Applying theory to structure respondents’ stated motivations for participating in web surveys

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Abstract
Purpose – There is limited published work addressing factors that influence responses to internet surveys. This is due in part to lack of an agreed upon set of relevant theories. Albaum, Evangelista and Medina (AEM) and Evangelista et al. made a step toward filling this gap when they studied the relevance of four theories of survey response behaviour. The AEM study included a survey from a population of survey researchers. Based on their survey, they concluded that all four theories contribute to explaining survey response behaviour. The purpose of this paper is to provide an exploratory extension of AEM by using an extended set of theories in an exploratory content analysis of qualitative feedback to a large internet-based experiment.

Design/methodology/approach – An internet-based survey using an experimental design was sent to essentially the entire population of student e-mail addresses at a New Zealand university. The 12,000 questionnaires distributed included open-end questions that asked about factors related to conducting surveys over the internet, especially potential barriers to response. A total of 841 comments are collected. An extended version of the four theories identified by AEM are used to organise and summarise the feedback provided.

Findings – Cost is the most highly mentioned factor and commitment the least-mentioned factor. Overall, cost, reward, and trust are the most significant factors in survey response, leading to the conclusion that social exchange appears to the most prominent theory for internet-based surveys and commitment is the least prominent theory.

Originality/value – This is the first study to use qualitative research to assess the applicability of the major theories of survey response behaviour. In addition; the study is the first to apply these theories to internet-based surveys.

Keywords Internet, Surveys, Motivation (psychology)

Paper type Research paper
1. Introduction
Why do people participate in survey research? Why do they fail to participate? Several motivation theories have been suggested as being potentially relevant to these questions (Linsky, 1975; Dillman, 1978, 2000; Yammarino et al., 1991; Albaum et al., 1996, 1998; Poon et al., 2003; Evangelista et al., 2008). The objective of the present study is to shed light on a subset of leading theories that have been proposed for understanding why people participate in survey research. These theories are conceived to be theories of human motivation, i.e. not to be age, education, social, or culturally specific. Whether this is in fact the case awaits additional study.

The present study may be conceived as an exploratory, qualitative evaluation of the null proposition that the subset of previously identified theories of human motivation do not generally apply to the survey response decision. From this perspective, it only is necessary to show that evidence is lacking that they apply to one population in order to accept the null proposition that they generally do not apply to all populations. However, our conclusion is that there is evidence that they do apply to at least one population, at least inferring from respondent comments to open-ended questions.

Prior to the emergence of the internet as a major mode of survey data collection, survey methodological research focused primarily on response rate and other characteristics of mail surveys, although telephone and personal interview surveys have been examined as well, and has used a variety of methodologies, such as surveys, scenario analysis, and experiments. A number of excellent review papers were published (Heberlein and Baumgartner, 1978; Kanuk and Berenson, 1975; Peterson and Kerin, 1981; Yu and Cooper, 1983). The present study focuses on internet-based surveying. The exploratory study is based on open-ended responses collected in conjunction with a large internet-based survey.

2. Background
Since the late 1990s through to the present there has been a growing body of literature about methodological characteristics of online survey data collection. These are summarised by Miller (2006), Smith et al. (2006) and Roster et al. (2007). Internet-based surveys increasingly have been replacing telephone surveys by practitioners (Willems and Oosterveld, 2003; Roster et al., 2004). This is not surprising. The internet offers unique features – world-wide reach, around-the-clock availability, ability to collect real time feedback, access to low incidence populations and narrow topics, extremely low cost and fast speed (Schmidt, 1997; Schaefer and Dillman, 1998; Stanton, 1998; McCullough, 1998). In addition, it offers the potential to eliminate or reduce certain biases such as acquiescence, extreme responding, and social desirability (Miller, 2006, p. 113).

Internet-based surveying is quickly becoming the preferred mode for conducting survey-based marketing research. According to the global organisation for market research; ESOMAR, online studies represent 20 per cent of all expenditures on data collection (Hernandez, 2007). Internet-based surveys, however, suffer from at least the same response rate problems that bedevil other survey modes. Response rates are generally no better, and frequently worse than its closest traditional equivalent, mail surveying (Roster et al., 2007; Couper, 2000; Cole, 2005). The question of why people respond (or do not respond) to surveys is at least as relevant to the practice and conduct of internet-based surveys as it is to other modes of delivery, if not more so given current practice.
Figure 1 shows six theories that have potential relevance for understanding responses to internet surveys – social exchange (rewards and costs), trust, commitment, self-perception and cognitive dissonance. This paper explores whether these theories may be useful in a content analysis to explain responses to a large internet-based survey. Qualitative research, therefore, has potential in determining which theory might best explain internet survey response behaviour.

