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IPSOS VIEWS

For the Love of Money?
Motivation and Engagement in
Online Research Communities

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GAME CHANGERS

DOES TRIPADVISOR PAY YOU TO POST A REVIEW ON THEIR WEBSITE?

DID YOUR EMPLOYER PAY YOU TO FILL IN THE ANNUAL EMPLOYEE SURVEY?

DOES DELL IDEA STORM PAY ITS CUSTOMERS TO SUBMIT NEW PRODUCT IDEAS?

WHAT ABOUT MY STARBUCKS IDEA?

Before the arrival of Online Access Panels, it was unusual to provide monetary rewards to survey respondents. In fact, it was the strong growth of online survey research using Online Access Panels, and the pay-for-participation reward schemes that these panels employ, that has led to the perception that the prime motivation for people to participate in research – to voice their opinions – is receiving money. **It is not.**

It is true that Online Access Panels attract groups of people that are primarily interested in money and we've seen the rise of 'professional respondents' because of this practice.

However, new questions have arisen with the strong growth of Online Research Communities: password-protected online environments that enable brands to interact and collaborate with consumers in real-time to build insights, drive innovation, and gain influence.

So, in terms of managing Online Research Communities, we should consider:

- Is a pay-for-participation approach really the right way to build and manage immersive, engaging and relationship-based research environments?
- Does this approach really help us to get the high quality of participants needed to deliver deeper insights, and with the agility that current market research practicioners require?

In this paper, we will tackle these questions by looking at both academic evidence as well as evidence from existing research communities managed by Ipsos. We present the argument that it is necessary to go beyond transactional relationships with consumers and tap into a broader range of individuals' motivational drivers to build effective relationships with them over time. This will also serve to ensure we maximize the effectiveness and the return on interest of such communities.

Ipsos' Point of View: *To build effective and efficient online communities, tapping into intrinsic motivations is crucial to drive meaningful insights. Monetary rewards should play a secondary role, as part of a broader engagement mix.*

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND THE POWER OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

What motivates people to participate in research? And what can possibly motivate them to participate in ongoing online communities? Our starting point here is the academic literature on human motivation, to ensure we have a theoretical grounding. One of the most accepted and most widely applied theories around human motivation is Self Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci. They broadly distinguish between two types of motivation that people can have to perform a task or achieve a goal: *intrinsic* and *extrinsic.*[1]

Intrinsic motivation refers to the spontaneous tendency "to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacity, to explore, and to learn". When intrinsically motivated, people engage in an activity because they find it interesting and inherently satisfying.

By contrast, when **extrinsically motivated**, people engage in an activity to obtain some instrumentally separable consequence, such as the attainment of a reward, the avoidance of a punishment, or the achievement of some valued outcome.

One noteworthy finding in the body of literature around SDT is that extrinsic rewards can actually interfere with people's intrinsic motivation: people experience less interest and exhibit less spontaneous engagement with activities for which they were initially intrinsically motivated after receiving tangible rewards for performing the activities.

The main takeaways from the academic literature on motivation are:

- Targeting intrinsically motivated people and tasks driven by intrinsic motivation will lead to better outcomes in a range of activities.
- Extrinsic rewards, when applied wrongly, can affect intrinsic motivation in a negative way.
- Appealing to people's intrinsic motivational needs makes a task inherently satisfying for them.

> **It is necesary to go beyond transactional relationships with consumers and tap into a broader range of the individual's motivational drivers to build effective relationships with them over time.**

ONLINE ACCESS PANELS: WHAT MOTIVATES THEM?

As we dive into the existing literature about motivation and participation in surveys or online access panels, we can start to see how the theory plays out closer to home. In a paper by Brüggen et al,[2] the authors outline an in-depth study that uncovers three distinct 'segments' of respondents based on their motivations for participating in online research and looks at how they perform, based on *quantity* (response rates) and *quality* (effort they put into the research) of their responses.

These three segments of respondents are:

1. VOICING ASSISTANTS

Of the sample, 27% are motivated mainly by an intrinsic motive. 'Giving an opinion' and 'helping' are extremely important and provide the only dominant response motives for this segment.

