

RESPONSE AND ITEM OMISSION RATES FOR FORMAT
JUSTIFIED QUESTIONNAIRES

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Abstract

This research examined the impact of a directed questionnaire on overall response rate and item omission rates. The results indicated that a directed questionnaire format did not improve results in either case.

The Study

During the past forty-nine years much research activity has been directed toward the investigation of methods to increase the response rate to mail questionnaires. Numerous strategies have been employed to boost the response rate. Some of the strategies have produced promising results, while many others have failed to aid the problem (Kanuk, 1975; Pressley, 1978; Roscoe 1975). In short, much work still needs to be done on the improvement of the response rate to mail questionnaires.

One common reason suggested for the failure of sample members to respond to the questionnaire is the lack of knowledge on the expected usage of the data that they have been requested to supply. The assumption is that sample members may tend to be reluctant to supply information when they can not see a reason why the information is needed. Consequently, these authors of this paper hypothesized that beneficial results could surface if the sample members were supplied with a justification for the inclusion of the questions. An example of such a justification format, henceforth to be called a directed questionnaire is: "The question below is aimed at finding out the proportion of people that use each of the financial institutions mentioned." It was felt that supplying reasons for the inclusion of the questions would not only increase the overall response rate to the questionnaire, but would reduce the number of questions that respondents leave unanswered (item omission rate).

The sample for this study consisted of 3700 respondents drawn from telephone directories of four midwestern towns. Approximately one half of the net sample received a directed questionnaire and one-half a non-directed questionnaire. The directed questionnaire was about one and one-half pages longer than the non-directed questionnaire. The types of questions and included likert, semantic differential, multichotomous and open ended. No incentives or advanced or follow up letters were used.

The following are the research hypothesis for the study.

H_{01} : There is no difference in overall response rates for questionnaires using a directed question format and of a questionnaire more traditional format.

H_{02} : There is no difference in the mean item non-response rates for questionnaires using a directed question format and for questionnaires using a more traditional format.

Results and Implications

The results of the study indicated that the group receiving the directed questionnaire had a 1.4 percent lower response rate (455 for directed and 476 for traditional). The hypothesis test for differences between the two proportions was judged to produce in-

significant results ($p = .35$). The proportion of items omitted averaged 8.6 per questionnaire for the directed and 9.3 for the traditional questionnaires. The hypothesis test for differences between the two proportions was judged to produce insignificant results, ($p = .71$)

Researchers desiring to increase the response rate to one of their mail surveys would apparently be ill advised to use a directed questionnaire format. However, if the researcher's objective is to obtain more answers to confidential questions, then the directed questionnaire may be the appropriate vehicle for some audiences.

The use of a directed questionnaire will increase costs considerably. This increase is due to additional mailing and handling costs caused by the larger size and the added costs of developing a more involved questionnaire. Thus, researchers desiring to obtain hard to get information may find that more can be obtained by using a directed questionnaire, but they must ask themselves if the information is worth the added costs and effort.

References

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