Satisficing in Telephone Surveys: 
Do Prepaid Incentives Make a Difference?

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Prepaid incentives appear to be effective tool for increasing response rates
- Norm of reciprocity: prepaid incentives create sense of obligation

Does sense of obligation continue while respondent completes survey?
- Lingers $\rightarrow$ increased effort
- Resolved by agreeing to participate $\rightarrow$ equivalent effort

Existing literature finds increased respondent effort or no effect
- Focus on item nonresponse and responses to open-ended items
- Current study designed to look at a wider variety of respondent effort indicators
DATA COLLECTION

- Telephone survey conducted in summer of 2011
  - Topics: health, employment, current social issues

- Listed sample
  - Name, address, telephone number for all sample members

- Incentive experiment
  - 40% of advance letters included a $5 bill

- Significant increase in response rate
  - Control: 11%; Incentive: 23%

- Reduced cost per complete by 10%

- No significant differences in demographic composition
  - Age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, region
RESULTS: ITEM NONRESPONSE

Significant reduction in proportion of respondents skipping at least one item

Incentive | Control
--- | ---
54% | 61%

Significant decrease in mean proportion of items skipped

Incentive | Control
--- | ---
2.3% | 2.9%
RESULTS: RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED ITEMS

- No significant differences in terms of
  - Item nonresponse
  - Mean number of words
  - Mean number of ideas

Mean Number of Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Incentive</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Across all three items</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS: RESPONSES TO BATTERIES

- No significant differences in terms of:
  - Straight-lining
    - Proportion of respondents selecting same response for all items
  - Non-differentiation
    - Mean respondent-level standard deviation

### Straight-lining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Battery 1</th>
<th>Battery 2</th>
<th>Battery 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least one</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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</table>

### Non-differentiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Battery 1</th>
<th>Battery 2</th>
<th>Battery 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All three</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS: RESPONSE ORDER EFFECTS

- Respondents in both groups equally likely to select first two options / last two options (27 items)

- Response order experiment (4 items)
  - No significant interactions between incentive and response option order
RESULTS: ACQUIESCENCE

- Mean number of affirmative responses was equivalent in the two groups (29 eligible items)

![Graph showing mean number of affirmative responses](image)
RESULTS: NUMERIC RESPONSES

No effect on mean proportion of items for which respondents provided round values

No effect on proportion of respondents indicating use of estimation strategy

15 eligible items

1 eligible item: respondents asked how they came up with number of Dr. visits in the past year
RESULTS

- No significant differences for:
  - Accuracy as compared to frame
    - Number of years living in current residence: perfect match
    - Incentive: 22%; Control: 20%
  - Interviewer observations
    - Respondent answered questions to best of ability ‘very often’
    - Incentive: 77%; Control 73%
  - Underreporting to filter items
    - Randomized order of 6 filter items (1 potential follow-up for each)
    - No pattern of underreporting in either condition
  - Attention to exclusions
    - Half of respondents asked to exclude a subcategory from consideration
      - How many servings of vegetables did you eat in the past 7 days? [Please do not include carrots, beans, or lettuce.]
RESULTS: INTERVIEW LENGTH

- Mean seconds per item significantly smaller in incentive group than in control group
CONCLUSIONS

- Significant effect of incentive on two of the twelve indicators
  - Reduced item nonresponse
  - Reduced time spent per question

- Prepaid cash incentives may not lead to much in way of increased effort
  - May not affect sense of obligation beyond point of agreeing to participate

- However, reassuring for those considering use of prepaid cash incentives – no reason to believe they result in reduced respondent effort

- Future work
  - Compare survey reports with validation data
  - Consider that effect might differ according to respondent characteristics

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