2. REWARD SEEKERS

These respondents, who make up 25% of the sample, participate *mainly because of the incentives* that they receive for their participation. All other motives except 'giving an opinion' relate negatively. This extrinsically-motivated segment reveals the lowest response rate and lowest levels of self-reported effort and performance.

3. INTRINSICS

Respondents in the largest cluster (48%) are motivated by multiple intrinsic motives. Although 'enjoyment' and 'giving an opinion' are the strongest response motives, 'interest', 'curiosity' and 'helping' also positively relate to motivation. It is also important to note that, within this cluster, incentives are are sometimes perceived negatively, and external motivations are, mostly, not important. This cluster has the highest response rate.

The authors conclude that: *"Respondents motivated mainly by incentives have the lowest response rates and levels of self-reported effort and response quality. It thus seems that people that respond for the love of money or other rewards love earning it the easy way."*

ONLINE COMMUNITIES: LOOKING AT THE EVIDENCE

The literature is clear on the role and impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation respectively when it comes to the effort and performance that people put into tasks. But, to further understand how this is playing out in the context of Online Research Communities, Ipsos carried out further research on research on four online communities run in the US, including two communities for financial institutions and one for a large lifestyle brand. The final one makes for a different category altogether, being a community in which chronic disease patients exchange experiences and opinions amongst themselves, and with Ipsos.

For each of the communities, we assigned members to one of four categories based on their self-declared motivations for engaging in each of the communities (see below).

Having established these four segments of participants, we can investigate similarities and differences in terms of the quantity and quality of their contributions in each of the communities. This comes from analysis of both behavioural and attitudinal data from surveys, as well as qualitative activities in these communities.

1.
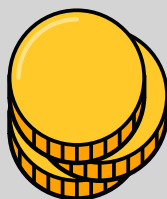
PURELY EXTRINSIC
Members who participate for rewards only (typically incentives such as prize draws).
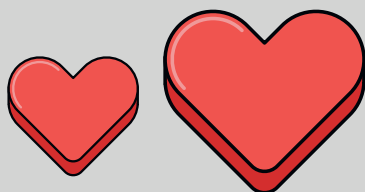
2.

SINGLE INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
Members who participate for one single, specific intrinsic motivation. In most cases these people join 'to provide feedback to the brand'.

3.

MULTIPLE INTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS
Members who participate for multiple intrinsic motivations, typically a combination of intrinsic motivation like 'providing feedback to the brand', 'connecting with others', 'learning more about the category', 'sharing opinions' or 'to get new ideas'.

4.

MULTIPLE INTRINSIC + REWARDS
Members who participate for multiple intrinsic motivations and rewards.

FINDINGS

FINANCE COMMUNITY A

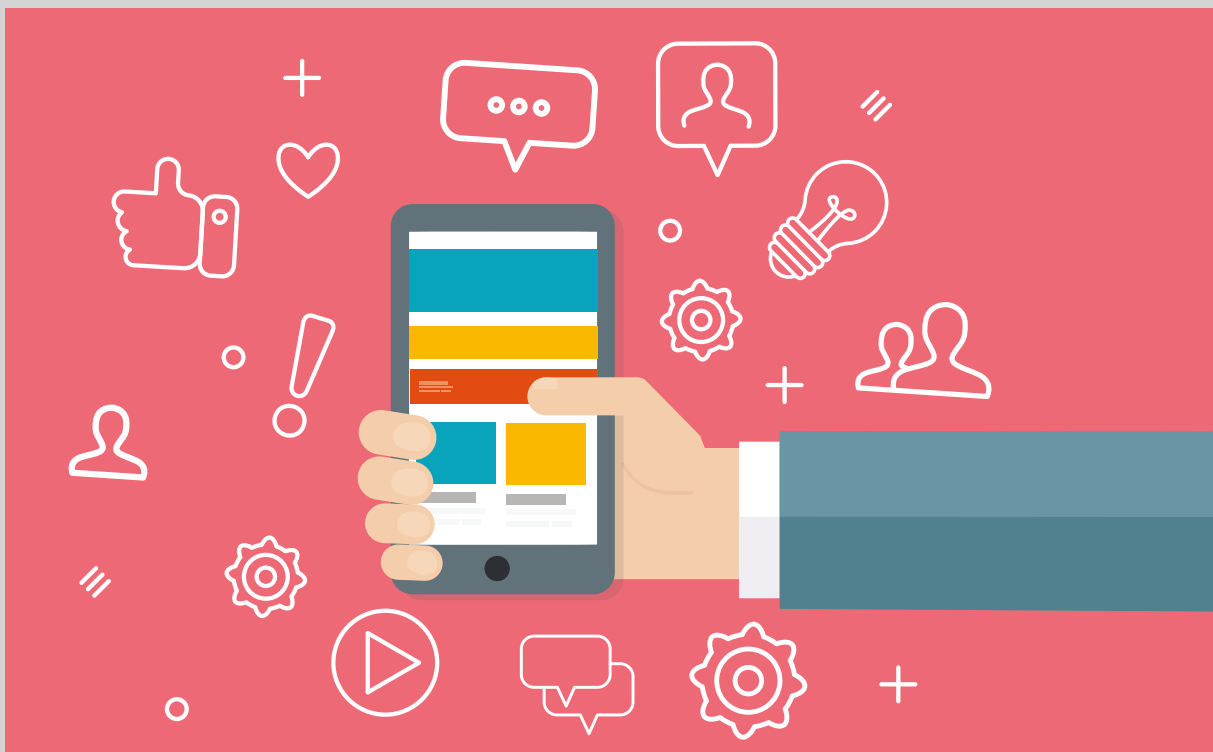Findings from our first finance community clearly show that:

