Financial incentives, personal information and drop-out rate in online studies

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Can financial incentives be used to reduce drop-out in online studies? This question is im-portant for methodological as well as practical reasons, but it has not yet been studied expe-rimentally. One of the non-experimental methods used to assess an answer was a survey among 21 web experimenters recently conducted by Musch and Reips (in press). In contrast to the expectation of a purely intrinsic motivation for participating in online studies they fo-und a clear link between lack of financial incentives and drop-out rate. To further investigate the causal nature of this relationship a web experiment was conducted in the Web Experimental Psychology Lab at Zurich University. 891 persons participated, 497 in an English version, and 394 in a German version. The web experiment was also designed to test the assumption that asking participants for personal information early in the experiment would lead to increased drop-out as well as different answering behavior in questions that are likely to be influenced by social desirability. This assumption was not supported by the re-sults. Data supported the hypothesis that announcing a lottery at the beginning of a study results in a reduced drop-out rate. As in the Musch and Reips study, drop-out was found to be about twice as large in the non-lottery condition as in the lottery condition. All in all drop-out was relatively low, supporting the notion that with the right design even in online studies without financial incentives, not too many methodological problems with high drop-out rates should be expected.

Keywords: Drop-out, financial incentives, web experiment, personal information, social desirability

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