before the end



Thought negatively about companies or brands mentioned in the survey



Rushed through the questions



Didn't take surveys I was invited to afterwards

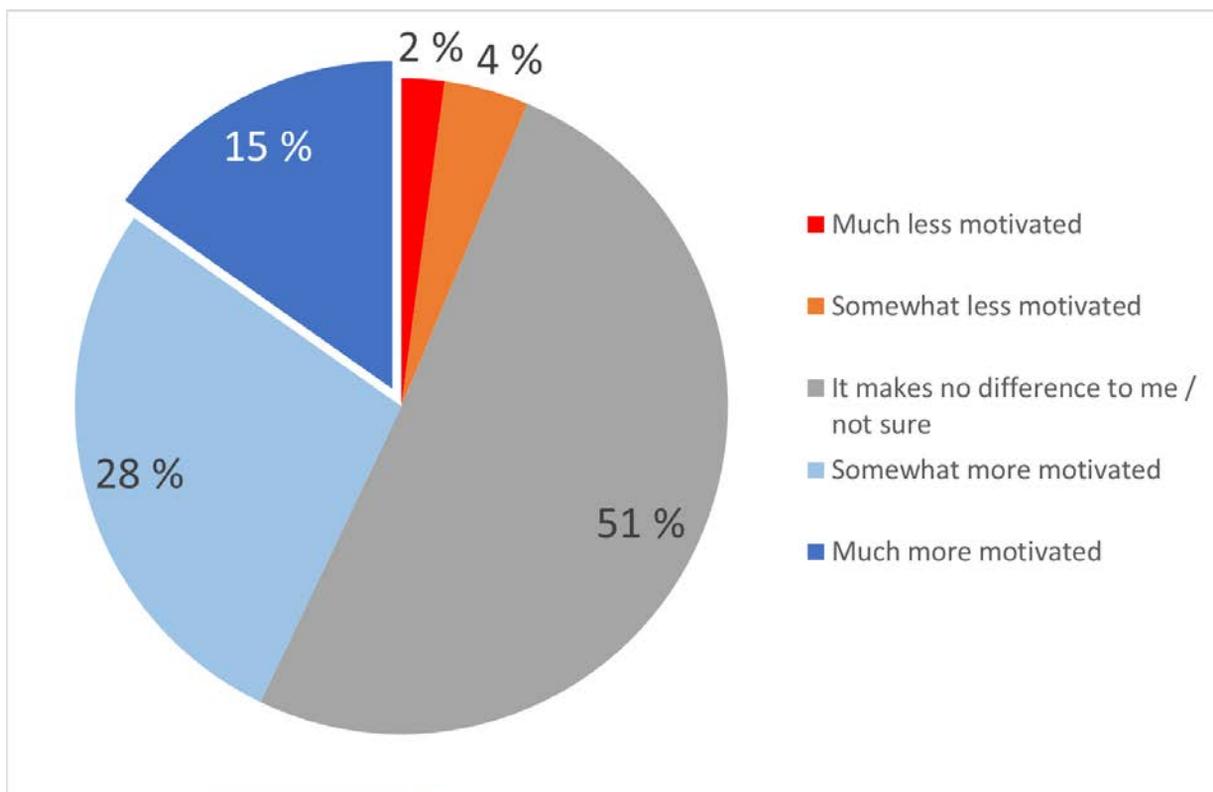
Does knowing the sponsor of the survey motivate people?

- Most of the time participants in online surveys are not told who is behind the survey, but probably this does not stop them “guessing” and blaming that guessed brand when they do have a bad experience.
- Given that most people participate in research to share their opinions and to influence things, it is perhaps not surprising that knowing the brand/company behind the research would appear to have a huge impact on motivation.

Take away:

By being transparent about who is behind the research we can increase participation rates.

How does or would it change your motivation to take a survey if you were told the name of the company or brand who was sponsoring the survey?



