

ously, and that errors are small in number and mainly random in nature rather than systematic. Our FRS findings were broadly in line with the incidence levels reported by others of the prevalence of satisficing behaviour, and that these ‘inattentive’ respondents were having little impact on our FRS data.

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You’re the boss! Time to place the respondent at the forefront of our survey design

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What can be done to counterbalance declining response rates?

The underlying industry assumption is that a better survey experience will lead to an engaged respondent, and engaged respondents are more likely to complete more surveys in the future. It should also lead to decreased drop-out rates, reductions in respondent fatigue and submission of higher-quality answers.

This experiment aimed to understand the effects that enhancing online surveys has on observed behaviour, measuring response and drop-out rates, average time of survey completion, responses to different question types

and to factual questions, and the stated survey satisfaction of respondents, by asking respondents to evaluate their experience.

Respondent engagement: is technology the solution?

The experiment was carried out using over 2,000 members of the Ipsos Online Access Panel during April 2008. The ten-minute survey included topics on shopping, social media and new media consumption, cookery and politics.

To examine the different levels of respondent engagement, we split the sample into six randomly assigned groups, as shown below.

Three variables on engaging the respondent were tested:

1. to access whether the *design of the survey* affects respondent engagement
2. to test whether *giving respondents instant feedback* on other respondents’ answers affects respondent engagement
3. to see if the *use of fun and interesting questions* in the survey affects respondent engagement.

Group	Variable on questionnaire received
1	Basic survey design, no feedback and no fun questions
2	Enhanced survey design, no feedback and no fun questions
3	Basic survey design, no feedback and received fun questions
4	Enhanced survey design, no feedback and received fun questions
5	Basic survey design, feedback given and received fun questions
6	Enhanced survey design, feedback given and received fun questions

The survey design was altered from a basic look with standard text questions and radio button to a more enhanced version using Flash and Java for drag-and-drop and visually appealing functionalities. Two questions, unrelated to the questionnaire topic, that we considered to be more interesting and fun to answer, were also added to the questionnaire. We also asked general knowledge questions on political and general interest topics such as the National Lottery.

Summary of results

As noted above, the aim of the experiment was to understand the effect that enhancing online surveys has on a number of response characteristics and patterns. As allocation to design groups was completely random, analysis and inference of causality would not require any statistical adjustments.

Observed behaviour

The results of each of the hypotheses tested are shown below.

Hypothesis 1: Enhancing surveys will reduce drop-out

Result: Not proven

- The drop-out rate (less than 1% overall) was very low across all groups (much lower than our average surveys), with no observed differences across design groups. Total numbers of drop-outs were too low to apply statistical tests. The conclusion is that our survey topic was not suitable to test the drop-out hypothesis. Future experiments

should be based on longer questionnaires and provide a more ‘frustrating’ experience.

Hypothesis 2: Enhancing surveys will increase the average time for survey completion

Result: True

- Enhanced versions of the survey did take significantly longer (15%) to complete.
- This on its own does not necessarily imply a more engaged respondent.

Hypothesis 3: Images rather than radio buttons will have an impact on the number of answers given to multiple-response questions

Result: True (but not straightforward)

- When asking respondents to identify which of a long list of media brands they recognise, the number of brands selected *consistently decreases* with survey enhancement. Level of drop-out varied between 2% and 10%, and was independent of brand recognition size.
- When asking a *capped* multiple-response question (up to three), the number of brands selected *increases* with survey enhancement. We felt this was due to the presence of the visual prompt of a celebrity.
- Ranking did not change between groups for either question.

Hypothesis 4: Enhanced surveys can reduce inattentive grid completion (less flat-lining or approximate flat-lining)

Hypothesis 5: Enhanced surveys can reduce question response randomness

Result: True

- We tested three groups of questions, as follows:
 1. Q6: nine-question grid, each on an identical 1–4 Likert scale (standard radio buttons vs roll-over ‘happy face’ images).
 2. Q7: nine-question grid, each on an identical 1–3 Likert scale (standard radio buttons vs roll-over ‘happy face’ images).
 3. Q8: eight-question grid, each on an identical (non-labelled) 1–10 Likert scale (standard radio buttons vs Flash technology).

