rybbon

How Instant Incentives Are Changing Academic Research

Elevate Your Research Methodology to Increase Response Rates and Better Engage Participants

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Introduction

Postdoctoral researchers, tenure-track assistant and associate professors, and tenured faculty all have enormous motivation to conduct high-quality, innovative, and mission-driven research, since it is a fundamental component of higher education. But most researchers and academics are well aware that survey response rates and engagement have been declining over the decades, which puts data collection and analysis at risk.

Academics face near-constant hurdles when planning and conducting research, but opting to offer an incentive or "thank you" can increase response rates and help you retain and engage participants.Thanking research participants for their time and effort, while often overlooked, is becoming a critical component of survey methodology. More than half of institutions that participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement use incentives to boost response rates (Sarraf, S. & Cole, J. S., 2014).

Offering incentives for academic research is a vastly different process than delivering incentives or rewards to consumers for product or market research. It requires developing an incentive program that is IRB-compliant, doesn't affect the substance of the research, and integrates seamlessly with the research process. A failure to meet any one of those criteria can result in a structural breakdown in your research. Preventing this becomes much easier when you opt for digital incentives. By selecting a digital incentives platform carefully and methodically, you can ensure compliance with all the appropriate regulations, collect data and insights that you can rely on, and significantly decrease the administrative burden of delivering incentives.

Digital incentives, combined with a robust and versatile incentives management platform, can dramatically improve the way you manage and deliver incentives. This e-book will explore five ways instant incentives are changing academic research.

Contents

Types of Digital Incentives Available

There are a variety of digital incentives available for researchers. The best option will depend on who your participants are and where they are located. Unlike physical incentives, digital incentives are easily trackable and refundable, require less manual setup and preparation, and allow for more flexibility with international studies. Below are a few of the most popular options.
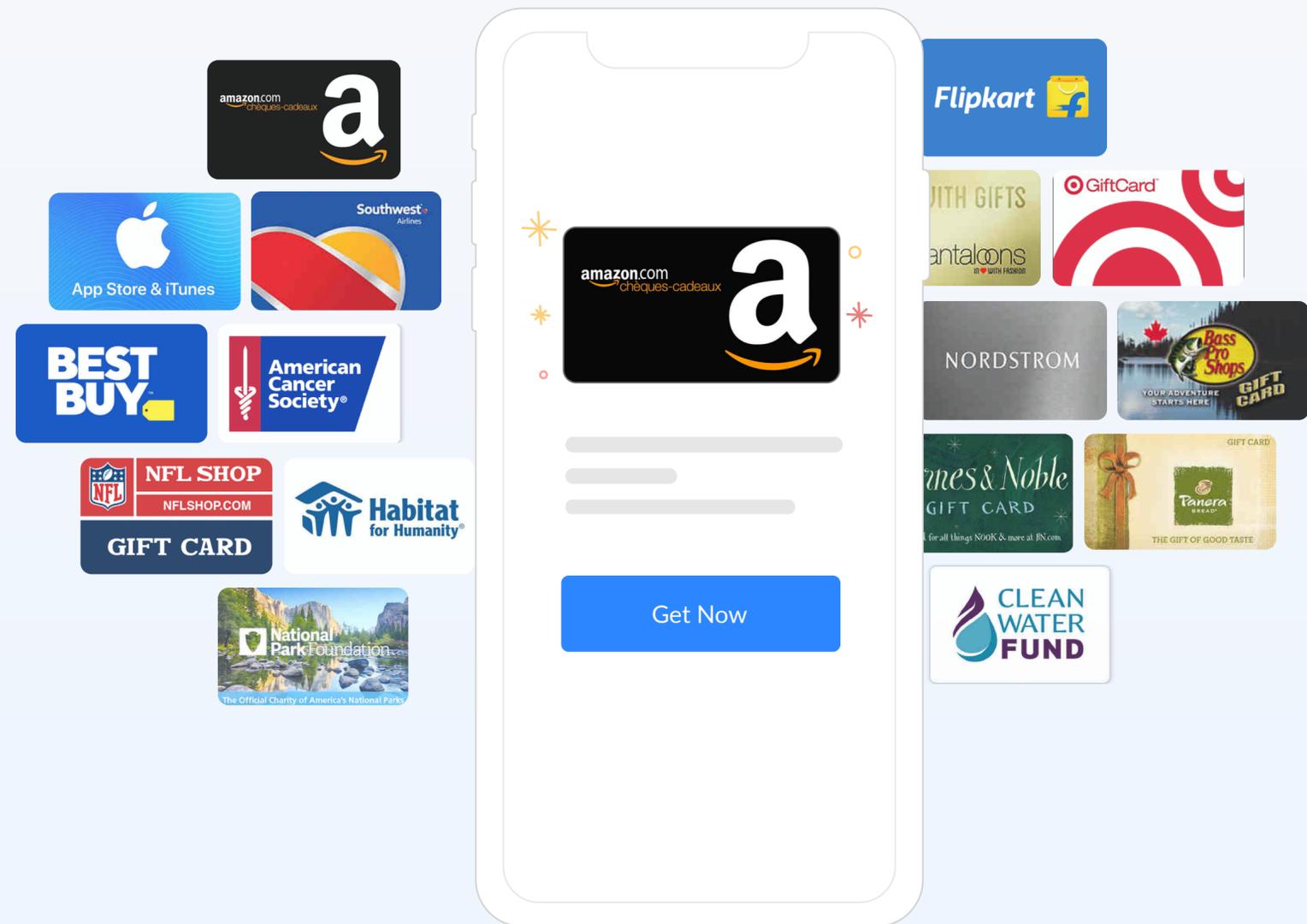
Digital Gift Cards

