

COMPENDIUM OF EMAIL SURVEY INVITATION RESEARCH

There are no universal truths to email survey invitation optimization.

In many cases, modification effectiveness varies by the target population's demographics and topic engagement.

Not a 1-size-fits-all situation.

Most of the published research on email survey invitation effectiveness has been done with college students and healthcare professionals. And even within those specific groups there was some variability, suggesting that there is no single formula for email survey invitation optimization. For any target population of research interest, simple experiments can be conducted to see if specific invitation attributes boost survey response rates. Email invitation attributes tested for survey response rate improvements in this compendium: embedding the first question into the email itself, locating the survey link higher or lower in the email body, mentioning the incentive in either the original or reminder emails, sending a postal mail reminder, sending shorter versus longer email invitations, wording that includes or avoids the word "survey."

Note that some studies show that the variations they tested worked, and some show ones that did not work.

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	TITLE	SOURCE	AHA
2018	Effect of Recruitment Methods on Response Rate in a Web-Based Study for Primary Care Physicians: Factorial Randomized Controlled Trial	So R, Shinohara K, Aoki T, Tsujimoto Y, Suganuma AM, Furukawa TA. Effect of Recruitment Methods on Response Rate in a Web-Based Study for Primary Care Physicians: Factorial Randomized Controlled Trial. Journal of Medical Internet Research. 2018.	<i>"Neither emphasizing the incentive in the subject line of the invitation email nor varying the day of the week the invitation email was sent led to a meaningful increase in response rates in a Web-based trial with primary care physicians."</i>
2017	Improving Survey Response Rates: The Effect of Embedded Questions in Web Survey Email Invitations	Liu, M., Inchausti, Nick. 2017. Improving survey response rates: The effect of embedded questions in web survey email invitations. Surveypractice.org.	<i>"The results show that as compared to the standard email invite (a link without any survey questions shown), the embedded question email invite improves the email click rate, and survey completion rate, with a small cost to survey drop-out rate."</i>
2017	Can the Type and Location of a Survey Link Positively Affect Response Rates?	Varghese, L., Moore, R., 2017. Can the type and location of a survey link positively affect response rates? ACT.	<i>"The results of this study show that there is variation in student survey response rates based on the survey link's location in the email invitation."</i>
2016	Should the Word "Survey" Be Avoided in Email Invitation Messaging?	Moore, Rael PhD. 2016. Should the Word "Survey" Be Avoided in Email Invitation Messaging. ACT.	<i>"No differences in response rate patterns emerged between the four invitation messaging types. Whether students received an invitation message or a subject line message that included or excluded the word "survey" had little bearing on survey participation or completion rates."</i>
2016	Incentive and Reminder Strategies to Improve Response Rates for Internet-Based Physician Surveys: A Randomized Experiment	Cook, D. A., Wittich, C. M., Daniels, W. L., West, C. P., Harris, A. M., & Beebe, T. J. 2016. Incentive and reminder strategies to improve response rate for internet-based physician surveys: A randomized experiment.	<i>"Offering a modest nonmonetary incentive and sending a paper reminder did not improve survey response rate. Further research on how to enhance response rates in Internet-based physician surveys is needed."</i>
2014	Effects of Mentioning the Incentive Prize in the Email Subject Line on Survey Response	Janke, R. 2014. Effects of Mentioning the Incentive Prize in the Email Subject Line on Survey Response.	<i>"Reminding survey participants with an email that mentions the incentive prize in the subject line appears to increase response rates with no deleterious effects on data quality."</i>
2013	The Impact of Survey Communications on Response Rates	Barlas, M.F., Falcone, A. E., Bellamy, N. D., and Mack, A. R. 2013. The Impact of Survey Communications on Response Rates, Proceedings of the 2013 Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) Research Conference.	<i>"Preliminary results show that the design of email communications can affect survey participation and response rates. A larger percentage of those who received the short email began and completed the survey, though this difference was not statistically significant."</i>
2012	The Effect of Invitation Design on Web Survey Response Rates	Kaplowitz, M.D., F. Lupi, M.P. Couper and L Thorp. 2012. The effect of invitation design on web survey response rates. Social Science Computer Review.	<i>"This research reports results of a full-factorial experiment (n = 15,652) of...invitation mode, subject line, location of URL link, length of the invitation text, and survey time/effort estimate...The results suggest that some design elements of invitations may have similar effects across subsets of populations, while others may have different effects on different subsets of potential respondents."</i>