For *hypothesis 4*, we calculated the average respondent variance across all items in a certain grid, where zero variance of a certain respondent is equivalent to flat-lining. All three grids showed similar average respondent variance when comparing the two designs. In terms of flat-lining, there was a notable high, and statistically significant, level in grid Q7. Q8 also proved that design can change flat-lining with only 4.5% of the respondents flat-lining in the enhanced version compared to 7.7% for other formats.

For *hypothesis 5*, results showed that all items in grid Q6 and grid Q7 displayed similar variance (standard deviation) and similar shapes of distribution. For Q8 the enhanced design group showed a significant variance reduction (30–40%) across all items. In our view, this reduction is a desirable result as it can be considered as a substantial fall in the measurement error element of the survey. The

average results were identical across items, so no bias was introduced by design – thus reinforcing this view.

Hypothesis 6: More engaged respondents will answer more accurately (political questions)

Result: False

There were no significant differences between groups.

Hypothesis 7: More engaged respondents will take longer over giving their answers to factual questions

Result: False

There were no significant differences between the average time (seconds) spent on these questions by design type.

Respondent evaluation

At the end of the survey we asked the respondents two groups of questions, the first related to their views of and satisfaction towards the survey:

- *The survey was interesting, different, easy to understand and user-friendly.*

Also we enquired about two ‘actionable’ issues:

- *The points value was fair compensation for taking part in survey.*
- *I will probably take part in more surveys similar to this.*

The results for ‘Strongly agree’ with the statements used are shown in Figure 1.

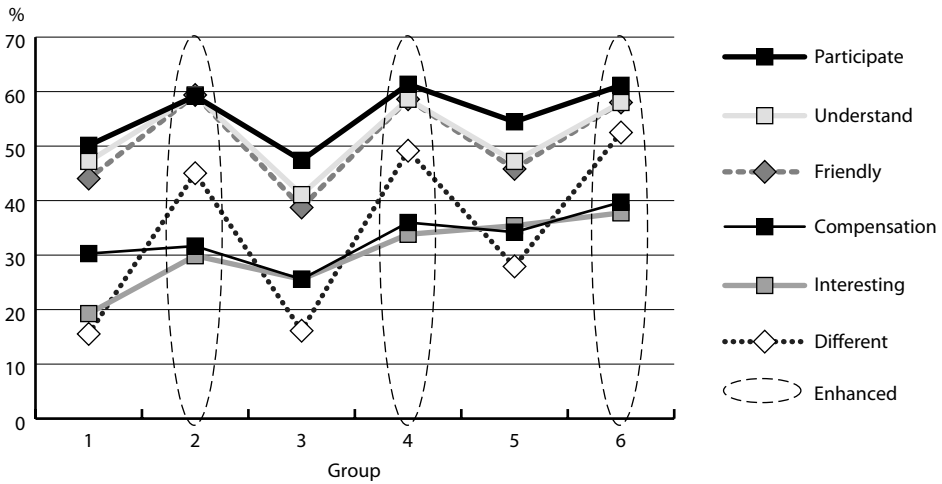


Figure 1 The results for 'Strongly agree' with the statements

- Respondents found the enhanced version substantially *different* and more *interesting*. This increased gradually as more design and content features were added.
- Respondents considered the enhanced version more *understandable* and *user-friendly*. However, adding more design and content to the survey did not increase this view.
- The proportion who felt *compensation* was adequate is slightly higher in the enhanced versions. This increases with additional design and features. However, it is difficult to identify the drivers using regression modelling.
- *Participation* is affected by design – roughly 10% more respondents state they will participate in a similar future study.

Attempts to draw more insight by running ANOVA models added no real additional insights. However, the overall strength of the models was relatively weak (*'different'* possibly being the exception), so we concluded that design factors have only a small effect on these perceptions.

We attempted to correlate the different statements to look for interesting relationships. Most notable was that a more (at least perceived) user-friendly and easy-to-understand survey experience is highly associated (Pearson correlation of 0.74) with the respondent's likelihood to participate in future surveys.

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