

Survey Completion Rates – The Importance of The "Attention Quotient" Live Web Surveys Across 15 Research Groups Show What Matters Most In Live Web Survey Sampling

Key Take-Aways

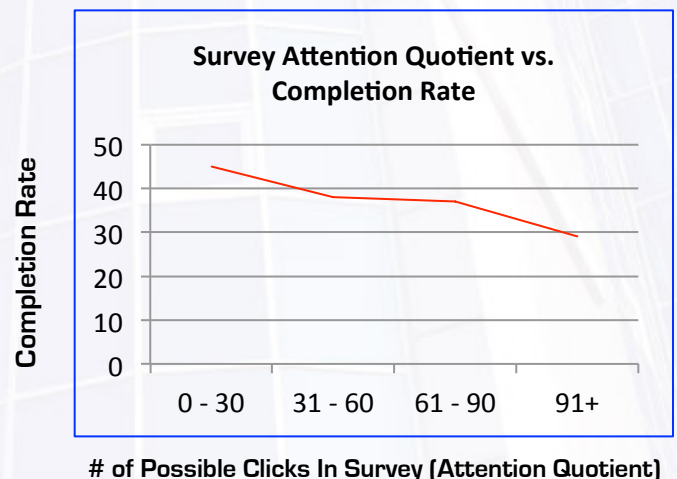
- Completion Rates (survey completes divided by survey starts) for multi-question surveys in the live web intercept arena range from 20% - 50%
- The most consistent variable impacting these rates is # of Possible Clicks (Survey Complexity), not # of Questions or Minutes to Completion
- Across 1,000+ research studies in 2011/2012, Safecount has observed a decline in the average # of Possible Clicks – a positive sign that the broader digital research industry is listening to consumers
- Online survey Completion Rates should be referred to as "Attention Quotient"

In the math world, the result of dividing two numbers, or expressions, is referred to as a "quotient". In the research world, the result of dividing the # of survey completes by # of survey starts is referred to as "Completion Rate". However, I think, as an industry, we should start referring to Completion Rate as an "Attention Quotient". There is a disconnect between the formulaic moniker "Completion Rate" versus the more descriptive "Attention Quotient". And, when thinking about "Attention Quotient", researchers need to shorten surveys both for ease of programming and to be user friendly. After all, we're asking for 3 – 30 minutes of someone's time – that's a lot to ask for. When we break the terminology down to what it truly means (what we are truly asking) perhaps we would be more sensitive and respectful of the consumer contribution.

Even though they're not mutually exclusive, it's reasonable to say that the length of time doing a task probably won't have as much of an impact on our ability or willingness to complete that task as would the amount of mental processing it takes to complete. The foundation for this is my "Attention Quotient" theory. "Attention Quotient" is best predicted by the # of Possible Clicks there are in a questionnaire – thus, how mentally taxing it is to read your options, process them and then click. Other methods of measuring survey tedium are by looking at "# of Questions" and "Time To Complete". "# of Questions" can be deceiving because, very often, surveys contain piped questions, incentive or sweepstakes rules and privacy policies which can throw off accurate page counts. Time to Complete as a metric also has challenges given its subjective nature. You can always calculate average Time to Complete after field work is done, but we need these measures prior to that.

This made me question, "is there really a direct relationship between survey length and completion rates?" Maybe we shouldn't be looking at survey length as the best indicator? Of course, these metrics are very different for live Web surveys versus panel based methods.

Chart illustrates how 1,000 survey starters translates to almost 500 completes on a 30 click questionnaire. On a 91 click questionnaire 200 more people will quit.



The world of live web intercept survey sampling is a much more challenging environment for advertising research versus the online panel world. The latter will commonly experience 90%+ survey completion rates. The upside for live web intercept is that, if certain recruitment technology is utilized, it casts a fine net, capable of capturing respondents with exposure to certain digital assets which the broader panel based approach cannot - the old "needle in a haystack" issue. It's also less expensive.

While this research on research doesn't represent a watershed moment for the online survey world, it is a necessary empirical reminder of the need for user friendly questionnaires. If not, completion rates decline and it costs us all more money. More importantly, when calibrating potential respondent goals, consider examining Possible # of Clicks as the main variable. This is more directly tied to the "Attention Quotient" - a more accurate term for "Completion Rate".



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