

Using Mixed-Mode Contacts to Facilitate Participation in Public Agency Client Surveys¹

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Abstract

Considerable research has focused on encouraging responses via the web for address-based samples of the general population. This study examines incorporating e-mail addresses into mixed-mode procedures for a survey of an agency's clients. The survey of clients who received information from the Cooperative Extension Service is used to analyze how implementation procedures and response mode affect behavior as measured by response rate and response mode over the contact sequence. When mail and e-mail addresses were used to implement a sequence of e-mail and postal invitations in a mixed-mode design, response rates were somewhat lower to those for mail only surveys. On the other hand, postage costs were substantially lower for the mixed-mode groups and the distributions of the substantive and demographic questions were nearly identical to the postal only group. This study demonstrates the benefit of obtaining e-mail addresses and using them in a mixed-mode survey process.

Introduction

- Survey researchers aspire to find cost effective strategies for getting people to go to the Web to respond to surveys.
- A recent study estimated costs could be reduced 12-20% by using a mixed-mode approach (Holmberg, Lorenc, & Werner, 2010)
- Survey invitations via postal mail continue to generate a higher response rate than Web-hosted surveys or the choice of Web/paper instruments (Israel, 2010; Lesser, Yang, & Newton, 2011; Messer & Dillman, 2010; Smyth, Dillman, Christian, & O'Neill, 2010).
- Survey procedures with mixed-mode sequencing and strategic timing can improve response rates in well-connected and technologically-literate populations (Converse, Wolfe, Huang, & Oswald, 2008; Millar & Dillman, 2011)
- This research explores the role of mode sequence and timing for Extension clients.
- Clients, like the general population, do not have universal access to the Internet and are diverse with regard to education and age

Methods

- Data were collected for the annual survey of Florida Cooperative Extension Service's (FCES) clients in 2011.
- The sample (n=1,939) was sorted into three strata:
 1. those providing both an e-mail address and a postal address
 2. those providing a postal address only
 3. those providing an e-mail address only.
- Those providing both an e-mail and postal address were randomly assigned to three experimental groups:
 1. Postal only

2. E-mail preference

3. E-mail with final contact by mail

- In the second and third strata, clients provided either a postal address or an e-mail address and were labeled as: *Postal only* and *E-mail only*.

Survey procedures by treatment group

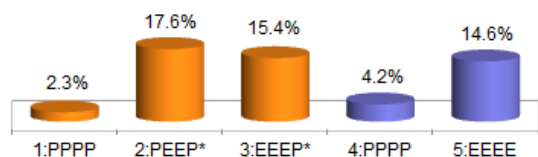
	----- Contact information available -----				
	----- Postal and e-mail address -----			Postal only	E-mail only
	1. Postal only	2. E-mail preference	3. E-mail with final mail	4. Postal only	5. E-mail only
1st contact	Mail pre-letter	Mail pre-letter	E-mail invitation with link	Mail pre-letter	E-mail invitation with link
2nd contact	Mail letter & questionnaire	E-mail invitation with link	E-mail invitation with link	Mail letter & questionnaire	E-mail invitation with link
3rd contact	Mail post card	E-mail invitation with link	E-mail invitation with link	Mail post card	E-mail invitation with link
4th contact	Mail letter & questionnaire	Mail letter & questionnaire	Mail letter & questionnaire	Mail letter & questionnaire	E-mail invitation with link

- A unified mode design was used to construct the mail and Internet instruments (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2009) to provide the same verbal and visual presentation to clients.
- This included using the same questions and question order and minimizing visual design differences.
- Clients receiving the invitation via e-mail could click on the link in the message to access the URL and then enter a personal identification number (PIN).

Findings

- It is difficult to obtain complete contact information for conducting mixed-mode surveys.
- Groups using e-mail had a higher percentage of undeliverables that were caused by:
 - writing could not be accurately deciphered
 - errors during entry into the contact database
 - obsolete addresses as clients change e-mail service providers between collecting the

Unreachable Rate by Contact Mode

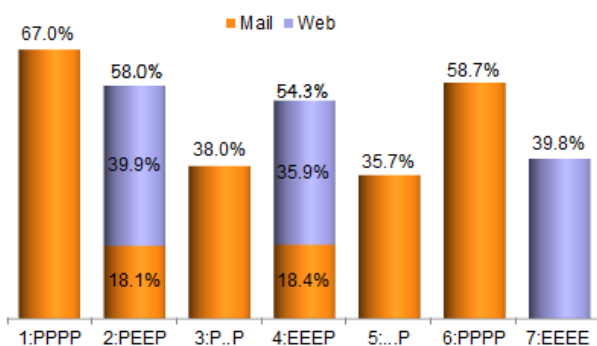


*Mail not substituted for bounced e-mail

contact data and initiating the survey

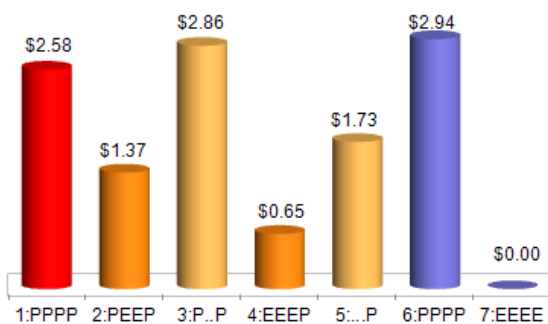
- The mail only group (1:PPPP) had a statistically significant higher response rate than the two mixed-mode groups (2:PEEP and 4:EEEE). The e-mail preference group and the e-mail then mail group had statistically equivalent response rates.
- The mixed-mode groups had a majority of respondents who completed the survey on the Web.
- The response rates for clients in the mixed mode groups who did not received the e-mail invitations (groups 3:P..P and 5:...P) were modest, in excess of 35%.

Response Rate by Contact Mode and Response Mode



- Postage costs for the mixed-mode groups were much lower and fewer paper surveys were manually entered into the database.

Postage Cost Per Completed Survey



Conclusions and Discussion

- The two mixed-mode groups that combined e-mail with postal invitations generated somewhat lower response rates to the mail only group but the substantive results were similar (data not shown).
- The response rate for the e-mail then mail treatment using mail and e-mail contacts suggest that there is a complementary relationship that is superior to e-mail only surveys.

- Perhaps the mixed-mode approach provides an opportunity for more people to act on their mode preference (Millar & Dillman, 2011).
- When offered the Web-hosted survey initially, more respondents were pushed to the Web. These respondents appear to have flexible attitudes toward the Web mode.

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