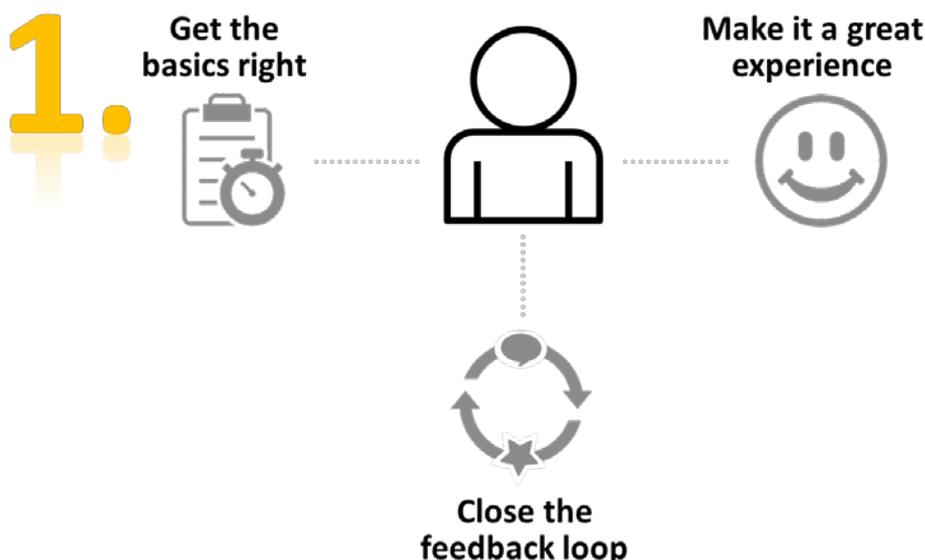
How to improve the online survey experience?

- The research explored how to improve the online survey experience using three techniques:
 1. We used Sentient Prime® to explore implicit reactions to different question types.
 2. We used open-ended questions to explore spontaneous feedback to what gives participants a very good or a very bad experience.
 3. We used a max-diff exercise to put the participant in our shoes to see what things they would do to improve the user experience.
- As a result of analyzing these three data sources we have a very clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the user experience and better engage participants.

Take away:

We have the knowledge to create a more positive participant experience.
We just need to DO IT!

The 3 Steps to Participant Engagement



How to improve the online survey experience?

GET THE BASICS RIGHT

Take away:

There is no point creating a great in-survey experience if you don't get these basics right.



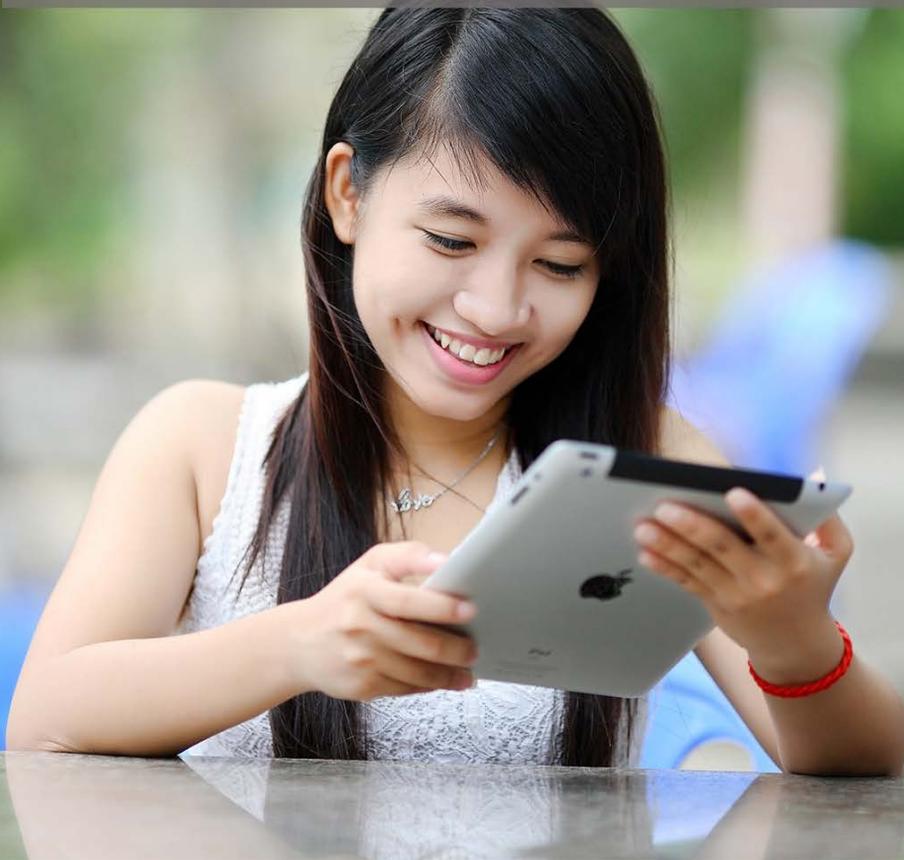
“Shorter screeners”

“Honesty about length”

“Incentives commensurate with effort”

How to improve the online survey experience?

