

Testing a new approach to reach millennials

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Abstract

To develop effective communication campaigns that convey information adequately to respondents, Statistics Canada has developed a segmentation pilot project with the objective of raising the profile of the agency's household surveys among specific population segments. The project aims to increase respondents' willingness to participate in surveys. The Respondent Communications team has therefore used evidence to create a targeted campaign that will speak to the audience.

The presentation will outline the pilot project's objective, approach and the selected segments of population (our target audience). It will also present the tools used as well as the dissemination plan for the campaign.

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (UNECE)

Workshop on Statistical Data Dissemination and Communication

(Cork, Ireland, June 25 to 27, 2018)

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Introduction

We have all noticed that it is increasingly difficult to convince respondents to participate in our surveys, and some groups are more challenging than others. This situation is not unique to Statistics Canada: many statistical organizations around the world are drawing the same conclusion.

To develop effective communication campaigns that adequately convey information to respondents, Statistics Canada has developed a segmentation pilot project with the objective of raising the profile of the agency's household surveys among specific population segments. The project aims to increase respondents' willingness to participate in surveys. As part of this project, the Respondent Communications team at Statistics Canada used evidence to create a targeted campaign that will speak to a particular audience.

1. What is segmentation?

In the consumer world, market segmentation is the process of **dividing** a broad consumer or business market, normally of existing and potential customers, **into subgroups** of consumers **based on some type of shared characteristics**. The overall aim of segmentation is to **identify high-yield segments**—that is, the segments that are likely to be most profitable or that have growth potential.

In our case, the project consists in dividing the population into a certain number of sociodemographic groups based on response-related behaviours to better understand the characteristics of non-respondents. In other words, we are using segmentation to identify the population clusters that have proven they do not respond to a certain type of survey, so that we can target our communications to provoke a reaction to our messages.

The 2016 Census in Canada used the segmentation approach and was the most successful census ever. So, it was thought at Statistics Canada that this method could be used for the surveys with the lowest response rates, as a means of increasing those rates. The surveys with the lowest response rates are obviously voluntary surveys, the majority of which are household surveys.

The segmentation work done for the 2016 Census showed that a segment of the population with one of the highest non-response rates for household surveys was young adults, or millennials. It should be noted that the entire Canadian population was segmented for the 2016 Census. In our current project, we are segmenting a **segment** of the population. So, our sample for this pilot project cannot be compared with the samples derived from the census segmentation exercise.

Still, we now know, with the help of our methodology experts, that millennials in Montréal do not respond to our household surveys, and we decided to target this segment of the population for the purposes of our project.

2. What we know about millennials

What are the characteristics of our target population? We know that millennials have a short attention span, they are very mobile and they need to be passionate about a cause to be engaged. So how do we get a hold of this population? How do we get through their front door and get them to listen to us? The digital connection.

We need to talk directly to them

A key communication principle is to adapt the message to the audience and to the medium for communicating it. Although it has been more than 50 years since Marshall McLuhan said it, his well-known phrase “the medium is the message” is still relevant today.

For the purposes of our campaign, the messages use a style and language that speak to young adults (aged 18 to 34) to interest them in statistics and convince them to participate in our surveys. The strategy was developed based on communication methods that appeal to millennials. In addition, we decided to illustrate the magnitude and value of Statistics Canada’s survey data by using concrete examples and a range of information from various surveys.

3. A concerted approach

Our approach is to promote household surveys as a whole rather than individually and ensure that the following messages are conveyed:

- Survey data are useful for measuring trends and determining whether measures implemented in certain areas are producing results.
- Responding to Statistics Canada surveys is useful and important!

Social media as a key tactic for mobilization

To disseminate the products and share the message with these young adults, we are publishing messages on our Facebook and Twitter accounts throughout the campaign. The project also involves purchasing targeted online advertising to connect with millennials directly. All messages include a link to the pilot project web page.

All products are being disseminated as a whole in a concerted way, and not individually. Paid social media activities support integrated components of a communications strategy that also uses outreach activities, content marketing and organic social media.

4. The tools

Adapted products

As part of this project, a variety of products are being created, including short videos and articles on topics of interest to young adults (education, career, housing and mental health), a printed insert, and a kit for partners.

The articles and 30-second video clips are being posted on a [web page dedicated to the pilot project](#) in the Information for Survey Participants module of Statistics Canada's website. Articles and videos about the first topic are currently on the page, and others will be added regularly to maintain public interest. The web page also includes a presentation on young adults, and infographics on the different topics will be added periodically.

The purpose of the insert is to promote the campaign among respondents on Montréal Island selected for the following surveys: the Labour Force Survey, the National Graduates Survey, the General Social Survey – Caregiving and Care Receiving, and the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. Since the beginning of the campaign, the insert has been included in the mail-outs with the invitation letters.

The kit for partners includes an explanatory note, a copy of the insert and a copy of the message publication schedule (social media).

The products feature a standard graphic design that people can easily associate with the campaign.

If the pilot project is successful, all these products can be reused for promoting household surveys at large.

5. A collaborative effort

This segmentation pilot project began in Statistics Canada's Methodology Branch. The branch has funded various projects to reduce the decline in response rates. A partnership was established in 2015 with representatives of various divisions, including Communications, to test the feasibility of segmenting the selected population for household surveys, drawing on the segmentation approaches used for the 2016 Census. In 2017/2018, the Respondent Communications team took over the project to develop a targeted strategy for one of the most difficult groups to convince: young adults aged 18 to 34 living in major urban centres. Eastern Region representatives in the Montréal office also joined the partnership.

Support from external and internal partners

Several educational institutions were also engaged in the Montréal area to expand the scope of the pilot project.

Statistics Canada employees are being solicited to help reach this segment of the population. If employees know any young adults aged 18 to 34 living on Montréal Island, they are invited to follow us on Facebook and Twitter and to share our messages about this pilot project with those young adults.

6. The dissemination plan

The plan is to disseminate the products in phases to keep interest going as long as possible. The length of the campaign is six months—from May to November 2018—and the campaign includes a gradual dissemination of electronic and print tools.

StatCan: External

- Devise a dissemination plan for the videos and articles on websites and social media platforms, based on the geographic and demographic characteristics of the segments selected and on their interests.
 - The plan factors in earned media as well as paid media.
- Mail out the inserts according to determined parameters.
- Promote the survey kit among designated organizations.

StatCan: Internal

- Implement an internal strategy to complement the external strategy. The two are intrinsically linked.

7. Measuring success

Measuring the effects of the pilot project

Everyone knows that behaviour does not change overnight. That is why the success of the pilot project will first be measured based on the visibility of the products on social media and on Statistics Canada's website: the number of shares and retweets, the number of video views, and the number of visitors to the pilot project web page. In addition, Statistics Canada's

Collection Planning and Research Division will compare the response rates of young adults in Montréal before and during the pilot project to measure its impact.

If successful, the segmentation pilot project will be systematically applied to all of Statistics Canada's household surveys and will go from being a pilot project to becoming the norm.