

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON BUSINESS DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

19-21 SEPTEMBER 2018 – STATISTICS PORTUGAL, LISBON

EVALUATING MODE SEQUENCE WHEN EMAIL IS USED AS THE INITIAL CONTACT IN ESTABLISHMENT SURVEYS

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The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is conducting a series of experiments to evaluate the use of Email as a method to invite establishments to a survey, both to save the cost of paper mailings as well as to increase online responses which are also cost efficient. Prior to the survey invitation, a pre-notification letter is sent to sampled establishments informing them of the upcoming survey and to collected updated contact information, including an Email address. For the respondents that provide their Email address in response to the pre-notification letter, it is now possible to solicit their survey response through an Email, potentially saving cost and time compared to a mailed paper invite. In order to maximize the benefit of this cost saving mode, research is needed to evaluate response rates, costs and timeliness of response for various sequences of Email and postal mail reminders.

Previous research on mode sequence has focused on surveys of households and individuals. Medway and Fulton (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of surveys that offered concurrent web/mail options and examined the effect on response rates. Their review of previous experimental comparisons found that mail surveys that also incorporate a concurrent web option have a significantly lower response rate than those that offer a single mode. This suggests that modes should be offered in a sequence rather than providing respondents with a choice. Millar and Dillman (2011) investigated the effects of different sequences of web and mail on response. They found that following requests for web response with a final request to respond by mail produces an equivalent response rate to when mail is the only response option.

Given the previous results from household survey experimentation, it is possible that a similar effect of mode sequence will be realized in establishment surveys. However, as Willimack notes (Snijkers et al., 2013), techniques commonly accepted and used in surveys of households and individuals may not be applicable for a survey of businesses. Therefore, it is important to conduct an experiment of mode sequence in an establishment survey to investigate optimal order and timing for each mode of survey request on response, costs and timeliness.

This research will evaluate the effectiveness of using Email to send businesses the initial survey invite when different sequences of modes are used for non-response follow up. Specifically, we focus on response rates, time to response, mode of response and cost per response.