

LORE methodological note

2014:19

Offering an incentive in web panel recruitment. Most efficiently introduced at a later stage?

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ABSTRACT

This methodological note examines the efficiency of different recruitment strategies to a probability based web panel. The note specifically studies the effect of introducing an incentive in the follow-up contact compared to using standard postcards, personalization, or using incentives from the beginning. The results reveal that using incentives is the most efficient way to increase recruitment rates, but that the final recruitment rates are the same if the incentive is introduced in the invitation letter (thus offering it to everyone) or only in the follow-up contact (thus offering it only to those who do not sign up immediately).

Background and data

In 2012 LORE launched a major recruitment to increase the probability based part of the Citizen Panel. To evaluate different recruitment strategies an experimental approach was used where some potential respondents received a standard postcard, some a lottery incentive with a very small monetary value, some a demographically personalized postcard, and some received different treatments in the initial contact and in the following reminder. See appendix for the complete experimental set-up and the layout of the postcard, this note will focus the analyses on groups 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8. In survey research incentives is a well-known but expensive way to increase response rates. This recruitment resulted in varying recruitment rates, and the treatment groups that received incentives reached exceptionally high recruitment rates compared to the other groups. See LORE methodological note 2014:8 for an initial overview of different recruitment rates in this recruitment effort.

This note aims to examine the effect of introducing an incentive in the follow-up contact of the recruitment, rather than offering it from the beginning, more closely by evaluating the efficiency in terms of recruitment rates of these different strategies. The main group of interest is the treatment group that first received a standard invitation postcard and then received the small lottery incentive in the reminder.

Results

Table 2 reveals that the treatment groups with the incentive appearing in the reminder reach a significantly higher recruitment rate than the other groups not using an incentivized reminder. There is however no significant difference to the group using both personalization and incentive in the reminder or to the group receiving an incentive from the beginning.

Table 1: Recruitment rates depending on treatment group (in percent)

	Standard invitation (standard reminder)	Standard invitation (incentive reminder)	Personalized invitation (personalized reminder)	Personalized invitation (personalized and incentive reminder)	Incentive invitation (incentive reminder)
Recruitment rate	10.87***	14.2	9.81***	12.47	14.37
N	2,980	986	2,977	994	2,965

Comment: *** variable significantly different at 99%, standard postcard with incentive reminder vs each of the other postcards. Net sample size, i.e. the original sample minus returned postcards and dropped invalid addresses.

To ensure that the reminder effect when introducing an incentive is not due to differences in sample composition despite treatment groups being randomly assigned to participants demographic comparisons have been performed. These tests show that the postcard with only incentives has a somewhat lower share of respondents with children under the age of twenty and that those receiving personalization but no incentives to a larger extent live in a city. Children, level of urbanization and distance to Gothenburg have been found to somewhat increase the probability to sign up to the Citizen Panel, see LORE methodological notes 2014:9 and 2014:14. The main demographic effect on recruitment rate is however age, with older people being more prone to join the Citizen Panel. The only systematic over or under representation found in this category was that the personalized postcard with the incentive reminder has significantly more people over the age of 60 than the main treatment group of interest in this study, thus a somewhat higher recruitment rate can be expected in this group. To be able to scrutinize the trustworthiness of the strong reminder effect of introducing the incentive at a later stage table 2 shows the recruitment rates for the different treatment groups on day 10 after the invitation, on day 25, and the final recruitment rate. The reminders were delivered from day 26.

Table 2: Recruitment rates on different field days depending on treatment group (in percent)

	Standard invitation (standard reminder)	Standard invitation (incentive reminder)	Personalized invitation (personalized reminder)	Personalized invitation (personalized and incentive reminder)	Incentive invitation (incentive reminder)
Recruitment rate day 10	5.14	6.1	5.02	5.23	7.3
Recruitment rate day 25	6.45*	8.14	6.38*	6.55	9.5
Final recruitment rate	10.87***	14.2	9.81***	12.47	14.37
N	2,980	986	2,977	994	2,965

Comment: ***, * variable significantly different at 99% and 95% respectively, standard postcard with incentive reminder vs each of the other postcards. Net sample size, i.e. the original sample minus returned postcards and dropped invalid addresses.

