

Considerations for survey recruitment incentives

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Introduction

Social science researchers often face challenges when it comes to recruitment of research participants, having insufficient response rates or unrepresentative samples. Incentives to participants can increase response quantity as well as quality, that help researchers meet necessary sample size requirements and reduce bias by obtaining statistically significant data.

Existing literature has looked into the most efficient and effective ways to incentivize individuals to participate in research. Generally, findings conclude that monetary compensation works best [1, 2, 3]. However, previous research does not consider what we can discover if participants are offered a choice in their compensation method.

Because money is more liquid, economic theory suggests any rational agent would choose cash over the gift certificate. Therefore, we would expect to see most, if not all, participants favoring cash compensation. We study participants' choice of cash vs. gift certificate of equal worth when offered the both to participate in a research study conducted at the University of Delaware. In this study where participants could choose between \$6 cash and an ice cream gift certificate of equal value, 34% chose the gift certificate as compensation.

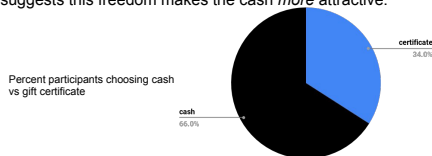
Method

A revealed preference choice experiment was conducted during the annual "Ag Day" event at the University of Delaware, attended by both students and local residents. 714 participants chose between \$6 cash and an equal value gift certificate for UDairy ice cream (available at the event) as compensation before partaking in a 10 minute study where participants were asked demographic questions, as well as to rate their preference of the two incentives from 1-7 [where 1 signified the highest preference for cash, 7 for the ice cream certificate, and 4 being indifferent] before receiving their compensation.

Results

Out of 714 participants, 34% chose the ice cream certificate.

- Although cash and gift certificates were of the same value (\$6), cash offers more freedom in how to spend it. Economic theory suggests this freedom makes the cash *more* attractive.

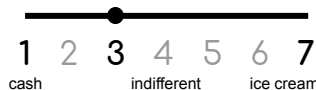


Demographics may influence one's decision.

- Out of age, education, rural/urban residence, race, gender, and income, the following characteristics were significant influencers:
- Likelihood of choosing ice cream rose with **age**
- Higher **annual income** brackets lowered likelihood of choosing cash
 - Choosing cash declines by 12, 11, 13, and 20% in ranges \$75k-99,999, \$100k-149,999, \$150k-249,999, and \$250k+ respectively
- **Rural residents** were 12% less likely to choose cash compared to urban residents

Compensation rating averaged a 3.

- 1 signified strongest preference for cash, 7 for ice cream gift certificate, and 4 being indifferent
- Reasons given, such as having access to free ice cream or that the participant had some before the experiment, suggest more people would have picked ice cream.



Conclusion

- Cash-only incentives may not be the most effective recruitment method, contrary to existing studies' findings.
- Over 1/3 participants chose non-cash alternative.

Unlike other studies focused on research incentives, this study examines how participants act when given the opportunity to choose their mode of compensation, whether it be cash or a non-cash alternative. Further research might be able to tell us if this flexibility will lead to higher response rates and better response quality. This in turn can help researchers obtain sufficient sample sizes, reduce bias, and improve a sample's representativeness of the greater population.

References

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Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible by the National Science Foundation EPSCoR Grant No. 1757353 and the State of Delaware. I would also like to acknowledge the support and guidance of Dr. Ahsanuzzaman, the Center for Experimental and Applied Economics, and Dr. Yolanda Williams-Bey.