



# RESEARCH ON RESEARCH

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# INTRODUCTION

Anyone working in the world of qualitative research knows how difficult it can be to find good quality participants for their research projects. While it's common industry-wide practice to compensate participants for their time and opinions, is that the only thing that motivates them to participate? We don't think so! While incentivizing participants remains a very important part of the process, we began our journey to dig deeper, to find out about some other things that get participants excited.

- » What gets participants engaged with Marketing Research in the first place?
- » Why do participants stay engaged, or not?
- » How do participants view our industry as a whole?
- » What are the emotional ties to Marketing Research?



# WHY DID WE EMBARK ON THIS JOURNEY?

**L&E has a very cool, user-friendly member portal that keeps our members highly engaged and interacting with us. Well, that's what we thought it would do! We did build a user-friendly, interactive tool that would help our participants navigate easily through our system. If we build it, they will come! And they did come. But guess what? They weren't engaging and interacting as much as we would like. So, we set out to find out why.**

We brought on UX Consultant, Amanda Stockwell, to do some usability testing on our member portal. Not surprisingly, while we did find out that there were certainly some improvements we could make, such as streamlining the sign-up process, improving the way we communicate with members, etc, and while the steps we took to improve our processes got us some really amazing results, and as one can only hope with any research, we found out a few things that were unexpected!

As it turns out marketing research is just not as important to the participants as we would like it to be. They didn't really need much of a reason to disengage. MR just wasn't very high on their priority lists when it came to their work or their children, or the myriad of other important things going on in their lives. And when it came to getting paid for it, depending on what their priorities were, sometimes the money just wasn't that important to them.

That's when we had an aha moment. That's when we realized that it's bigger than the tools that we provide. It got us thinking about brands, how consumers engage with brands, and how brands keep consumers engaged. Can we think of marketing research as a brand?

**Moderated Usability Studies**

Interviewed and ran moderated usability studies/interviews with

- » 5 "Actively engaged" Participants
- » 5 "Moderately engaged"
- » 5 Inactive Users

# OUR PROCESS

As we began thinking about marketing research as a brand, we wondered if the same techniques used to engage consumers could apply in the MR world. To help frame how we were going to proceed with finding out, we read up. The publications that we read had nothing to do with marketing research, but how consumers engage with brands, and the emotional “hooks” that brands utilize to keep consumers coming back. With that, we formed one question - What are participant’s emotional ties to participating in marketing research and the industry in general, if any?

## EXISTING RESEARCH

### We read up!

- » *Hooked*, Nir Eyal
- » *The Science of Why*, David Forbes
- » *The Participation Game*, Norty Cohen
- » GreenBook GRIT CPR Report 2017 Global Respondent Engagement Study

### Focus on brand engagement

- » Feeling > Thinking

With this question in mind, we launched an emotionally based study with approximately 200 of our own database members. We took them through a series of fun qualitative exercises, with a little splash of quant for good measure.

The first was a qualitative online board, which included a video segment asking the participants to tell us how participating in MR makes them feel, followed by a collage exercise using images to express their feelings about participating, along with some sentence completion, wrapped up by writing a letter to the moderator telling us what we can do to improve their participation experience.

“ As we began thinking about marketing research as a brand, we wondered if the same techniques used to engage consumers could apply in the MR world.

For the next part, we used a video analytics tool to analyze the video segment from the first online board. We asked how participating in MR makes them feel. From that video response, we were able to do a sentiment analysis, pull out most used words, phrases, and themes, which helped us view trends and attitudes towards participating, and marketing research in general.

For the final exercise, we took participants through a rapid response imagery selection process. We began with a question, or sentence lead-in, and participants were forced to select an image response, milliseconds before the conscious brain is able to kick in. While participants might hold back or are sometimes unable to express what they want to say, the rapid image selection says it for them. Brains don't lie. Using this tool was able to give us the emotional response to the question or sentence lead-in.\*



**“ We took them through a series of fun qualitative exercises, with a little splash of quant for good measure.**

\* Special thanks to Aha!, LivingLens and Mindsight by Isobar, for graciously donating their technology solutions for this research.



# WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

Well, what we knew going in was that cash is still king, and that incentives should not go away. However, we also found out that there are many other motivating factors when it comes to participation and engagement. Below are just some of the top motivators that participants found extremely rewarding, in addition to being paid.

- » Feeling a part of a larger community, “something bigger”
- » Being “in the know” or knowing about a new product or service before anyone else
- » Knowing what they shared may have had an influence on a product or service

## And with the positives, also came the negatives.

- » The number one reason participants disengage is out of frustration of not being included in studies. “Why would I try a third time if I NEVER qualify?”
- » Participants feel like we ask a lot of them, and don’t get much back in return. We call, we email, we put them through a long screener or questionnaire, and they NEVER get selected.

