

Methods for Improving Response Rates: Findings from AAPOR 2012

Benjamin L. Messer

Washington State University

PAPOR Mini-Conference, June 22, 2012

Disclaimer

- *Papers/presentations obtained with author permission. Any misinterpretations are my own.*

Three paper sessions at AAPOR 2012

- Using Incentives to Increase Survey Participation & Decrease Bias
- Methodological Briefs: Methods for Improving Response Rates
- Maximizing Survey Response Rates

In the summaries that follow, I will refer to the author(s) & session number

1) Using Incentives to Increase Survey Participation & Decrease Bias

2) Methodological Briefs: Methods for Improving Response Rates

3) Maximizing Survey Response Rates

*I was unable to see all the sessions, or get papers/slides from all the authors.

Two major themes emerged from these sessions:

- A. Using Incentives to Increase Response Rates
- B. Manipulating Survey Materials to Improve Response Rates

A. Previous research on incentives suggests that they are effective at increasing response rates

- Cash more effective than other means
- Prepaid more effective than promised
- Noncontingent more effective than contingent
- However, questions remain about use of different incentives types.

Cash, Lotteries, or Discounts?

- Two papers tested offering respondents these types of incentives:
- **Stevenson et. al. (Session 1)** used web+mail design and provided Pell Grant eligible students:
 - Entry in a \$50 lottery (25 winners): 35% (25% via web)
 - Entry into an Ipad lottery (1 winner): 42% (32% via web)
 - A post-response \$10 bill: 49% (35% via web)
 - \$0: 37% (26% via web)
 - Control and Ipad lottery groups had lowest costs/complete
 - No difference in data quality

Cash, Lotteries, or Discounts? Cont.

- **Cardador (Session 1)** conducted a panel survey in 11 different department stores (Wal-mart, Target, Kohl's, etc.)
 - Tested offering respondents:
 - **Prize drawings** (Ipad lottery, free car, free gas, \$100 gift card drawing and instant)
 - **"Brand" discounts** (5% off, 15% off \$200 purchase, \$5 credit, \$5 off \$25 purchase)
 - **Combination sweepstakes** (\$100 instantly and \$1000 drawing, Ipad Touch instantly and \$5000 drawing, 5% off and \$5000 drawing)
- **Dollars and discounts performed best**
 - Prize drawings (e.g. free gas) outperformed cash drawings
 - Combinations performed worse overall
- Incentive preferences differed only by income → no clear trend, yet
- 43% indicated they would not complete survey without an incentive
 - 25% would complete

Incentive Contingency Effects

- **Lavrakas et. al. (Session 1)** tested offering respondents in a KnowledgePanel different combinations of noncontingent and contingent (i.e. promised) incentives
- \$5 non/\$10 con: 38.5% visited; 33.1% completed
- \$5 non/\$25 con: 42.6% visited; 34.8% completed
- \$10 non/\$10 con: 37.9% visited; 30.3% completed
- \$10 non/\$25 con: 55.1% visited; 39.9% completed
- Those who received the largest incentive were least likely to complete questions
 - Opposite effect for smallest incentive group
- Limitations: no groups without (non)contingent incentives

Incentive Amounts

- **Viera et. al. (Session 2)** tested the effects of offering respondents in a Department of Defense Youth Poll mail survey:
 - \$1 prepaid + \$5 promised: 15%
 - \$2 prepaid + \$5 promised: 16%
 - No differences on demographics or measurement

Differential Effects of Incentives on Sub-Populations

- **Keirns (Poster)** analyzed the effects of offering \$1 incentive across different sub-populations (i.e. adults, families, youth) in a mail/phone survey in NH
 - Population defined as “vulnerable” (mental health conditions)
- \$1 resulted in significant increase in adult responses (49% vs. 32%)
 - Marginal improvement for families (42% vs. 40%) and youth (30% vs. 29%) but not significant

Differential Incentives to Target Nonresponding HHs

- **Jang et. al. (Session 3)** conducted the National Survey of Recent College Graduates using mail/web with CATI follow-up
- All HHs received initial incentive
 - Followed results in real-time and sent differential incentives to different types of households in the follow-up mailing
 - \$20 to some, \$30 to some
 - Did not significantly increase response rates but did reduce response times, particularly for web

Effects of Incentives on Nonresponse Bias

- **Felderer et. al. (Session 1)** used a German panel survey with data on nonrespondents to determine if offering prepaid \$10 Euro or contingent lottery ticket:
 - Results in more low-income HHs
 - Lower nonresponse bias in regards to wealth
- \$10 Euro: 86% RR
- Lottery: 80% RR
 - Cash more effective at obtaining lower income HHs
 - Nonresponse bias on wealth variables lower for cash incentive group

B. Survey Materials can be Manipulated to Improve Response Rates

- Stamps, envelopes, and letters in mail surveys
 - Little is known about the effects of these on response
 - Stamps and envelopes could enhance the salience of the mailing
 - Letters can be used to encourage people to respond

The effects of different envelope stamps, and the timing of the mailing?