The most cited theories for explaining survey response behaviour are social exchange theory, cognitive dissonance theory, self-perception theory and commitment or involvement.

Researchers applying social exchange theory to survey research argue that people are most likely to respond when they expect and trust that the rewards of responding to the questionnaire outweigh the costs associated with responding. Dillman (1978, 2000) proposes a framework for maximising survey response by minimizing the cost for responding, maximizing the rewards for doing so, and establishing trust that those rewards will be delivered. Decomposing social exchange leads to essentially three theories of response: rewards, cost, and trust.

Those using cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) propose that the motive for responding to a survey is avoidance, or reduction, of unpleasant feelings associated with non-response (Hackler and Bourgette, 1973; Furse and Stewart, 1984). Furse and Stewart (1984) postulate that cognitive dissonance theory provides a mechanism for integrating, within a single model, much of the empirical research that has been done on inducement techniques for survey response. Furse et al. (1981) felt that dissonance explained the success they found regarding the foot-in-the-door technique (i.e. using a small request as a prelude for a larger request) and would also explain some of the negative findings experienced when the technique was used.

Self-perception theory asserts that persons infer attitudes and knowledge of themselves through interpretations made about the causes of their behaviour (Bem, 1972). Interpretations are made on the basis of self-observation. To the extent
that a person’s behaviour is attributed to internal causes and is not perceived as due to circumstantial pressures, a positive attitude towards the behaviour develops. These attitudes (i.e. self-perception) then affect subsequent behaviour. Allen (1982) extended the self-perception paradigm to the broad issue of mail survey response. To enhance the effects of these on response, labels should be created. Labelling involves classifying people on the basis of their behaviour such that they will later act in a manner consistent with the characterisation. Self-perception would predict that labelling one’s behaviour would cause that person to view herself or himself as the kind of person who engages in such behaviour, therefore the likelihood of later label-consistent behaviour is increased (Tytbout and Yalch, 1980). The theory also has been applied in survey research to explain the effects, or lack of effects, associated with foot-in-the-door technique (DeJong, 1979). Self-perception theory might be applicable to an internet survey to explain internal – versus external – sources of motivations for responding to a survey.

The concept of commitment is used to explain consistent behaviour. It can be defined as “a variable, which encompasses the ranges of allegiance an individual may be said to have for the social system of which he is a member” (Hornback, 1971, p. 65). A person who is highly committed to an activity, such as responding to survey requests, is less likely to terminate the activity than one who is uncommitted (Ford, 1973). Commitment may be attached to many different aspects of a survey, such as the source of the sponsor, the researcher, the research organisation, the topic and issues in the survey, and even the process itself.

We provide greater detail on these theories in Section 4, where the results of the study are discussed. The next section describes the study that provides the data.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research design
A methodological screening experiment was conducted to study the effects of eleven survey data collection techniques. A screening experiment is used to identify which factors from a larger set of factors have relatively large effects on survey response rates (Dean, 2007; Dean and Lewis, 2006). The results of the experiment are to be reported elsewhere.

The substantive objective of the survey was to explore respondents’ motivations for participating in surveys. Both structured and open-ended questions relevant to this issue were included in the survey. The open-ended questions specifically focused on barriers to response. In this paper, we analyze the open-ended responses within the context of the theories of survey response that have been discussed above.

3.2 The population
The research used a population of active student email accounts at a large university in New Zealand. Co-operation from the students’ computer service made it possible to generate a list of > 12,000 student e-mail addresses, essentially the entire population of active student email accounts. Using students for survey methodological studies has been a common practice (Dillman et al., 1999; Couper et al., 2001). Despite the caution needed to generate the findings to a wider population, student populations offer several advantages compared to commercially available lists of email addresses. First, commercially available sample frames largely – if not entirely – are composed of
people who have committed to respond to surveys, i.e. are members of a panel. Response rates from such groups will not be representative of the rates to be expected from the general population of prospective respondents.

Second, as with sample frames in general, lists of email addresses become increasingly out-of-date with the passage of time. All the addresses in the present sample frame were “active” during the period of the study. That is, there were no returned e-mails (bounces) indicating an address was not valid.

