

# Bridging the Engagement Gap: Realtime Survey Matching in Online Market Research Panels

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**Abstract:** *Online panels play a crucial role in modern market research, providing valuable insights to businesses and researchers. However, maintaining panelist engagement remains a significant challenge in the industry. This paper presents a novel approach to increase panelist retention in online market research. By implementing a real time survey matching system immediately after registration, we observed an 8% increase in panelist retention. This method addresses the common issue of panelist disengagement during the typical two-week waiting period between registration and survey targeting.*

**Keywords:** online panels, market research, panelist engagement, survey matching, panelist retention

## 1. Introduction

Market research is the systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information about a market, product, or service. It involves collecting data on target audiences, competitors, and industry trends to inform business decisions and strategies. By providing valuable insights into consumer behavior, preferences, and needs, market research helps organizations minimize risks and maximize opportunities in their respective markets.

Surveys via phone, email, online and email constitute some of the major ways to conduct market research. In the online market research segment, attracting and retaining panelists is a challenge especially for younger demographics.

This paper introduces a realtime survey matching technique designed to enhance panelist retention by providing immediate engagement opportunities post-registration.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Online Panels in Market Research

Online panels consist of pre-recruited groups of individuals who have agreed to participate in surveys and market research studies. These panels provide researchers with quick access to targeted demographics for various studies. The panelists will receive points or cash for completing the surveys. This is a faster way to conduct research compared to the previous methods like mail and phone.

### 2.2 Advantages of Online Panels

- **Speed:** Quick access to respondents reduces fieldwork time.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Lower costs compared to traditional face-to-face or telephone methods.
- **Targeting:** Detailed profiling allows for precise respondent targeting.
- **Consistency:** Ability to re-contact the same respondents for longitudinal studies.
- **Global Reach:** Access to diverse, international respondents.

### 2.2 Evolution of Panelist Recruitment Strategies

Historically, online panels employed a controlled recruitment process where registration invites were sent only to vetted panelists whose demographics already matched available surveys. This approach ensured that newly registered panelists had a survey ready to take immediately upon joining the panel, promoting instant engagement.

However, to accelerate panel growth and diversify the panelist pool, many research firms transitioned to allowing open self-registration online. While this strategy successfully increased panel size, it introduced a new challenge: many self-registered panelists didn't have a suitable survey available immediately after registration.

### 2.3 Traditional Panelist Onboarding Process

With the shift to self-registration, a gap emerged in the panelist onboarding process. After registration, panelists typically experience a waiting period of approximately two weeks. During this time, several processes occur:

- 1) Data quality checks are performed to verify the authenticity and reliability of the panelist's information.
- 2) The targeting process ingests the panelist's data into the system.
- 3) The panelist's profile is matched against available and upcoming survey opportunities.

This waiting period, while necessary for maintaining data integrity and effective targeting, presents a significant risk to panelist engagement and retention.

### 2.4 Challenges in Panelist Retention

The delay between registration and the first survey opportunity often leads to decreased interest and lower return rates among panelists. This gap in engagement represents a critical point of attrition in the panelist lifecycle. The lack of immediate interaction contradicts the expectation set during the registration process, potentially leading to disappointment and disengagement.

Moreover, in the fast-paced digital age, users have come to expect instant gratification and immediate value from their online interactions. The two-week waiting period stands in

stark contrast to these expectations, further exacerbating the risk of losing potential valuable panelists before they even begin their journey.

### 3. Related Work

Several studies have explored methods to improve panelist engagement and retention:

- 1) Schact et al. (2018) investigated the impact of gamification on survey participation rates, finding a 12% increase in completion rates for gamified surveys.
- 2) Hays et al (2015). Investigated the low recruitment participation rate in online panels and how it is different from probability based internet panels.

### 4. Methodology

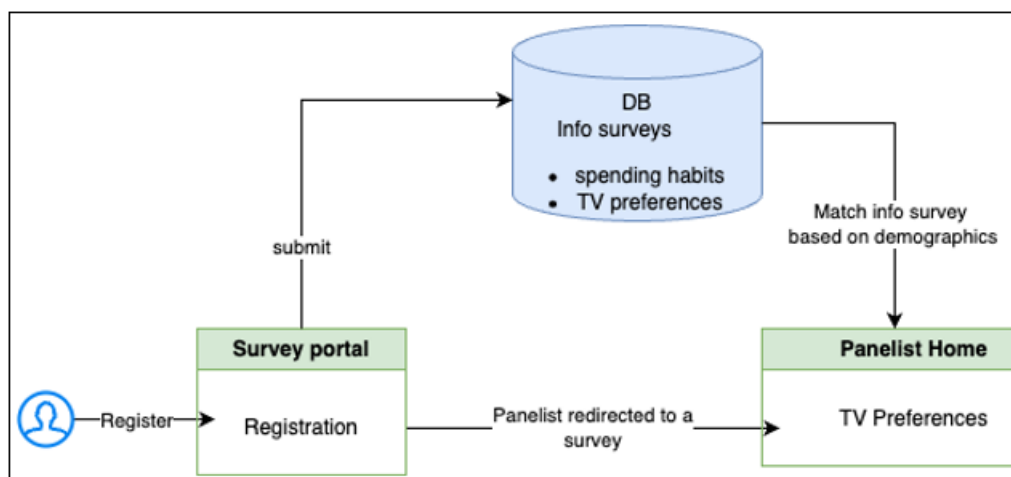
#### 4.1 Realtime Survey Matching System

We developed a system to offer newly registered panelists immediate survey opportunities based on their demographic information. This system includes:

- 1) A set of general demographic surveys covering topics such as spending habits, car ownership, diet preferences, and entertainment choices.
- 2) A dynamic targeting algorithm that matches panelists to appropriate surveys immediately after registration.