MAKE A GREAT EXPERIENCE



There is no magic formula or “one-size-fits-all” solution here, as a lot depends on the research objectives. Here, however, are some things worth considering to make the survey an enjoyable experience:

1. Space of participants to **share their opinions**
2. **Online interactions** with other survey takers / the researcher
3. Possibility to **compare one’s own response** to others
4. Use **gamification** techniques and **creative** question types
5. Use **sound or video**, but be aware of media/device **compatibility** issues

And don’t forget these basics of good survey design:

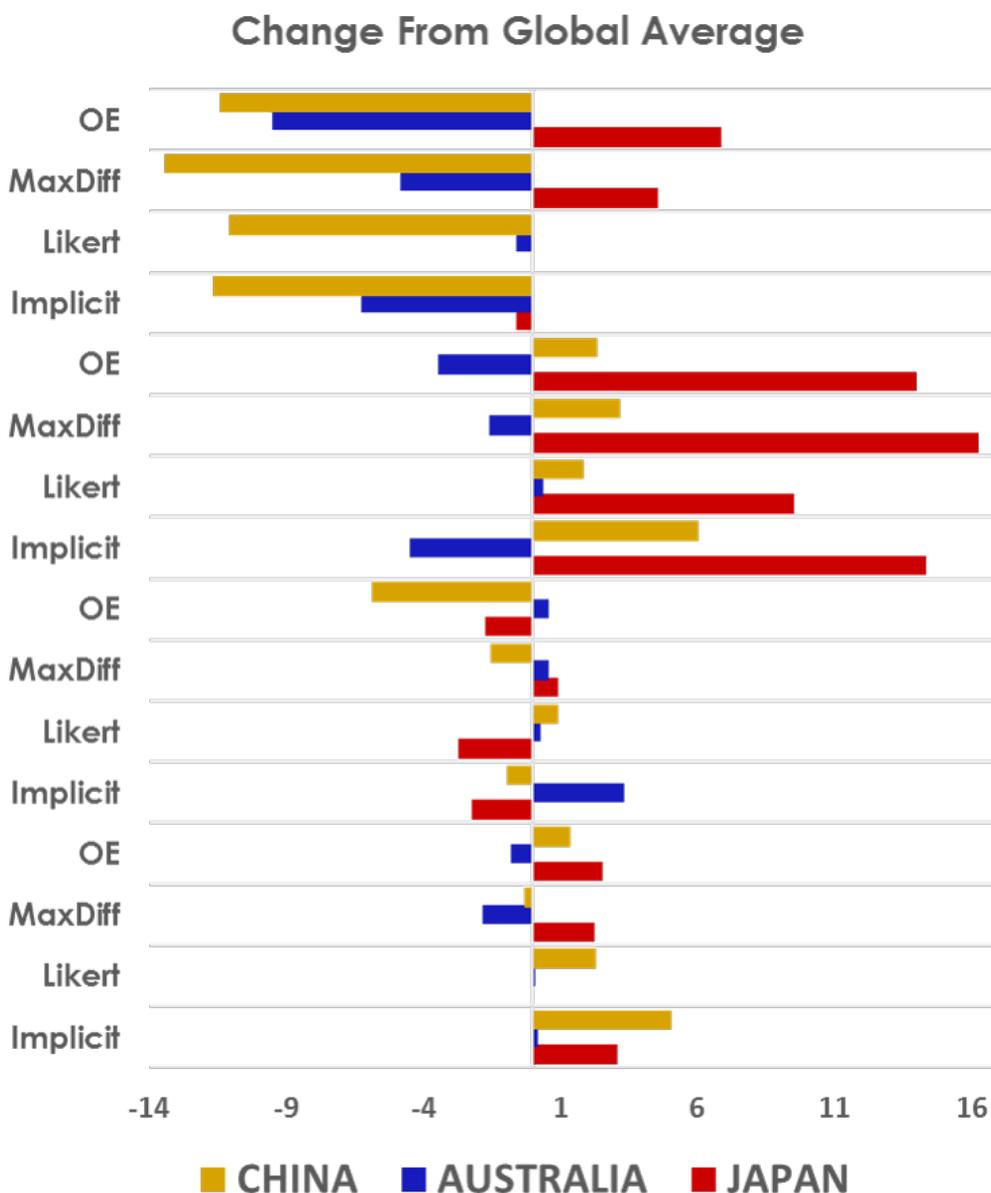
1. **Clear and concise** questions with good grammar
2. **Faultless mechanics**, e.g. no broken links, mobile responsiveness
3. Good **navigation** and attractive **appearance**

