

Offering a Web Option in a Mail Survey of Young Adults: Impact on Survey Quality

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INTRODUCTION

A major threat to the accuracy of survey data comes from the increasing prevalence of survey nonresponse, which raises concerns over the existence of nonresponse bias.

- As a result, survey researchers have focused their efforts on finding effective methods of increasing response rates and minimizing the threat of nonresponse bias.

Increased prevalence of Internet usage has prompted survey administrators to offer respondents a web option for submitting their survey responses.

- Collection of survey data via web is particularly attractive as it is often more cost-effective when compared with other methodologies.

“Kids are on the Web... Why don’t you do a web survey?”

- Addition of a web option is also thought to improve survey quality by increasing response rates.
- Especially among young adults that may be more likely to expect such an option and would otherwise not respond to other survey modes.

RESULTS: RESPONDENT PROFILES

In general, respondents across conditions had similar demographic characteristics to one another and to Current Population Survey estimates.

- However, Web Only condition had higher proportions of Hispanics (vs. Blacks) and lower proportions of youth living in the South (vs. other regions).

In addition, current educational enrollment was considerably higher among Web Only respondents.

- Web Only respondents were also more likely to be currently employed.

	PAPER ONLY	PAPER OR WEB	WEB ONLY
Hispanic	14%	13%	18%
Black	13%	12%	8%
South	38%	38%	28%
Enrolled in School	70%	69%	78%
Currently Employed	50%	51%	57%

Note: All point estimates are unweighted

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does offering web response option impact survey data solicited by mail?

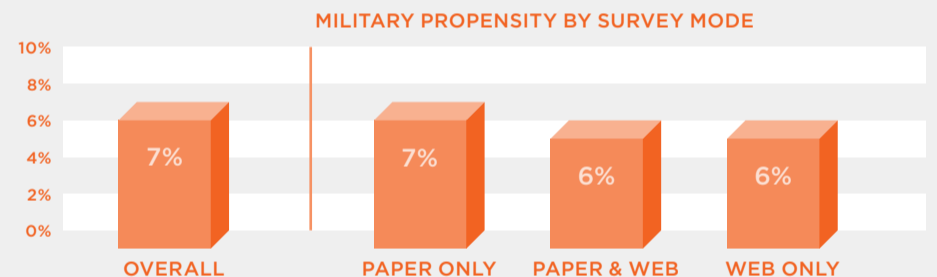
We were interested in three facets of survey quality:

- Response rates and efficiency of survey administration
- Representativeness of the respondent profile
- Impact on key metric estimates

RESULTS: KEY METRIC COMPARISON

All conditions produced comparable military propensity metrics.

Paper or Web and Web Only conditions sample were slightly less propensity.



Note: All point estimates are unweighted

METHODOLOGY

Mail solicitation with both paper and Web-based questionnaire.

- Questionnaire was identical for each completion mode.
- Questionnaire measures future career plans of youth ages 16-24 as it relates to school, work and military service.

All sample members were reached using a mail-based contact method.

- Dillman contact strategy (pre-notification, 3 survey mailouts, and reminder postcard).
- With the exception of instructions varying according to 3 experimental conditions, all sample members received identical survey materials.

20,000 youth were randomly drawn from an address list-based frame of all 16-24 year olds living in the US (estimated 95% coverage rate) and assigned to one of three conditions:

- Paper Survey Only (10K cases) - complete paper questionnaire only.
- Paper or Web Survey (5K cases) - given choice to complete survey via paper or web.
- Web Survey Only (5K cases) - complete web questionnaire only.

RESULTS: RESPONSE RATES AND DATA COLLECTION EFFICIENCY

Paper Only condition yielded the greatest proportion of completed surveys with no additional fielding time required.

- The Paper or Web condition has a slightly negative impact on completion rate, which is consistent with “paradox of choice” theory (Schwartz, 2004).
- Web Only condition produced the lowest completion rate, suggesting the exclusion of a significant proportion of the target population.

When taking into account its slightly higher response rate plus the added costs of developing and administering a web option, the Paper Only condition was the most efficient data collection mode.

	PAPER ONLY	PAPER OR WEB	WEB ONLY
Contacts	10,000	5,000	5,000
Completed Surveys	1581	743	380
Completion Rate	16%	15%	8%
Total Cost	Mid-High	High	Low-Mid
Length of Time to Field	2.5 Months	2.5 Months	2.5 Months

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Challenges to conducting web-only surveys:

- Coverage - master email list typically not available
- Sampling - unequal probability of selection with multiple emails
- Nonresponse - not everyone has Internet access; push-to-web is challenging
- Measurement - privacy concerns; complex programming requirements

Web surveys best conducted as part of multi-mode survey (e.g., paper survey with web option).

- However, the “paradox of choice” may actually result in slightly fewer completes when offering a web option.
- Must balance slightly lower completes vs. the administrative cost savings of not having to handle and enter paper surveys.

Future Direction

- Current study relied on a push-to-web strategy because the frame was limited to name and mailing address.
- If frame is able to be enhanced with email address information, future research should examine the feasibility of employing a “Web Only with Email Contact” condition.