

USING A PHYSICALLY ATTRACTIVE RESEARCHER TO INCREASE MAIL SURVEY RESPONSE

ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates whether the photograph of a physically attractive researcher, when placed in a mail survey cover letter, can significantly affect survey response. Ample empirical evidence exists to suggest that a cover letter containing the photograph of an attractive researcher could generate a better survey response than a cover letter that omits a photograph. Numerous reports indicate that when a physically attractive person is used to present a message, the persuasiveness of the message is enhanced [Chaiken 1979] [Debevec, Madden, & Kernan 1986]. Moreover, in studies where a physically attractive message sender is depicted in a photograph and compared to a control condition that does not use a photograph, the treatment with the photograph generally produces more favorable results [Horai, Naccari, & Fatoullah 1974] [Patzner 1983].

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

A systematic random sampling procedure was used to select 150 names and addresses from a Los Angeles telephone directory - Pacific Bell's Northwestern Area edition.

Treatments and Procedures

This study used the "after-only with control group" design [Churchill 1991]. Subjects were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control condition. Subjects assigned to the treatment received a mail survey cover letter with a picture of a twenty year old female researcher photocopied in black and white on the lower left side of the page. The picture was roughly two and a half inches

square. Those assigned to the control group received the same cover letter without the picture.

RESULTS

The treatment group produced a significantly higher response rate (40% vs. 19%) and a significantly lower speed of response (8.5 days vs. 5.9 days) than did the control group. There were no significant differences between the two groups on the item omission rate or sample bias.

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