

Vanguard Research Initiative
December 2014

3. Invitations and Survey Mechanics

1. Invitations and desired sample size.

Our goal in designing the VRI was to produce a minimum of 3,500 responses completing the three panel surveys administered over the course of approximately one year. To hit this target, we needed to estimate response rates for initial participation and attrition across surveys. In designing the production sample, we had excellent information on response rates from the pilot survey. The overall response rate was about 7.7 percent (ratio of completed surveys to non-bounced invitations). This is a remarkably high response rate for such a Web survey.¹ To decide on the overall number of invitations, we had to estimate projected attrition rates. We assumed a one-third attrition rate between each survey.² We chose 130,000 accounts for email invitations of which, at the time of invitation release, 121,201 had valid emails and did not bounce.³ The actual response rate for Survey 1 production survey was 7.38%, with 8,950 completes. More than 4,600 respondents completed all the three surveys, which exceeds our initial target.

2. Invitation procedure.

Email accounts selected for the survey received a pre-alert email mailed by the Vanguard Group. Roughly a week later, the selected individuals received a survey invitation, also emailed by

¹ Note also that this not a classic response rate, which is calculated conditional on the initial screen to create the frame. This response rate combines the success rate in survey to build the frame and the response to the survey given that a household is in the frame.

² The attrition rate from survey 1 to survey 2 was very close to what we estimated. The attrition rate from survey 2 to survey 3 (about a fifth) was quite lower than this estimate.

³ An account is classified as to have bounced emails if not only the initial invitation but also all the following reminders are bounced (see below for detailed description for the reminder process).

Vanguard, containing a clickable survey link and instructions for completing the survey. See Figure 3-1 for the text of these communications. Those who did not complete the survey within a week received a reminder email, containing the same link and instructions. The Pilot had two reminders, where the second one followed the first one after a week, if they had not completed the survey by then. The production survey had one.

3. Incentive.

The incentive for completing all three surveys is a \$20 payment by Vanguard. After each survey, there is also a sweepstakes for prizes such as iPads, and a grand prize sweepstakes for those who complete all three surveys. See Vanguard Research Initiative, “Survey 1 Questionnaire,” pages 57-59, for details of incentive.

4. Administration of survey.

The survey was programmed and administered for Vanguard by IPSOS, SA an internationally recognized survey research organization. Neither the University of Michigan nor New York University was engaged in collecting these data.

Figure 3-1. Pre-alert and Invitations Emails.