

LORE methodological note

2014:8

Recruitment effects of reminders, personalization and incentives

Johan Martinsson
Karolina Riedel

ABSTRACT

This methodological note examines how different numbers of follow-up contacts, lottery incentives, personalization and combinations thereof affects recruitments to an online panel from probability based samples of respondents. This note concludes that a small lottery incentive in itself, and an incentive combined with personalization can be effective. It is also evident that to reach a higher recruitment rate more effort and follow-up contacts are needed.

Data

In November 2012 a postal recruitment invitation to 29,000 potential recruits randomly selected from the Swedish national population register was conducted at the University of Gothenburg. The aim of the recruitment was to increase the probability based part of the Citizen Panel at the University of Gothenburg, but also to find a cost-efficient way to recruit high quality panelists. In web panel recruitment there is always a balance between keeping the recruitment costs down and reaching and sustaining a high quality panel. One of the main questions is therefore whether it is possible to strike a balance between quality and cost, and whether this balance can be improved by using for example personalization or incentives in the invitation.

The recruitment followed an experimental design with thirteen randomized treatment groups based on four basic treatments:

- One using a standard postcard
- One using weak personalization
- One using a symbolic (i.e. inexpensive) lottery incentive
- One using a combination of personalization and incentive

All potential respondents received postcards with identical front pages (see appendix 2), but the information on the back side varied. Within these four basic treatments the numbers of reminders were varied, and some received incentives in the reminders, but not in the original invitation (see appendix 1 for a table presenting the complete experimental treatment set-up. This note however, only analyses 9 of the total 13 treatment groups.

Groups 3 and 6 that use different modes in the initial postcard and the reminder postcard are excluded as this makes them difficult to compare to the other groups, and groups 12 and 13 are excluded for the same reason because they received a substantially shorter recruitment questionnaire.

The incentive was a weak form of a lottery incentive where a lotto number was printed on each postcard back side. Respondents were told that they would receive any money this number would win in the Swedish national lotto if they answered the recruitment survey and signed up to the web panel before a specified date. The monetary value of this lotto number was very low (approximately 0.3 euros). Therefore, this should be characterized as a form of weak (almost symbolic) lottery incentive.

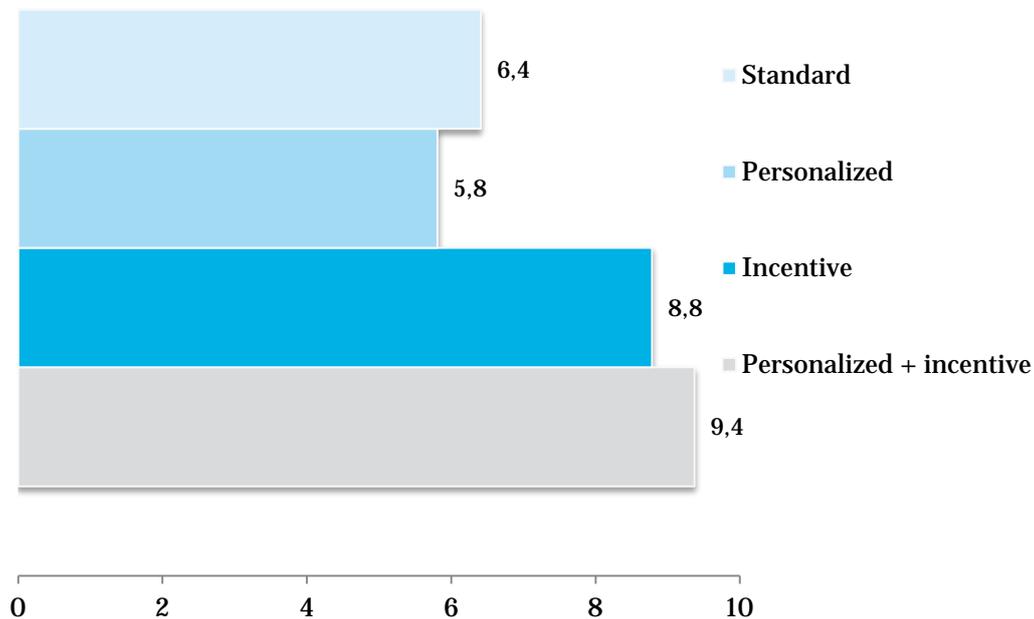
The personalization was also a weak kind of personalization based on six demographic groups. The respondents assigned to the personalization condition were told that “currently we are especially looking for more [men/women] between [18 and 30/31 and 50/51 and 70] years old in order to make the Citizen panel represent Sweden well.” The characteristics matching the respondents’ demographic group were inserted on each postcard.

The hypothesis was that incentives and personalization would affect the recruitment rate in a positive way and that reminders in all cases would increase the recruitment rates.

Results

The initial results, only looking at treatment groups that received no reminders, show that the personalized postcard does not reach a significantly different recruitment rate than the standardized postcard. The incentivized postcard on the other hand reaches a recruitment rate of almost 9 percent which is significantly higher than the personalized and the standardized postcards. In line with our expectations the highest recruitment rate is achieved by the combination of incentives and personalization. This group reaches more than 9 percent, which however is not significantly higher than only using an incentive. These numbers suggest that there are almost no differences when using a standard postcard or personalization, but a positive effect of using incentives and combining personalization and incentives. This means the effect really stems from the incentive, and not from the personalization. It also seems difficult to reach a higher recruitment rate than ten percent without using any reminders in this Swedish context, at least without using stronger, and more expensive, incentives. Figure 1 displays the results from these four basic treatment groups.

