The Impact of Invitation Wording on Web Survey Response Rates

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Introduction

- Purpose of OMNIBUS student opinion survey:
  - Provide a responsive venue for real-time data collection on student needs
  - Collect dynamic demographic information not found in Banner
  - Respond to data collection needs across campus
  - Monitor core theme objectives related to student perceptions and behavior
- History of the Omnibus:
  - Fall 2007 - first student opinion survey administered
  - Fall 2008 - survey titled “Omnibus” or ‘comprising several items’
  - Fall 2010 - transitioned to an online, web-based survey and is now administered both Fall and Spring semesters

Survey Sample
This research is based on data collected from a university wide web survey about student opinions. Approximately one-third of current UVU students were invited to participate (n=12,000). A random sample was drawn from UVU students registered for Spring semester 2016.

Grouping of Respondents
The survey invitations were divided into 16 groups of different combinations to address four dimensions of experimental manipulations: introduction, use of results, outcome of survey, and closing signature. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the groups. Final groups contained 750 students each and are summarized in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
<th>Closing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>Student's name</td>
<td>specific examples</td>
<td>has been used</td>
<td>no name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>UVU Student</td>
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Distribution and Reminders
Students were emailed an invitation to participate in the survey through their university email account. The initial invitation was sent to everyone in the sample on 25 March 2016. Two additional reminders were sent to those who had not responded before the survey closed on 11 April 2016 (at midpoint of administration and one day prior to close). Reminders used the same group differences except for the final reminder which was standard for all students. For the purposes of this study, response rates were calculated using rates before the final “standardized” reminder.

Methodology

- Findings
  - Demographic differences proved to be much more significant than differences based on changes to the invitation letter.
  - Older students, females, white students, and students in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts were more likely to respond.
  - Personalizing the invitation (both the introduction and closing) positively impacted response rates—especially when used together.
  - There were interactions between the content of the invitation and demographics.
  - Personalizing the invitation’s salutation/closing with a name influenced women to take the survey more than men.
  - Men were more strongly motivated to respond when their names were used (rather than calling them ‘UVU students’).
  - Women preferred more details about topics covered by the survey. This made no difference to men.
  - Women preferred knowing the survey had been used in the past. Men preferred knowing it would be used in the future.
  - The older a student is, the more important personalizing the invitation becomes.
  - There were no meaningful differences based on ethnicity/race or the college/school their major was in combined with differences in the invitation letter.

Impact of 16 combinations of variables

- Recommendations / Best Practices
  - Addressing the students by their first names (rather than ‘UVU students’).
  - Giving specific details about the contents of the survey (rather than a broad, general statement).
  - Focusing on how administrators have used responses in the past (rather than focusing on how they plan to in the future).
  - Closing with the name of a person in Institutional Research & Information (rather than just the name of the department).
  - (These recommendations amounted to about a 2.5% difference in response rates over other combinations.)

Future Exploration:
- Customize message to match demographic preferences.
- Explore other variables in the invitation letter.

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