The Effectiveness of Mailed Invitations for Web Surveys

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Background 1

• If e-mail addresses are available, using e-mail for Web survey invitations may be most efficient
• But there are some concerns with e-mail invitations
  – Low legitimacy
  – Concerns about spam
  – Privacy concerns when soliciting e-mail addresses
  – Many sample frames don‘t contain e-mail addresses
• Mailed invitations are an alternative
  – Greater legitimacy
  – Opportunity to deliver monetary incentive
  – But involves a media break
Background 2

- Over the past decade we have been conducting research on Web surveys as follow-up to the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS), a biennial face-to-face survey
- In our 2010 research (reported in *Survey Practice*), we found:
  - A mailed letter (pre-notice or invitation) is more effective than e-mail alone (51% vs. 40% response rate)
  - Asking for e-mail addresses is sensitive: only 45% provided their e-mail
  - The 55% who did not were not invited to the Web survey, even though they had Internet access
- In 2012 we experimented with:
  - Not asking e-mail address
  - Conducting a mixed-mode (mail and Web) survey
Research Aims

• To test the effectiveness of asking (or not) for an e-mail address and then sending a mailed invitation to a Web survey
• To test the effectiveness of a mixed-mode procedure comparing Internet users and non-users, using a
  – Mailed invitation to a Web survey
  – Mailed reminder with a paper questionnaire
Method

• The study was designed as a follow-up to the 2012 ALLBUS
  – Random sample of German-speaking adults, with persons randomly selected from the community registers
  – Face-to-face interviews (CAPI)
  – Response rate of 37.6%

• Respondents to the ALLBUS were requested to participate in a mixed-mode (Web and mail) follow-up survey
  – Random assignment with 1/3 of willing Internet users asked for e-mail address and 2/3 not asked
  – All groups sent invitation by mail to Web survey; reminder included paper questionnaire
Overall Process

CAPI interviews (n=3480)

- with Internet access n=2525 (73%)
  - willing follow-up n=2140 (85%)

- no Internet access n=955 (27%)
  - willing follow-up n=592 (62%)

Random subsamples of groups; each group: n = 250

- group A: Internet, not asked for e-mail address
- group B: Internet, asked and gave e-mail address
- group C: Internet, asked and did not give e-mail address
- group D: no Internet access

Mail invitation with link to Web survey and reminder with paper questionnaire
Counts and Response Rates (AAPOR RR2) by Group

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<th>group</th>
<th>Internet access</th>
<th>asked for email address</th>
<th>Invited R</th>
<th>response in percent</th>
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<td>reminder: paper questionnaire</td>
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</table>
Response Rates by Group

Group A
- Mail: 30.4%
- Web: 19.2%

Group B
- Mail: 22.4%
- Web: 26.4%

Group C
- Mail: 32.0%
- Web: 22.0%

Group D
- Mail: 54.0%
- Web: 3.2%

49.6  48.8  54.0  57.2
Results

- Only 42% of those with Internet access asked for e-mail address provided it
- Asking for e-mail address did not affect Web or overall response rate; Web response rates:
  - Not asked: 19.2%
  - Asked and provided: 26.4%
  - Asked and non provided: 22.0%
- Providing mail questionnaire with reminder significantly increases the overall weighted response rate:
  - Web only: 16.9%
  - Web + mail: 51.8%
Summary and Conclusions 1

• Overall response rates similar across all groups, suggesting a mixed-mode design is an effective strategy to bring in respondents, especially if
  – Internet status is not known
  – E-mail addresses are not available
• Asking for e-mail address does not appear to have negative consequences, even if a majority do not provide it
  • In 2010, highest response rate (57%) achieved with mailed prenotice + e-mailed invitation
Summary and Conclusions 2

• Mixed-mode design includes a larger proportion of the original sample
  • 2010: 328 out of 2,867 responded to Web-only survey with e-mail invitation (13% of original sample)
  • 2012: 1,415 out of 3,480 would have responded to mixed-mode survey with mail invitation (41% of original sample), if all were invited
• Next step is to look at representativeness of mixed-mode versus Internet-only samples