

Research Notes

An Experimental Design to Test Sponsorship and Dating Effects in Library Questionnaire Design

Ruth A. Pagell and Edward J. Lusk

The effects of sponsorship and return date on the response rate to a university library questionnaire were examined. A survey of personal computer utilization was sent through campus mail to all Wharton School faculty and M.B.A. students. Fifty percent of the surveys had a return date; fifty percent did not have a return date; fifty percent of the surveys had a library return address; fifty percent had a Wharton faculty address. The response rate for M.B.A.'s was significantly higher when both a return date and faculty address were included. Faculty response was not affected by either sponsorship or return date.

Two factors which are often used to stimulate response rates in surveys are prestigious sponsorship and affixing a return date to the questionnaire. Increasing the response rate is important because it reduces the potential bias from non-respondents and facilitates generalizing to a larger group given the respondents' viewpoints. This paper reports the results of a study that examined these two factors in a library survey.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The Lippincott Library of the University

of Pennsylvania was interested in collecting information on the utilization of personal computers for online searching for both students and faculty of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. The questionnaire was one page and asked thirteen questions, some with multiple answer options. The two populations of interest were the Wharton teaching faculty, defined as Research Assistants, Standing Faculty, and Adjunct Professors (N=226), and M.B.A. students (N=1323).

Questionnaires sent to all members of both groups were experimentally arranged as follows:

- 50 percent of the questionnaires had a return date affixed. The return date was one week after the distribution date.
- 50 percent of the questionnaires had no return date.
- 50 percent of the questionnaires had the following return address:

Intramural Mail
Ruth A. Pagell
On-Line Search Coordinator
Van Pelt West/CH
- 50 percent of the questionnaires had the following return address:

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Intramural Mail
Edward J. Lusk
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The research hypotheses for both groups were:

H1: The questionnaires with the faculty return address will be returned more frequently than will the questionnaires with the library return address.

A multi-based online search was conducted to locate articles addressing the topic of sponsorship of surveys or questionnaires. No articles concerning this particular topic appeared in the ERIC, LISA, or Information Science databases. However, the subject has been reported in the literature of other disciplines, where it is concluded that university sponsorship specifically, and relatively more "prestigious" sponsorship in general, has been shown to be useful in many situations to stimulate questionnaire responses.¹⁻³ Blumberg, Fuller, and Hare offer a few counterexamples.⁴

In this study, it was assumed that the faculty return address would be equated with a university sponsorship.

H2: The questionnaires with the return date affixed will be returned more frequently, until the return date passes, than will the questionnaires with no return date affixed.

A corollary to H2 is that after the return date has passed, questionnaires without a return date will be returned more frequently than those questionnaires with a return date.

Research suggests individuals will return the dated questionnaires more frequently by the specified return date compared to questionnaires with no return date affixed.⁵⁻⁷ But it has also been found that after the return date passes, undated questionnaires are received more frequently.⁸⁻¹⁰

In our survey, the questionnaires were distributed one week before spring break. This period was selected because, according to the Director of Admissions, most of the students typically "wrap things up" before the break. After the break, the returns were expected to be negligible.

RESULTS

The returns during the seven day period are represented in Table 1. After one week, 96.5 percent of the M.B.A. questionnaires had been removed from their mail folders. The two research hypotheses are supported by the data for the M.B.A. students ($p < .075$ and $p < .025$ respectively). The relationship between sponsorship and affixing a deadline for the M.B.A. students is represented by the following:

The Classification Table

	Lusk	Pagell
DATED	66	39
NOT DATED	36	44

The X^2 test for homogeneity yields $p < .025$. The odds ratio for this classification table is 2.06 with a standard error of .43. Therefore, the return of dated questionnaires with faculty sponsorship is slightly greater than twice that of undated questionnaires without such sponsorship.

Finally, eleven faculty and three M.B.A. questionnaires were returned after the affixed return date. Of these, twelve were not dated.

DISCUSSION

The faculty and M.B.A. students seem to react differently regarding faculty/library sponsorship and questionnaire dating. There may be numerous plausible explanations for these differences. However, given our methodology, such explanations are conjectural. More importantly, given the results, two sets of guide-

TABLE 1
QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS

	Dated		Not Dated		Total
	Pagell	Lusk	Pagell	Lusk	
M.B.A. Students	39	66	44	36	185
Wharton Faculty	11	15	15	15	56
Total	50	81	59	51	241

lines are suggested in surveying these two groups:

I. Surveys of faculty can be conducted without faculty sponsorship without inhibiting the return rate. Such question-

naires should not have return dates affixed.

II. Faculty sponsorship and return dates seem likely to increase return rates for M.B.A.'s.

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