

E-mail surveys: tackling non-response-problems by monitoring the mailing-behavior

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Surveys based on electronic mail-questionnaires or WWW-questionnaires which are announced by e-mail are counted now in the basic and most popular methods of online research. Companies and researchers both realized the economic reasons for utilizing such methods. A serious problem however are the unsatisfactory response-rates (Tuten, 1997: 5). Rates of only 15-20 % are frequently for bigger samples. Recent examples are an e-mail survey at the university of Mannheim (Germany) and a WWW-survey at the university of Cologne with an e-mail, addressing the potential participants. In both cases the samples were drawn among the number of the (known) web-users of each university and in both cases not more than 15% answered the questionnaire.

While there is a broader discussion of how to design an electronic mail to generate the maximum answer rate (Bosnjak/Batinic, 1999), I want to concentrate on how to monitor the mailing-behavior of the sample. This should be preliminary to those considerations for e-mail-design and form. If the mailing behavior of the potential respondents is checked before, during and after the survey, substantial data is collected to interpret the actual response-rate. This works however especially in samples, representing a known totality of users. The paper contains a practical example of how to manage such a monitoring process.

Keywords: e-mail-surveys, non-response problems, mailing behavior

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