Thought-piece

The Global Research Experience

GRBN's effort to understand and improve global panelists' research experience is already bearing fruit for its research partners, each of whom has a meaningful stake in the outcome as we seek improved data quality and global participation rates, ultimately to the benefit of our end-clients. Sentient Decision Science volunteered our global implicit research platform, Sentient Prime®, to measure the non-conscious emotional appeal of and attitudinal responses toward specific survey components. These intuitive responses are typical of those that drive engagement, but that participants may have difficulty articulating reliably in response to explicit questions.

Collecting a 6,000-participant sample across 12 countries is a familiar but substantial undertaking, so it's rewarding that after completing the first round of data analysis we already see meaningful—and actionable—differences not only in the self-reported quality of participants' past research participation experiences and attitudes toward the brands behind those projects, but also in implicit responses to the kinds of survey components they find most appealing, effortful, fun, or straightforward.



Thought-piece

We've already begun putting these insights to work by managing the balance of survey components deployed across markets, to increase engagement and completion rates. For example, consistent with the explicit results reported elsewhere in this newsletter, the average global participant finds all survey components emotionally appealing (the most reliable implicit attitudinal predictor of engagement), while participants in Japan and China found all survey components to be much more fun than people in other countries. At the same time, Chinese participants also found all survey components far more effortful (less easy) than other groups.

This difference agrees with explicit responses in terms of the number of panels Japanese and Chinese participants have joined, but not in terms of Chinese participants' lower rates of reporting financial motivations to participate—it seems intuitively correct to expect that those who find surveys more effortful might be more focused on compensation, which we did not see in China. The implicit and explicit results together provide an explanation of these response patterns: despite the increase in perceived effort, Chinese participants found all survey components strongly appealing. In addition, their explicit statements that surveys make them feel closer to companies, as well as their tendency to recommend survey participation at higher rates than the Japanese, indicate that non-monetary rewards compensate for the differential in perceived survey effort. The smaller number of signups and the much smaller proportion of Chinese participants who have been taking surveys for more than 3 years (22%, vs. 71% in Japan) therefore seems less like the result of poor survey experiences and more like a consequence of the difficulty in reliably reaching Chinese survey participants in past years—indeed, the proliferation of smartphones in the Chinese market and the simultaneous growth of mobile survey platforms has made this task easier each year. We look forward to sharing a deeper analysis of this learning at IIX EU, as well as many more insights into research experiences across the 12 countries studied, specific views of male and female participants, the three generations of participants sampled in each country, and more.



Cyrus McCandless



How to improve the online survey experience?

CLOSE THE FEEDBACK LOOP



Recommendations:

1. **Be transparent** about who the survey is for and what will be done as a result of it. Tell people why their opinion counts... either before or at least after the survey.
2. Provide **instant feedback at the end of the survey**. Be creative and think of questions participants would be interested in knowing the answers to.
3. Say thank you and provide **feedback after the survey**. If participants want to receive feedback later on as to how their opinions were useful, provide that feedback. Keep them involved.
4. Let them know how participating in similar types of research has **helped other brands / companies**

Take away:

A positive survey experience impacts the end-client's brand positively. It's good business sense.

Next steps: Get involved



Recommendations:

1. Join the GRBN Participant Engagement Initiative.
2. Donate resources to a good cause.

Take away:

Taking action to do things differently is the only way to improve the participant's user experience.