Much like their physical counterpart, these gift cards are a great incentive for research participants. Moreover, they are much easier to buy, manage, track and deliver than physical gift cards.

Virtual Prepaid Cards

This is an excellent option for global research projects. A virtual prepaid card, like Visa or MasterCard, makes the process of crossing borders to deliver incentives simple. These cards are accepted in many countries and allow the participant the freedom to choose what they want to purchase.

E-Donations

E-donations are a great option for charity-minded participants or participants who are shy about accepting gifts. Like digital gift cards, e-donations are easy to buy, manage, track, and deliver.

Digital Payments

This is another option that gives the participant some choice in choosing their reward. You can use digital payment platforms like PayPal and Venmo, or just opt for the ACH route. Either way, you are able to deliver payments without the time and money required to issue, deliver, and track physical checks.

Chapter 2

Incentives Automation

An important benefit of digital incentives is that their management can be centralized and automated. Incentive management systems like Rybbon allow you to buy, manage, deliver, and track incentives all from one convenient location. An incentives management platform should provide you with all the tools needed to create an organized way of managing and tracking incentives.

Incentive Management

Imagine a world with no more spreadsheets of inventory! This is the world of automated incentives management. You can automate the purchase of incentives around particular projects or surveys then instantly deliver these rewards to any device through email. Ultimately, this cuts down the time it takes for the recipient to receive and use the reward.

An effective platform will then feed this information back into a centralized portal, which allows you to manage and report as well as integrate the data into your existing survey platform/data collection method. This makes it much easier for you to manage complex projects with multiple clients and payouts.Overall, this automated process is much faster and more accurate. You end up spending less time and money on purchasing, managing, delivering, and tracking your incentives. In addition, there is less room for error, so you spend less time and resources fielding complaints and resolving issues.

Mask recipient data and deliver rewards anonymously to remain IRB-compliant.

Slashing Project Management Burden and Cost

Most academic professionals aren't solely conducting research — they're also juggling service work, administrative responsibilities, and classroom teaching — so nothing is more valuable than time.

Additionally, much of academic research is funded by grants, and saving money and staying within budget is critical to ensuring future grant success. Unlike physical incentives, which must be paid for before delivery, virtual incentives allow for full refunds on unclaimed rewards, so you don't have to worry about wasting grant funds. Not all incentive management platforms offer refunds, so make sure to ask about unclaimed reward policies when evaluating a platform.

If you estimate the time it takes to manually deliver incentives (print checks, stuff them into envelopes, complete data entry, reconcile cashed checks, record incentive redemption, etc.), it takes about 500 hours to deliver 3,000 incentives per year.

A virtual prepaid card, like Visa or MasterCard, is delivered by email. Setup, delivery, and tracking/reporting can be accomplished in only 20% of the time it takes to deliver and facilitate physical incentives.

If you're delivering more than 3,000 incentives, then the cost and burden of physical options will continue to increase, while the hours put into delivering digital incentives will stay about the same, because they're much easier to scale.

Why are digital incentives easier and more affordable?

Digital incentives essentially eliminate the time-consuming tasks that are involved with managing, delivering, and tracking physical incentives. The right digital incentives management platform takes it a step further, streamlining the process and reducing the administration burden even more.

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Speeding Up Research Project Execution

Yet another benefit of instant incentives is that they can help speed up research project execution. Whether you are sending 1 or 1,000 rewards, you can do all of this with a digital system in just a matter of minutes.

How Instant Incentives Save You Time

An effective incentives management system lets you load and manage recipient lists by project, as well as automatically track recipients. When everything is efficiently organized, it's much easier to regularly upload growing lists from your data collection tool as often as needed.