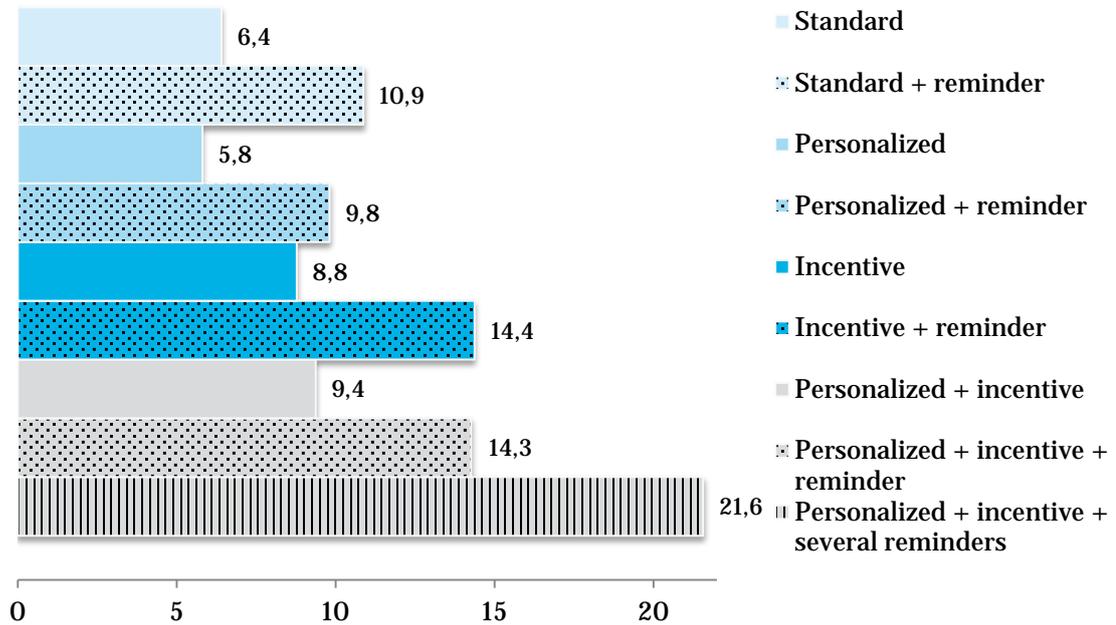
Figure 1: Recruitment rates in basic treatment groups using no reminders, in percent



Next, we will examine the results of the different treatment groups when also using reminders. These results are presented in figure 2. When using one reminder, there is still no statistically significant difference between the standard and the personalized postcard. The incentivized postcard continues to follow the combined personalized and incentivized postcard, and they end up at recruitment rates significantly higher than the standard and personalized postcards.

Perhaps not very surprising, more effort and follow-up contacts lead to higher recruitment rates in general. This is visible and significant in all treatment groups. Both when combined and when used alone incentives clearly reaches an even higher recruitment rate of 14 percent when using one reminder, compared to 9 percent without a reminder. Lastly, when using several more follow-up contacts of different types, the combined personalization and incentives group, a recruitment rate of almost 22 percent was obtained. In total, this group of potential recruits could receive up to two postal reminders and one telephone reminder (three call attempts).

Figure 2: Recruitment rates in basic treatment groups including reminders, in percent



Concluding remarks

Following these results there does not seem to be any strong positive effect of personalization by itself. Using incentives or combining incentives with personalization on the other hand does seem to be substantially more efficient. This means that the additional effect in these two groups is due to the incentives alone and not to the personalization. More effort in recruiting respondents leads to a higher recruitment rate, but earlier studies reveal that even though the recruitment rate increases, the cost per recruited respondent also increases with higher response rates, see LORE Methodological Note 2013:3. It is therefore difficult to tell where the balance between cost and quality is optimized. For an analysis of the long run response rates and their differing initial effort of recruitment, see LORE Methodological Note 2014:2.

Appendix 1

Group nr	Invitation type	Reminder	Gross sample
1	Standard postcard	-	3,000
2	Standard postcard	Standard postcard	3,000
3	Standard postcard	Incentive	1,000
4	Personalized postcard	-	3,000
5	Personalized postcard	Personalized postcard	3,000
6	Personalized postcard	Personalized postcard with incentive	1,000
7	Postcard with incentive	-	3,000
8	Postcard with incentive	Postcard with incentive	3,000
9	Personalized postcard with incentive	-	3,000
10	Personalized postcard with incentive	Personalized postcard with incentive	3,000
11	Personalized postcard with incentive	Personalized postcard with incentive, several reminders	2,000
12	Standard postcard with shorter questionnaire	Standard postcard	500
13	Standard postcard with shorter questionnaire and no login needed)	Standard postcard	500
Total			29,000

Appendix 2

(“What do YOU think?”)

VAD TYCKER DU?



din åsikt behövs till forskning om demokrati och opinion



MOD The Multidisciplinary Opinion
& Democracy Research Group



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

The Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) is an academic web survey center located at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. LORE was established in 2010 as part of an initiative to strengthen multidisciplinary research on opinion and democracy. The objective of the Laboratory of Opinion Research is to facilitate for social scientists to conduct web survey experiments, collect panel data, and to contribute to methodological development. For more information, please contact us at:

info@lore.gu.se