#### 4.2 Implementation Process

- 1) Panelist completes registration filling out a detailed form with the panelist's demographic information including education, home ownership and family status.
- 2) A survey router system uses the panelist's demographic information to match existing information surveys to the panelist.
- 3) Panelist is immediately presented with survey opportunities right after registration in the users home page. The panelist can then complete the survey and earn points for the same.



**Figure 1:** Survey Router implementation based on pre programmed info surveys and panelist demographic information

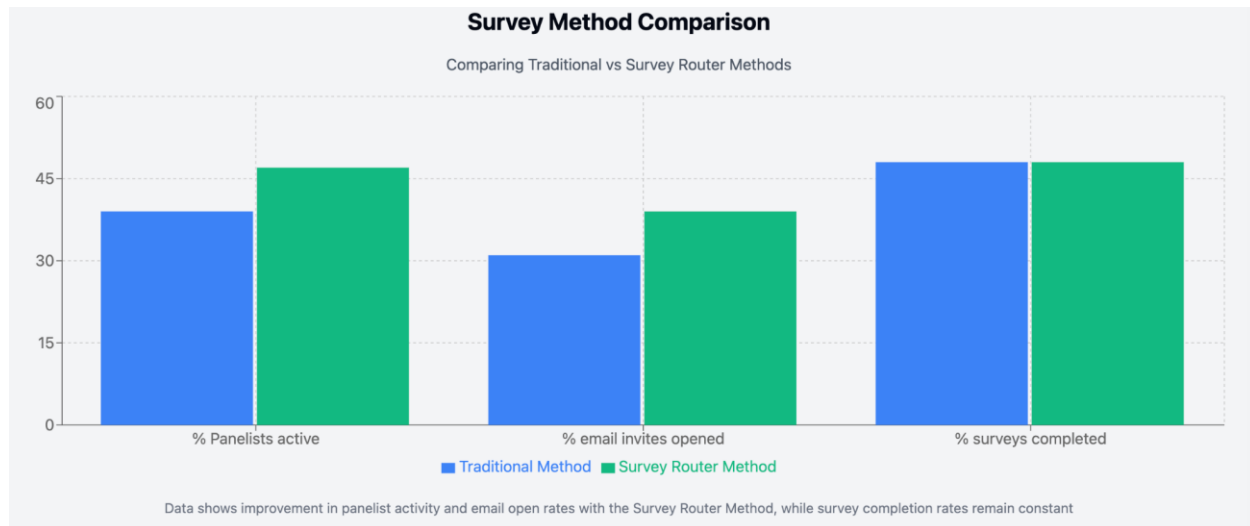
#### 4.3 Data Collection

We tracked panelist retention rates over a six-month period, comparing a control group (traditional onboarding) with the experimental group (realtime survey matching). We also tracked the email open rates, and survey completion rates of the panelists who went through traditional onboarding vs through the realtime survey matching.

### 5. Results

The implementation of the realtime survey matching system resulted in:

- 1) An increase in panelist retention from 39% to 47%, representing an 8% improvement. This showed a marked improvement of people opening the survey invitations and coming back to the portal to complete more surveys.
- 2) Higher engagement rates among new panelists, with 72% participating in at least one survey within the first 24 hours of registration. Giving the survey right away also increased the chances of the panelist filling in the demographic survey.
- 3) Email open rate improved from 60% to 71% and the survey completion rate was flat at 71%.
- 4) Improved data quality due to more recent and relevant demographic information.



## 6. Discussion

The significant increase in panelist retention demonstrates the effectiveness of immediate engagement in maintaining panelist interest. By providing a positive first experience, we created a stronger association between registration and active participation.

### 6.1 Limitations

- 1) The study was conducted over a six-month period; longer-term effects should be investigated.
- 2) The impact may vary across different demographic groups or geographic regions.

### 6.2 Future Work

- 1) Explore the long-term impact of realtime survey matching on data quality and panelist longevity.
- 2) Investigate the potential for machine learning algorithms to further optimize survey matching.
- 3) Examine the effects of combining realtime matching with other engagement strategies, such as gamification or personalized incentives.

## 7. Conclusion

The implementation of a realtime survey matching system significantly improved panelist retention in our online market research panel. This approach addresses the critical engagement gap immediately following registration, leading to higher retention rates, email open rates and completion rates. It also potentially improves the data quality. As the market research industry continues to evolve, such innovative approaches to panelist engagement will be crucial in maintaining robust and reliable online panels.

## References

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