This is a great benefit for qualitative research and multi-week studies when you do not want to wait until the study is over to pay all recipients in one batch. Automating your instant incentives allows you to pay incrementally on a daily or weekly basis.

You can also automate the process by integrating the data directly into your survey or data collection platforms, which just isn't possible with cash, manual checks, or physical gift cards.

Virtual incentives save time and money

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Chapter 5

Expanding Reach to Global Participants

Many academic studies span multiple countries, with research that hinges on international or cross-continental data collection. If you manage international surveys, then you have probably already experienced the challenges associated with international incentive delivery and management.

Sending out checks to distant countries or certain parts of the world can be very complicated due to issues with addresses or data errors. Even when addressed and shipped correctly, physical incentives can take several days or even weeks to arrive, and rush delivery options are too costly when you are dealing with hundreds of participants. Physical gift cards also pose a challenge in regard to availability, since they are often accepted in a limited number of countries or, even worse, only in the country where they were purchased.

Digital incentives help expand reach to global participants without the hassle.

Virtual prepaid Visa is delivered by email and accepted in more than 150 countries. This makes the prepaid card a more convenient incentive option for global participants than checks. Likewise, this option is often better than a digital gift card, which may still limit the countries in which it is accepted. For instance, the Amazon gift card is only accepted in 12 countries, and each country has its own specific card.

With something like virtual Visa, the exact same card can be used across multiple countries. This is a huge benefit for multi-country studies, allowing researchers to engage with participants in more countries.

Digital incentives help expand reach to global participants without the hassle.

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Complying with IRB Regulations and Audit Requirements

Automatic Tracking and Custom Reporting for IRB Regulations and Audit Requirements

With digital incentives and an integrated management system like Rybbon, much of this process becomes automatic. An incentives management platform allows you to track deliveries and recipients with 100% visibility, including what was sent to whom and for what purpose.

When your research project must comply with IRB regulations and deliver incentives anonymously, make sure to choose a platform that lets you send out rewards without the researcher seeing any identifiable information, while also still supplying robust reporting and tracking.

## What does IRB-compliant reward delivery look like?

- Decoupling respondent information from the reward request. Administrators can still access key functions, such as survey completion confirmations, reward status tracking, etc.

- Blinding recipient data as it gets passed over from the research platform.

- Eliminating any personal identifiable information (PII) from being passed between the reward and research platforms, while still maintaining full functionality, tracking, and reporting of all systems.

Reports can be customized to show only the necessary information, which allows you to better support requirements around regulations and compliance. Accurate data is vital for internal policies, as well as checks and balances. You need to be able to determine if you are paying the right people the right amount and ensure you can account for the money spent to eliminate budget waste.

An incentives management platform makes this much easier, allowing you to see and track all incentives in one central location. You can follow each incentive sent and compile automated reports by client, project, and recipient.

Account for money spent and eliminate budget waste.
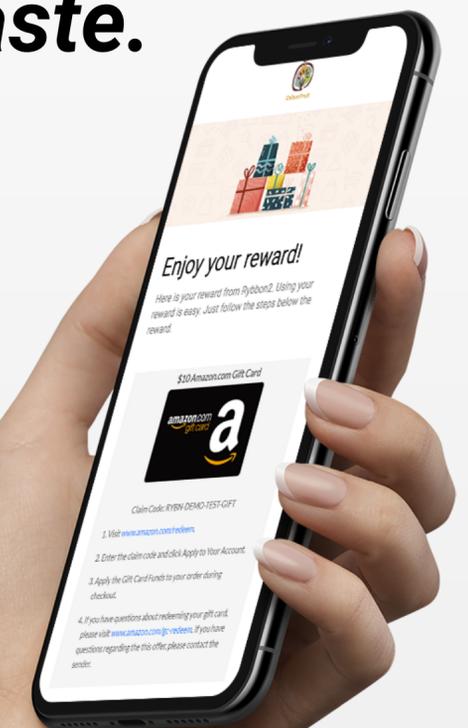
Chapter 7

Thanking Participants and Increasing Engagement

Have you ever had to field complaints from participants wondering where their reward is? Track down an incentive that's lost in the mail? Participant complaints and reward delivery delays cost time, money, and resources that would be better spent working on more critical tasks.

It's important to keep participants happy. They don't want to wait three to five weeks for their reward to arrive. If they start to get concerned or frustrated, it can jeopardize your research, especially if you are relying on these participants to return for future studies.

Ensuring participants are satisfied and engaged is especially critical for longitudinal studies that require an increased level of commitment.