Table 2 shows that the group receiving first a standard postcard and then an incentivized reminder reached a significantly higher recruitment rate compared to the standard treatment group and the group receiving a personalized invitation postcard already at field day 25, before the incentivized reminder was received. This indicates that the studied treatment group already from the beginning consisted of a selection of respondents that were somewhat more prone to sign up to the panel, despite the sub-samples being randomly assigned from the entire random sample from the Swedish national population register and not displaying any major demographic differences. However, the difference in recruitment rates grow even larger after the reminder is received. Therefore, we will also assess what happens day by day during the recruitment effort.

Figure 1: Recruitment rates by field day (in percent)

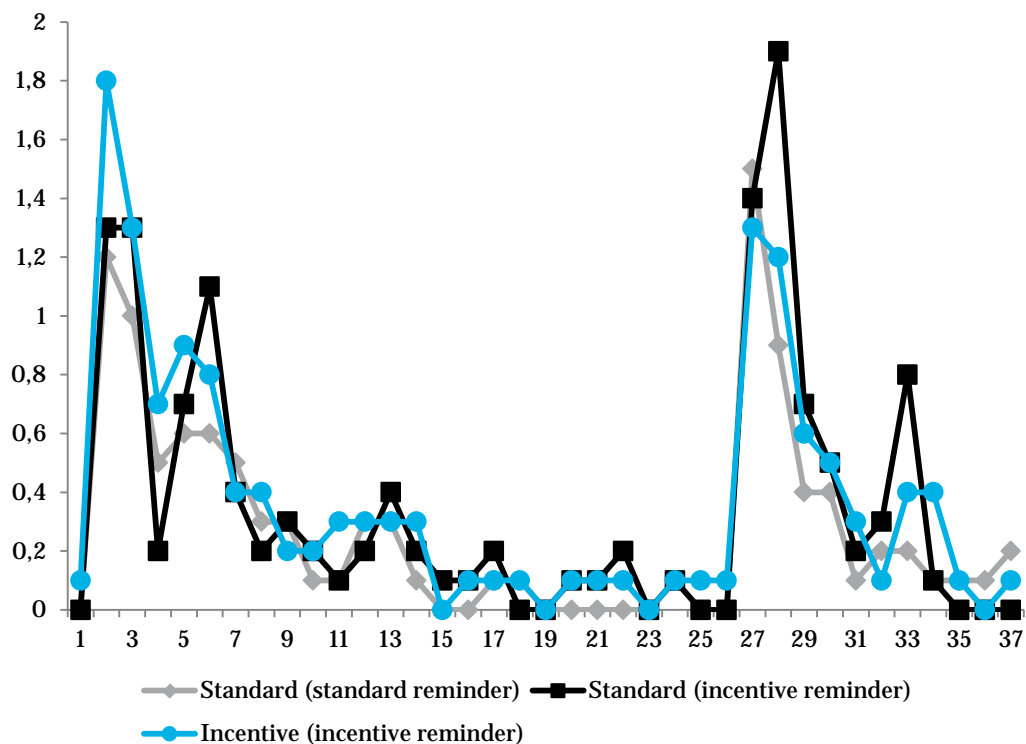


Figure 1 visualizes the recruitment rates on the different field days. As could be expected the incentivized invitation letter does reach a higher initial recruitment rate in the first days. The standard group, which later receives an incentivized reminder, however, has two relatively high recruitment days in the beginning, and then another peak after six field days. From field day 26 it is possible to study the reminder effects, which is visible in all treatment groups. The reminder effect of introducing an incentive is significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than the standard postcard treatment group. The recruitment rate even peaks at a higher level following the incentivized reminder than following the initial standard invitation postcard. This only happens for the two groups for which the offer of an incentive appear in the reminder postcard.

Concluding remarks

These comparisons reveal that there is no significant difference in recruitment rate between introducing a small lottery incentive directly to everyone in the invitation letter and when introducing the incentive in the follow-up contact to those that have not yet

signed up for the panel instead. From a financial perspective this can be seen as good news and a possibility to lower recruitment costs by only offering those who do not sign up before the first follow-up contact the incentive if they do so. On the other hand this might be considered problematic from an ethical point of view since respondents are treated differently and reluctant respondents are rewarded. The results in this note also show that even an incentive of very small monetary value is more important to increase the recruitment rate than for example personalization.

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:

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