Chapter 5

Gamification in Market Research: Promises, Results, and Limitations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an overview of gamification in the domain of market research, with a specific focus on digital data collection methods, such as online surveys. The problems faced by the market research industry are outlined, followed by a discussion of why gamification has been offered as a possible way to overcome some of these challenges. The literature on gamification is reviewed, with a focus on results from empirical studies investigating the impact of gamification on outcome variables such as data quality and respondent engagement. Finally, the authors present results from an original study conducted in 2013, comparing differences between a conventional (text-dominant) survey and a gamified version of the same survey.

INTRODUCTION: THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL DATA COLLECTION

Steve Jobs famously said that he never relied on market research, because “people don’t know what they want until you show them” (Isaacscon 2011). In spite of this oft-quoted (and controversial) dictum, organizations spent more than $39 billion on market research worldwide in 2012. The greatest share of this expenditure came from Europe (40%), followed by North America (37%) and Asia Pacific (16%). Together, Latin America and Africa together accounted for just 6% of global market research spending (ESOMAR 2013). While exact figures are not available, it is safe to say that survey research probably accounted for the largest proportion of research expenditure.

With the widespread diffusion of the Internet, online surveys have become the dominant form of quantitative data collection for marketing research. Correspondingly, face-to-face interviews and phone
surveys have declined in importance, although these techniques still remain important in order to ensure inclusion of target segments that are not online for a variety of reasons (e.g., low socio-economic status, remote geographic location, or low Internet penetration in emergent economies). However, in both mature and emerging markets, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain representative samples using telephone surveys – due in large part to low or declining use of landline phones, coupled with the use of unlisted numbers and call screening devices. In the United States, for example, the Pew Research Center reports that several response metrics for phone surveys – such as contact rates, cooperation rates, and response rates – have declined drastically between 1997 and 2012 (Pew Research Center 2012; Shepard 2012).

Online surveys offer many benefits over other forms of data collection, such as the ability to implement complex logic, the ability to present audio and visual stimuli, and the ability to randomize the order of questions, among others. In addition to these benefits, the creation of online panels in many countries has made it possible for marketers to field multi-country surveys in a matter of weeks, rather than months, as was required with older methodologies.

THE CHALLENGES OF ENGAGING SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Unlike other forms of data collection, such as face-to-face or telephone interviews, most online and mobile surveys tend to be self-administered. Self-administered surveys have many advantages – including the ability to administer surveys asynchronously, and the reduction of social desirability bias in answers – but they also present challenges in terms of how to keep participants engaged in the data collection process. A skilled interviewer can find ways to encourage people to stay interested in a survey, probe for additional information, and extract answers to open-ended questions. Even if the research topic is not very interesting – or the survey is very long – the very presence of the interviewer might help to reduce the temptation among respondents to abandon the survey.

With the growing popularity of online surveys, “researchers have raised concerns about the effects of long, onerous, poorly designed and simply dull surveys” (Downes-Le Guin, Baker, Mechling & Ruyle 2012). A report by the National Science Foundation (NSF) raises concerns that the validity – and indeed the very future – of survey research may be endangered, due to declining response rates, accompanied by rising costs (NSF 2011).

Besides declining response rates, market researchers are also concerned about declining attention spans among survey takers. For example, the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) launched the Foundations of Quality (FoQ) initiative in 2007, with the mission of investigating key concerns in online research. Among other topics, the ARF FoQ 1.0 underlined the need to study the effects of respondent motivations and engagement on survey results (ARF 2012).

These concerns about declining attention spans are compounded by the fact that mobile devices have increasingly supplanted traditional personal computers (PCs) and laptops as the favored means of accessing the Internet (O’Toole 2014). Surveys that are designed for traditional PCs are not always user-friendly on mobile devices. If respondents take surveys designed for a traditional PC on a mobile device – and these surveys are not optimized for mobile – this will probably result in higher abandonment rates for surveys, and consequently higher costs, not to mention concerns about response bias (i.e., are respondents who complete surveys – especially longer ones -- somehow different from those who abandon them?).
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