Members that are only motivated to participate for rewards have lower participation rates in community activities and score the lowest on quality of participation metrics, for example the time taken to complete survey or the length of open answer.

Those who score the highest on both participation metrics and quality metrics are those with multiple intrinsic motivations. Therefore, they do not only participate more but also bring higher quality to each research event. It is important to note that when you throw monetary rewards in the mix for this profile, the participation and quality metrics only increase marginally, meaning *it is not really about the money* when it comes to individuals with multiple intrinsic motivations.

Members with a broader *range* of (intrinsic) motivations score higher on all metrics than those with a singular intrinsic motivation.

	🪙	❤️	❤️❤️	❤️❤️🪙
Average time taken to complete survey (sec)	290	311	387	406
Average length of open answers (characters)	66	78	108	125
Average survey completion rate	54%	51%	63%	68%
Posted in discussion board in 6-month period	32%	37%	72%	71%
Read responses in discussion board in 6-month period	50%	45%	75%	86%
Visited suggestion box in 6-month period	9%	9%	19%	28%

FINANCE COMMUNITY B

Findings from the second finance community are very much in line with the former, showing that money does not drive engagement.

The group of members motivated by extrinsic rewards scored lowest on all metrics.

Members with only intrinsic motivations scored higher on all metrics compared to those only motivated by rewards.

Members with multiple intrinsic motivations plus rewards are most active in the community and are also most interested in participating in various in-depth research activities.

This is usually when rewards are offered to appreciate community members' effort, time and dedication. It is a gesture to reaffirm the bond with the community project and the relationship being cultivated.

	🪙	❤️	❤️❤️	❤️❤️🪙
Average time taken to complete survey (sec)	313	571	568	491
Average length of open answer (characters)	51	97	85	76
Total sign-ins in community	14	18	18	26
Average # posts in community	1.5	2.7	2.8	4.5
Average length of post in community	231	346	395	368
Interest to participate: personal blogging	4%	8%	13%	19%
Interest to participate: live chat	6%	13%	27%	32%
Interest to participate: in person events	13%	20%	31%	45%

LIFESTYLE COMMUNITY

Similar observations to those found in the finance communities are also seen in a very different category: lifestyle.

Although members with a singular intrinsic motivation score lower on most metrics than those only motivated by rewards, clearly the group of members with multiple intrinsic motivations perform better on both quantity and quality of contributions, as well as on interest in

participating in various types of deep dive research. This leads to more engaged participants for face-to-face dynamics too. This can be leveraged for on and offline exchanges, as communities can and should combine the two when it makes sense within research objectives.

In line with the earlier findings, members with multiple intrinsic motivations plus rewards score highest on most metrics.