## And then the neutral.

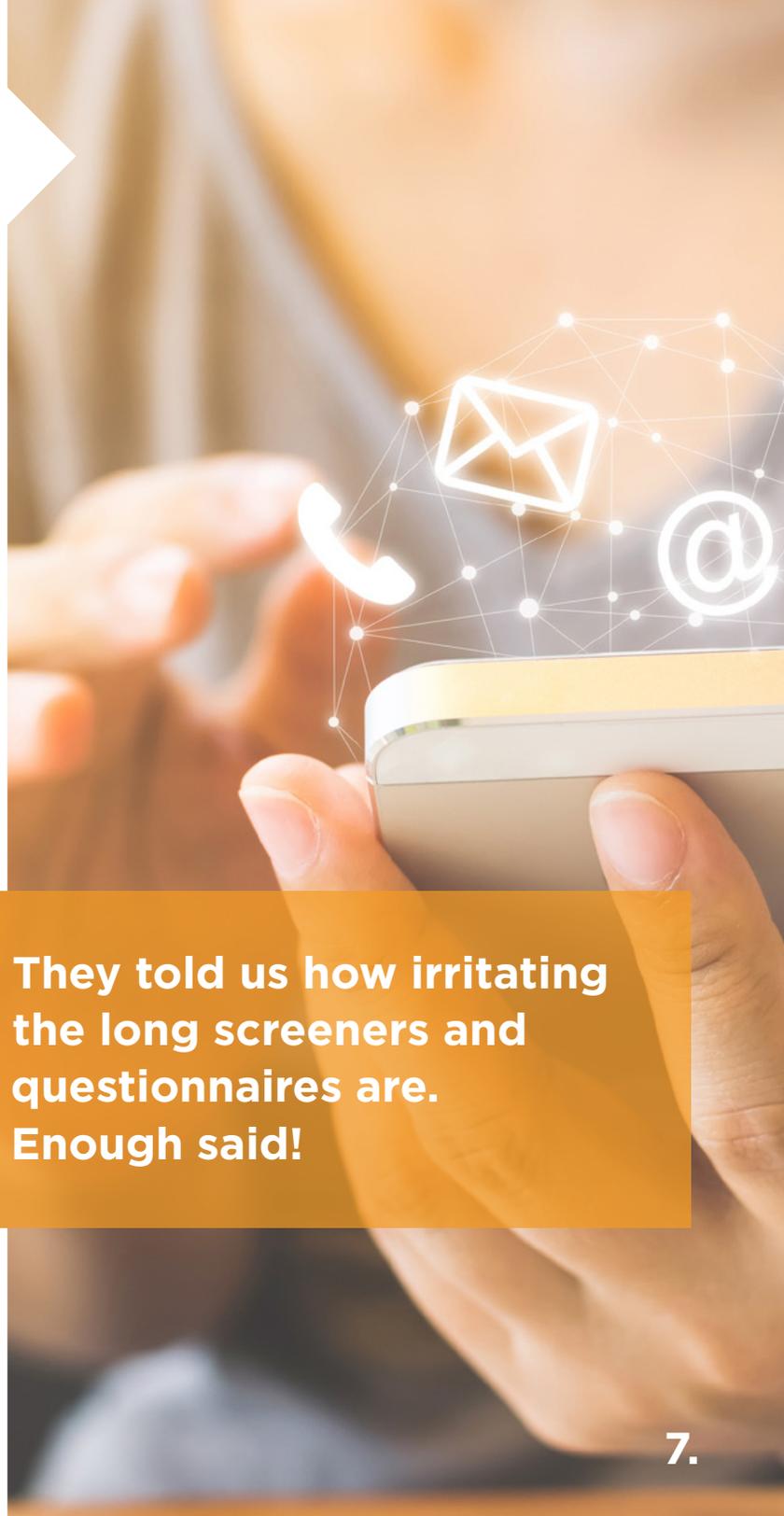
- » Participants want to be heard, they want to have tangible evidence of their participation.

# WHAT CAN WE DO AS AN INDUSTRY?

It makes sense that by taking steps to improve the participant experience, by putting the emphasis on the people we rely on for their time and opinions, these actions would only create better quality participants for our clients, hence delivering better quality data.

With what we heard from our participants, what are some things we can do?

- » They told us they crave community, and like the feeling of being involved. We can strengthen the feeling of community and belonging among our participants.
- » They told us they like feeling what they shared with us contributed to something important. We can work together to share back some information to show participants their impact on the research.
- » They told us we ask a lot of them with not a lot in return. We can reduce the asks of our participants.
- » They told us how irritating the long screeners and questionnaires are. Enough said!
- » They told us that not being selected for studies makes them feel bad. We can find a way to soften the blow when they don't qualify.



“ They told us how irritating the long screeners and questionnaires are. Enough said!

# CONCLUSION

From this research it became very clear that we still have a lot of work to do. Again, while we realize that incentives are still a major motivator, we also found out that there are many other reasons why people participate in marketing research. Largely, the feeling of belonging, the feeling of knowing, the feeling of contributing. With that information, we can begin taking steps to create an environment where participants can feel those things every time they engage with us, keeping them engaged. We know that we alone do not have all of the answers, and that we can do better as an industry to work together to improve the participant experience.

**Special thanks** to our technology partners who volunteered their solutions towards this research:

- » Aha! Online Qualitative Research - Online Qualitative Board
- » LivingLens - Video Analytics Tool
- » Mindsight Direct by Isobar - Emotional Response Tool



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