Comparing the Quality and Cost Effectiveness of Facebook, Craigslist, and In-person Recruitment Methods for Longitudinal Panels

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About the NYC DOHMH Tobacco Cessation Study

- Since 2019, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) and ICF have conducted three waves of a longitudinal survey to measure the impact of tobacco cessation programming on the smoking cessation behaviors of adults in NYC. The NYC Tobacco Cessation Panel Survey study includes a baseline survey and three waves of follow-up surveys administered over one year. Along with surveying existing nonprobability panel members, ICF explored alternative methods of panel recruitment for this study, including in-person, social media (Facebook), and online marketplaces (Craigslist) that alternate recruitment strategies were necessary because this mode alone could not provide sufficient eligible sample (adults who smoke).

Sampling and Recruitment Approach

- The survey targeted current smokers living in NYC and was fielding in English and Spanish. The final survey goal was 500 longitudinal completes (respondents who completed the baseline and the three follow up surveys).
- We integrated the use of multiple recruitment methods in order to participate in the study, including:
  - MFour Panel: We partnered with MFour, a mobile panel provider, for this study. Current MFour panel members received an invitation to complete the survey as well as follow up surveys.
  - In-person intercept. ICF interviewers were positioned outside of establishments where they were likely to intercept smokers (bars, convenience stores). Interviewers invited passersby to participate in surveys. Surveys were administered by the interviewer on respondents’ personal devices using the MFour Surveys on the Go platform.
  - Facebook Advertisement. Facebook ads have been successfully used to recruit smokers to complete surveys. Facebook’s advertisement platform allowed ICF to specifically target key demographics in NYC and use key word parameters to target smokers, such as “cigarette”, “tobacco”, “smoking”, “nicotine”. A web link was included in the advertisement to drive interested participants to the survey.
  - Craigslist Advertisement. Craigslist advertisements were placed in all NYC boroughs. The ads indicated that NYC is looking for smokers to participate in a study and that they may receive an incentive if they are selected to participate, with a promise of additional incentives if they participate in the 3 follow-up surveys as well. A link to a Survey screener was included in the ad.

Research Objectives

- Longitudinal surveys are valuable for assessing the impact of a program or intervention over time, such as public health campaign effectiveness. However, collecting longitudinal data presents numerous challenges, including the cost of recruiting and retaining panel members. ICF evaluated advantages and disadvantages of each recruitment method by comparing panel retention, demographic coverage, and cost-effectiveness. Areas of inquiry included:
  1. Evaluation of the quality and cost effectiveness of existing panels, In-Person, Facebook, and Craigslist recruitment modes.
  2. Evaluation of the demographics by each recruitment mode.
  3. Evaluation of the retention of each recruitment mode.

Timeline

- Wave 1: 6/22/2019 - 7/19/2019
- Wave 2: 10/3/2019 - 11/16/2019
- Wave 4: 5/3/2020 - 5/7/2020

Baseline

- Existing panelist recruits were the most cost-effective method across all waves (ranging from $24.20 to $10.35 per complete).
- Craiglist, the second most cost-effective mode, and resulted in the cheapest cost per complete (average $0.85), at first yielded more completes than Facebook in Wave 1 by 126 completes, but in Wave 3 had a closer margin of 4 completes.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Generated multiple creatives for advertisements to circulate on a continuous basis throughout the fielding process.

Future Considerations

- In-Person Surveying is costly and time-intensive for a non-probability survey.
- Instagram. In addition to Facebook advertisements, expand the audience by also posting on Instagram to reach a younger population.
- Variation. Generate multiple creatives for advertisements to circulate on a continuous basis throughout the fielding process.
- Planning. Build in time to evaluate productivity of each mode within the fielding schedule to gauge campaign effectiveness.
- Low-Incidence Population. The harder to reach the target population, consider multiple recruitment modes to save on time.

Challenges and Barriers

- Time. Although the existing panelist completes occurred sooner in the fielding period, there is a limited pool of sample to survey. Extending the reach and audience of the survey is time-intensive.
- Posting Requirements. Facebook and Craigslist have posting restrictions in order to be considered a valid advertisement. For example, Craigslist only allows advertisement postings every 48 hours.
- Creative. As previously noted, each platform captures the attention of a different audience. Therefore, knowing what to post where without being flagged by regulating site authorities can pose a challenge.
- Experience. This was our first time experimenting with a social media platform and were unknown of the ways to optimize on the platform, such as how to curate ideal audiences using key words.

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