- **Tarnai et. al. (Session 2)** tested the use of a standard stamp vs. a business-reply envelope
 - Standard stamp obtained slightly higher response rates
- **Benson et. al. (Session 2)** tested the use of metered mail, US Flag stamp, and Latino legend stamp
 - Resulted in no differences
- **Pens & Gentry (Session 3)** tested the use of standard mail postage vs. First Class postage sent on different days of the week
 - First Class postage sent on Monday worked best
 - Tuesday & Saturday worse days to mail


The effects of envelope size and look?

- **Tarnai et. al. (Session 2)** also tested medium vs. standard sized envelopes
 - Resulted in slightly higher response rate for medium size envelopes
 - More get opened
- **Pens & Gentry (Session 3)** found envelopes designed to look like “promotional” material performed better than envelopes that look more “official” in an Arbitron Radio Diary Survey
 - “Official” materials performed better later in data collection period

Promotional


vs.


Official



You have an opportunity to impact radio ratings.

A rewarding opportunity.







It doesn't matter how much or how little you listen. We want your input—and we will reward you for it.

Congratulations! You have been selected to take part in the Arbitron Radio Ratings. You will soon receive a mailing from Arbitron. It will explain how to tell radio stations what you listen to, so they can better serve your needs.

Each member of your household age 12 or older is encouraged to participate. It's easy, and entirely voluntary. This is your chance to be a part of the Radio Ratings—and be rewarded for it!



Look for the Arbitron Radio Ratings package coming soon to your mailbox.



DO NOT FORWARD

<First Name> <Last Name>
<Address 1>
<Address 2>
<City>, <State> <Zip+4>




9740 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046-1521



Your Radio Ratings Access Card is on its way.

<First Name> <Last Name>
<Address 1>
<Address 2>
<City>, <State> <Zip+4>



You have been selected to take part in the Arbitron Radio Ratings. **We are mailing your card with your personal code. Please look for it.**

Arbitron collects essential ratings information used by radio stations, and it is important that you participate.

- Please be alert for the Arbitron Radio Ratings mail package and card that we are sending to you.
- Your card contains a personal code that can be used to access your Ratings Diary.
- You will receive a \$10 reward for completing your Ratings Diary.

PLEASE NOTE: Participation is voluntary, and each member of your household age 12 or older is encouraged to take part.

Please open your Arbitron Radio Ratings mailing and use your card as soon as it arrives.

The effects of different letters?

- **Wouhib et. al. (Session 3)** conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of pre-notification or advanced letters to respondents
 - Improves screener completion rates and interview completion rates
 - Has the opposite effect on eligibility rates and overall response rates
 - May signal to some respondents that no more info is needed or that the survey will be burdensome
- **Pens & Gentry (Session 3)** also found that prenotices did not increase response rates in an Arbitron Radio Diary Survey
 - Worked when combined with pre-recorded telephone messages
- **Benson et. al. (Session 2)** tested the effects of sending bilingual letters
 - Improved Hispanic-flagged RR but had opposite effect on RR for non-Hispanic HHs

Summary & Conclusions

- Cash still rules, but other incentives (e.g. lotteries, discounts, etc.) may be effective in different surveys and populations.
 - Could produce lower quality data (Lavrakas et. al.)
 - Combinations of noncontingent and contingent incentives needs more research, appears promising
 - More research also needed on the nonresponse effects of using incentives
- Different survey materials in mail surveys can lead to marginal improvements in response rates
 - Standard stamp or First class appears better than metered or business-reply mail
 - Larger envelopes may draw more attention
 - Promotional design may be more effective than something more “official”
 - More research needed on effects of prenotice letters
 - Previous research shows a substantial effect, but not so in AAPOR papers

Questions?

Thanks!

bmesser@wsu.edu

Papers/Posters

- Stevenson et. al. (Session 1). “What are the Odds? Lotteries vs. Cash Incentives”
- Cardador (Session 1). “Maximizing Survey Participation for Retail Customers by Understanding Survey Mode and Incentive Preferences”
- Lavrakas et. al. (Session 1). “Experimenting with Noncontingent & Contingent Incentives in a Media Measurement Panel”
- Viera et. al. (Session 2). “Combining Prepaid & Promised Incentives: Impact of Prepaid Amount in a Mail Survey of Young Adults”
- Kierns (Poster). “Differential Effects of Cash Incentives in Vulnerable Populations”
- Jang et. al. (Session 3). “Implementing Timely Data Collection Interventions Based on Response Rates & Key Survey Estimates”
- Felderer et. al. (Session 1). “Incentives Effects on Nonresponse Bias”
- Tarnai et. al. (Session 2). “Response Rate Effects in an ABS Survey for Stamped vs. Business Reply Return Envelopes, With & Without Incentives, and Medium vs. Standard Size”
- Benson et. al. (Session 2). “Response Rate and Recall Effects of Using a Tailored Stamp on Advance Materials in a General Population Telephone Survey”
- Pens & Gentry (Session 3). “The Effect on Differential Mail Methodologies on Response Rates: Testing Advanced Notices, Package Design, Postage & Personalization”
- Wouhib et. al. (Session 3). “Exploring the Effect of an Advance Letter on Response Rates: A Meta-Analysis Study for the National Immunization Survey.”