

WILL OFFERING RESPONDENTS A SUMMARY OF THE
RESULTS AFFECT THE RESPONSE TO A MAIL SURVEY?

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Should a copy of the survey results be offered to mail survey respondents? Some survey practitioners recommend this practice, for they believe it will increase the response rate to the survey. Experimental research, however, has produced mixed results concerning the efficacy of this technique. It is not clearly understood what conditions must prevail for this technique to be effective. The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate whether the nature of the questionnaire (interesting vs. uninteresting questionnaire) interacts with the offer of survey results. It is proposed that offering the results will increase the response rate only when the questionnaire is of interest to the survey population. If members of the survey population find a questionnaire interesting, they should view a copy of the results as a reward, and thereby be motivated to respond. On the other hand, if a questionnaire holds little interest to members of the population, the results should not be of interest to them and should not serve as a motivator of response.

Two questionnaires were developed to represent opposite ends of the interest dimension. The interesting questionnaire was represented by the Mind Inventory Catalog (MIC). It consists of a variety of interesting questions covering topics such as vacation and job preferences, sex, love, marriage, divorce, money, religion, crime, and public behavior. The Tax Survey (TS), in contrast, consists of a series of monotonous questions on tax issues, and was designed to represent the uninteresting questionnaire.

To determine whether each questionnaire produced the desired effect, a perception study was conducted among 123 undergraduate business students. The students were randomly assigned to receive either the MIC or the TS in a classroom setting. Each student was asked to complete the questionnaire he/she had received and to evaluate it with a questionnaire consisting of ten semantic differential scales. The scales covered a variety of attributes such as length, variety, topic importance, and interest. Factor analysis was applied to the data and it indicated that the most important dimension represented by the ten scales was the "interesting-boring" dimension. Both the MIC and TS were evaluated on this dimension (i.e., the factor scores were analyzed) and it was discovered that the MIC was perceived by the students to be significantly more interesting than the TS. Thus, these results confirm that the MIC is a more interesting questionnaire than the TS.

To test whether the offer of survey results is affected by the nature of the questionnaire, a 2 X 2 factorial design was used. One independent variable was questionnaire interest (interesting vs. uninteresting questionnaire). It was manipulated by mailing the subject either the MIC (interesting questionnaire) or the TS (uninteresting questionnaire). The second independent variable was "summary offered" (summary offered vs. summary not offered). Each of the four treatment groups was randomly assigned 105 undergraduate business students, and each student was mailed a questionnaire package consisting of a questionnaire, cover letter, and stamped return envelope.

The results show that offering a copy of the survey results to the respondent had no effect on either the rate, speed, or quality of response, regardless of the nature of the questionnaire. Application of this technique simply increases the costs and time required to complete the survey. It is not clear why this technique was ineffective. It appears that the offer of survey results appealed primarily to those persons who would have responded to the survey even if the results were not offered. That is, the technique may have reinforced some respondents' inclination to respond but may have had little effect on those persons who were not already inclined to respond.