Reward Flexibility and Customization

One way to keep participants happy is to use an incentives management platform that allows them to choose their reward. This is a great option if you aren't sure what reward is preferred, plus it can further incentivize participation because respondents can select a reward that is most meaningful to them.

For instance, you can give participants the choice of an Amazon virtual gift card, virtual prepaid Visa, or other digital reward from the brand of their choice. This can all be done using your incentives management tool, with zero overhead.

Improving Delivery

Instant incentives also make the delivery process more effective, helping you eliminate participant complaints and questions. The way that a reward is delivered is an important part of the experience, especially if you're hoping to engage participants for future studies. This is often lost when a third party is delivering rewards.

With an incentives management system, you can customize reward delivery with the appropriate messaging. Rewards are delivered from your email address, and the incentive is presented as a thank you from the program or school that conducted the research, rather than a third party. This helps ensure that rewards aren't accidentally deleted or lost in spam filters or promotional inboxes.

Furthermore, you can take advantage of the opportunity to drive engagement during the delivery process. In the delivery communication, you can ask participants to sign up for future studies, refer other respondents, or opt in for other communications.

Meet Rybbon: Pain-Free Incentives Management

Have you ever met anyone who enjoys doing incentives? We haven't either. Delivering incentives using cash, checks, or physical gift cards is painful, costly, and frustrating.

This is why we created Rybbon — the complete incentives management solution for researchers. Rybbon makes incentives management easy so that you can focus on your core research tasks. Rybbon takes the pain and costs out of incentives.

Here are just a few reasons why academic researchers love Rybbon:

Full range of incentives

With worldwide Visa, gift cards, and digital payment options, you have the choice of what types of incentives you'd like to use.

Project-based incentives management

Rybbon is designed to do more than just deliver rewards. You can organize all payouts by project, survey, or study as well as easily tally and track incentives. This makes reporting or exporting data easy.

Instant delivery by email

Participants no longer have to wait for incentives to arrive. Rybbon makes it easy to deliver incentives right to the participant via email.

Detailed rewards and cost tracking

Rybbon makes it simple to keep accurate records of your rewards and costs.

100% refund for unclaimed rewards

Around 5-20% of rewards go unclaimed. Rybbon automatically gives you a 100% refund. You will never waste your limited budget or grant funds on unclaimed gifts.

Recipient's choice

You can give every survey respondent a reward they value by letting them decide how they want to be rewarded. With Rybbon, you can set up a curated selection of gifts and e-donations and let your recipients select their preferred gift or donate to a charity of their choice.

Integration with your data collection and survey tools

Recipient data can be brought into Rybbon from virtually any data collection system using Rybbon's smart import capabilities. Rybbon also makes it easy to integrate incentives management into your existing survey, CATI and other data collection platforms with APIs. Rybbon provides out-of-the-box connectors for platforms like Survey Monkey and Qualtrics, so that you can quickly integrate our reward system with your survey management program.

Trusted delivery via your email domain

With Rybbon, your survey rewards are sent from your trusted email address and domain so that rewards are recognized and don't get lost in recipient inboxes. You can customize our mobile-friendly format with your unique voice and message.

Conclusion

Instant digital incentives take the hassle out of delivering rewards to research participants. A management system like Rybbon helps you automate the purchase, delivery, and tracking processes so that you can spend less time worrying about incentives and more time on other vital tasks.

Here are a few of the benefits of digital incentives:

- There are a range of digital incentives available – choose the most effective incentive for your target participants.
- Instant incentives drive down costs and speed up the research process, making you more efficient.
- Digital incentives keep participants happy by giving them a choice of reward and cut down on delivery delays and errors.
- Automated reward systems make it easy to track incentives for meeting regulations and audit requirements.
- Digital incentives open up new opportunities for you to expand your reach to international participants.
- Automated rewards make it possible for you to get back to your core research tasks.

Below are additional studies and resources on the value of incentives. Connect with us to learn how to incorporate instant incentives into your research methodology to streamline data collection, increase engagement, and save time and money.

Further Reading and Resources

- Resource From Qualtrics: How to Reward Your Survey Participants
- Qualtrics Blog: What you need to know when selecting an academic research platform
- Digiday Video: The Future of Consumer Rewards and Incentives
- Rybbon Blog: Ensure Survey Incentive Security and Protect Against Abuse in 4 Steps
- Association for Institutional Research Annual Forum: Does use of survey incentives degrade data quality?; Cole, J. S.; Sarraf, S. A.; Wang, X.

- Survey Lottery Incentives and Institutional Response Rates: An Exploratory Analysis; Shimon A. Sarraf James S. Cole, Ph.D

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