	🪙	❤️	❤️❤️	❤️❤️🪙
Total sign ins in Community	20	11	18	20
Average # posts in Community	303	2.2	6.2	6.6
Average length of post in Community	220	276	409	395
Interest to participate: Personal Blogging	34%	27%	54%	64%
Interest to participate: Live Chat	59%	39%	71%	82%
Interest to participate: In Person Events	52%	51%	58%	65%

HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY

As a health issue like diabetes touches the life of both patients and caregivers on a daily basis, we can expect that a community around the topic would entail different intrinsic motivations, relating to sharing experiences and learning from them.

After months of taking part in the community, participants were asked about their satisfaction with the community and responses came back with a 76% positive outcome (scoring 4 or 5 on a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means very dissatisfied and and 5 means very satisfied).

When asked to comment on why they were so satisfied with the experience in the community, the participants repeatedly used words related to intrinsic motivations such as: 'information', 'learning', and 'sharing opinions'. *(See wordcloud below).*

This evidence ties in with what we have seen on the multiple intrinsic motivations at play in communities with different purposes or in different categories. And while there is evidence that shows rewards have a role, we can see once more that it is a supporting role.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

To summarise our findings, we can say that:

1. **Community members who are solely motivated by extrinsic rewards or prizes underperform across all metrics**, whether it's quantity or quality of participation. These members are also least interested in participating in various types of research activities. Extrinsically motivated members are therefore clearly the least valuable for a community in the long run.

2. However, **members that are motivated by multiple intrinsic reasons and rewards as a secondary motivation are typically the most engaged members**. Not only do they respond to research events, but they also bring more effort and attention to the queries and discussions. For this reason, extrinsic rewards should play a role in the broader engagement strategy. But this role should be secondary and applied carefully, to support and foster the intrinsic motivations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With our literature review and the Ipsos analysis presented here we have found solid evidence that to build and maintain successful online communities, you must start with intrinsic motivation. If we were to take a traditional pay-for-performance approach, we would end up with communities that are not only more expensive to maintain, but we would also have members that are less active, less proactive, put forth less effort, and ultimately provide less value for clients.

To build successful, vibrant and engaged communities, we strongly recommend the following:

1. **Right recruitment is critical for a good start**: In selecting the best recruitment sources, and in the screening process of the right community members, we need to identify those people that are primarily intrinsically motivated to be part of the community, and ideally have a broad range of intrinsic motivations at play. We should avoid attracting people that are just there for immediate monetary gratification, while encouraging brands to access their own databases of consumers who already have a brand relationship.

2. **Value for the members should be thought of as having equal importance as the value for clients**: And it should be given as much effort. This is because this value proposition, and following through with it for long-term exchanges, will define what type of participants join and, therefore, the success of the community.

3. **Communities need to be managed to maintain and diversify intrinsic motivations**: Once intrinsically motivated members are recruited, it is critical to keep up and build upon these motivations. In this way, if you have identified why people want to participate and what their expectations are, it is much easier to satisfy their needs with the various levers available in managing a community – from how to craft activities or to how to acknowledge contributions.

4. Rewards and recognition should play a role in the engagement mix: As we learned from the literature on motivation, rewards can have an adverse effect when applied wrongly. But this doesn't mean that they can't play a useful role. When thoughtfully applied alongside frequent recognition methods, they can help maintain the right motivations at play and provide for a well-balanced community. Instead of creating a pay-per-answer environment, something different can be done, with different results. Aligning rewards with intrinsic motivations, for example by supporting and acknowledging high quality contributions, compensating for extraordinary effort, or just creating a bit of extra fun and excitement, leads to a different kind of research environment, in which community members keep coming back for more reasons than just for money.

In conclusion, managing effective Online Research Communities is about recognising achievements, allowing progress, and letting members know that their voice can and does influence the client or partner and, by extension, market and society.

With intrinsic motivations front-and-centre for members, communities should always aspire to a meaningful exchange.

> **" Managing effective Online Research Communities is about recognizing achievements, allowing progress, and letting members know that their voice can and does influence the client or partner and, by extension, market and society.**

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1. Ryan, R & Deci, E. (2016) "Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness"
2. Brüggen, E, Wetzels, M, de Ruyter, K and Schillewaert, N. (2011) "Individual differences in motivation to participate in online panels: the effect on reponse rate and reponse quality perceptions", International Journal of Market Research, Vol. 53, No. 3.

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