GRBN Participant Engagement Initiative

- The initiative is a global initiative to improve participant rates, by improving the user experience and driving up participant engagement.
- No matter whether you are a data collector, a research agency or an end-client, we want your participation.
- Partners in the initiative will use the User Experience and Brand Impact metrics to drive change in their own organisations in order to increase participation and improve the perception of companies/brands over time.
- Partners can contribute to the creation of a best practice handbook for researchers and end-clients, as well as more research-on-research.

Recommendation:

Join these great companies which were the first to sign up as partners.

PREMIER PARTNER

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SILVER PARTNERS

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RESEARCH

KANTAR HEALTH+

RTi Research
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PARTNERS

ActiveMeasure

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ecglobal

FocusVision

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M ESH
Experience

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p2sample

PURESPECTRUM

Recollective

research
now

SENTIENT
EXPERIENCE SCIENCE

SSI

Working together to increase participation

[Click here](#) to find out more and join in.

Thought-piece

The Holy Grail of Market Research Participation



Picture this:

A cold weekend morning. A busy shopping street. Someone shouts out something that sounds like 'Shmarget Reachearcher' and the crowds start to move, morph, come together in concentric circles with a single individual at their centre, holding a clipboard.

'Pick me! Pick me!' the clamouring masses shout. 'I want to take part!'

That would be lovely, wouldn't it? Sure, that street magician can do it, but her value proposition is clear: experience the magic. And sure, that children's charity choir gets people to act, but its value proposition is clear: contribute to a worthy cause. And, behold, free wine and cheese samples? It's a no-brainer!

If you are reading this, you are likely very conscious of the benefits of having a general public who value (and actively take part in) Market Research. The question is, still, how we make that happen.

The solution is one we have been trying to tap into for years: Give Something Back.

Essentially, there must be a clear return on investment for participants, where often there are limited opportunities to make the right impression. If you know that, in mainland China, participants are keen to please an interviewer, or that in Germany, people want to know that their contribution 'makes a difference', are you then taking the time to adapt your approach for immediate increased value perception?

For Myanmar and the US, identified as two of the most charitable countries in the world, is your research providing participants with a 'feel good' factor in return for their contribution? With South Korea's super-modern technology scene, are your employees and colleagues providing participants with engaging, relevant Market Research experiences, every time?

Even if this is already the case, cue Michael Jackson's 'Man in the Mirror'. Valuing Market Research has to come from within, before it can take hold on a global scale from without. Look at the 2016 GRBN Trust Survey research, for instance, which turned back several instances of '#ihatemarketresearch' on Twitter... all from people working in the industry itself.

So, to reach the Holy Grail of Market Research Participation, let the industry start to value the incredible power that it holds to give voice. Let's engage our employees, our colleagues, our friends and family.

At the very heart of Research lies the consumer, the participant, the person whose voice is begging to be heard. You are empowered to Give Something Back, by providing that voice with a platform from which it can shout its opinion, rally the troops and really start to make a difference to the things that matter to it.



Ruth Partington



Donate Resources to a Good Cause

- We can further improve trust in the market research and increase participation by demonstrating the value we create for society and not just business.
- GRBN has teamed up with Paragon Partnerships, a Unilever-led initiative, to encourage researcher companies, as well as individual researchers to donate resources, however small, to helping governments, NGOs and academics tackle the UN Global goals.

Recommendation:

Say thank you and demonstrate our value to society.

GRBN Paragon 100-day Challenge



Change the world

[Click here](#) to find out more and join in.

Many thanks to our partners on this User Experience Survey



Recommendation:

[Click here](#) to find out more about GRBN and our initiatives.

Home > GRBN News

GRBN NEWS

100-day Challenge & Giving Back Associations Codes & Guidelines Data Protection & Information Security Learning

LATEST

Read the latest news from GRBN here

The image shows a grid of news articles from the GRBN News section. The main article is 'Participant Engagement Initiative - Partners' by Sotiris Makrygiannis, dated January 30, 2017. Other visible articles include 'Democratising education with technology' by Sotiris Makrygiannis, 'The New ICC ESOMAR International Code. Notes on Data Analytics, How to Implement and Discipline' under Codes & Guidelines, 'How to take a personal 100-day challenge?' under 100-day Challenge & Giving Back, 'Keeping User Experience Top of Mind' by Roddy Knowles under Research Now, 'Want to change the world from your desk? Here's how.' under 100-day Challenge & Giving Back, and 'Driving Trust in Research Through Better UX' by Kerry Hecht under Recollective.