NOTES

A note on the use of congruent rewards in survey situations

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The purpose of this study was to test the possibility of utilizing a reward model to reach segments of the population that ordinarily do not respond well to mail questionnaires or personal interviews. A particularly resistant population sample was chosen to see if a model could be constructed that would (1) be inexpensive and thus within the means of ordinary investigators operating on limited funds, (2) allow for an expansion of the sample without increasing unit cost, (3) secure a high response rate, and (4) yield results comparable to those from studies of similar populations using other methods.

Studies of working class persons, other than purely statistical ones, have been scarce. Those that have been done usually involved case studies, covert observations, or participant observational reports.

Since many working class, or "hard hat," individuals tend to become steady customers at taverns catering to such clientele, eight working class taverns in five scattered localities were made the target population for the test. All eight taverns were in white neighborhoods; all respondents were white.

With the cooperation of the tavern owner, a large sign was placed in a prominent location on the bar, stating, in bold letters, "Get a Free Beer. Ask the Bartender." A sealed medium-sized box with a slit in the top was placed next to the sign. When approached, the bartender explained that to obtain free beer the customer had to agree to fill out a questionnaire, one beer and one questionnaire per subject. No names appeared on the questionnaire. When completed, the questionnaire was personally deposited in the "ballot box." The customer was asked to fill out the questionnaire in its entirety and to answer honestly and candidly.

Each bartender was allotted a specific number of blank questionnaires based on his estimate of probable

customer flow. The signs and boxes were deposited at the bar on Thursday and collected a week later. Taverns were not open on Sunday in the test state.

At the conclusion of the data collection period, the boxes were opened in the owner/bartender's presence and \$1.00, in currency, was paid for each fully completed questionnaire. Each usable response cost a net of \$1.12, including the cost of printing, distributing, contacting, and retrieving.

The error rate was smaller than with mail questionnaires. Only eight responses were incompletely filled out or otherwise spoiled. Of the 310 questionnaires distributed, 302 were usable. The first condition, that of low cost, was met. The survey could have been extended easily to whatever size one wished, without an increase in unit cost, by adding more taverns, thus fulfilling the second imposed condition.

The ease with which the tavern quotas were filled, the care in completing the questionnaires, the absence of "smart aleck" replies or sabotage, the neat manner in which they were folded, all indicated a high level of acceptance by the customers, thus fulfilling the third condition.

The responses were compared for reliability with responses to certain items that had been widely validated on various populations. There were no statistically significant differences between those test items endorsed by the tavern customers and the degree of endorsement by other samples, matched for age, sex, occupation, and income.

This technique worked well in sampling a relatively hard-to-reach segment of the population because, in the opinion of the investigators, certain important considerations were met. The reward was congruent to the situation. The "action set" of a person in a tavern is to drink, and the reward served as a reinforcement for that already existing set. Second, the setting was nonhierarchical in that there were no pressures exerted by the bartender. And there was no payment for service in the usual sense. Third, there was the sense of participation in a larger enterprise, with no great effort on one's part, and an immediately satisfying reward.

Variations of this technique of offering a nominal or token reward which is immediately gratifying in terms of the action set of the individual has been used successfully in obtaining voluntary responses from heroin addicts, cockfighters, and, presently, members of fundamentalist, evangelical churches.

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