There is no reason to believe that university students in New Zealand views on internet-based surveys differ from students in other countries (such as Australia, the USA, etc.). In fact, there is no reason to believe that students’ motivations to respond (or not) to surveys differ from other members of society, although it is possible that their willingness to articulate these motivations are greater than the general population.

3.3 Questionnaire
The survey questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part 1 questions concerned respondent behavioural motivation factors. The respondents were asked to scale items using a five-point Likert format. The questions were adopted with some modifications from Albaum et al.’s (1998) study of the survey response behaviour theories. Part 2 included questions regarding respondents’ demographic characteristics (age, gender and level of education) and their experience with computers and surveys. Part 3 questions were open-ended questions providing respondents the opportunity to make additional comments on aspects of the survey. It is these questions that are the basis of the present study.

The questionnaire was pretested on a convenience sample drawn from the student population. Based on the pre-test, several structured questions were reworded. Open-ended questions did not require rewording.

4. Findings
As mentioned above, a request to participate in the survey was sent by e-mail. Since there were no returned e-mails (i.e. bounces), all e-mails were received. A total of 1,284 potential respondents opened the e-mail (i.e. clicked on), which represents a click rate of 10.7 per cent. The submission rate is calculated by dividing the number of responses by the number of clicks. Responses were received from 861 students, representing a submission rate of 67.5 per cent. When the click rate is multiplied by the submission rate, a response rate is obtained, which is 7.2 per cent for the present study. This is comparable to the response for internet surveys reported by Roster et al. (2007) in their general population study of five survey methods.

Two sets of questionnaires were used to test whether internet survey respondents were sensitive to survey length. The short version had 25-28 questions while the long version had 36-39 questions. No differences in click rate or submission rate were found between the two questionnaire lengths.

Owing to the sensitivity of personal information in an online survey context, only three personal questions were asked about gender, age and the education level of the respondents. The short version questionnaire omitted the three questions pertaining to respondents’ demographics. Additionally, one question was asked about the respondent’s previous internet survey experience in the questionnaire version that included demographic questions. The long and short versions of the questionnaire
were assigned at random, i.e. 6,000 respondents received the long version. A total of 422 respondents chose to provide answers to the demographic questions. Respondent characteristics are as follows:

- **Gender**: 40.3 per cent of the respondents were male, 56.9 per cent were female, and 2.8 per cent respondents did not answer.

- **Age**: 79 per cent of the respondents were aged between age 18 and 25, followed by 24 per cent between age 25-34 and 6 per cent between 35 and 50. Only 1 per cent was either under 18 or over 50, and 1 per cent did not answer. This distribution largely matches the student age distribution in the university but is younger than the overall online population.

- **Education**: approximately, 60 per cent of respondents were either undertaking or had completed their tertiary education, and 30 per cent were either undertaking or had completed their postgraduate degree. Only 7 per cent of respondents claimed that their highest level of education was secondary school, and 2.6 per cent did not answer.

- **Internet survey experience**: approximately, half of the respondents (47.3 per cent) had not participated in a previous internet survey, 25.8 per cent of the respondents had participated in one to three previous surveys, and 23.2 per cent of the respondents claimed to have participated in more than three.

### 4.1 Social exchange: rewards and costs
Reward may be either tangible or intangible, and both types were mentioned frequently in the feedback. Tangible gain, often referred to as “incentive”, was often associated with monetary value, although sometimes survey feedback was seen as a form of incentive.

#### 4.1.1 Tangible rewards
The single most frequently mentioned factor was incentive. Overall, 12 per cent of respondents indicated some aspect of incentive. Incentives seemed to play an important role in motivating people and as an offset to the perceived time and effort cost of survey participation. Respondents’ comments about incentive included: “[…] people feel that there is nothing in it for them at all, so will not participate”; “[…] most people will only take part in an internet survey if they receive something in return for participating”; “[…] time off work/leisure time, an incentive would usually make it worthwhile”; and “[…] time and lack of incentive. Mistrust that the incentive doesn’t exist”.

According to the feedback, incentive may also include the opportunity to read the survey results. Some respondents said that this was a more attractive incentive than cash. However, the effectiveness of this incentive may depend on the respondents’ characteristics and the survey subject, as < 5 per cent of respondents mentioned this, compared with those who expressed a strong interest in “real” incentives. Therefore, feedback on survey results is best considered as an addition to an economic incentive.

Trust was an important consideration in relation to incentives offered over the internet. It remains a challenge for survey researchers to assure the respondents that the incentives promised over the internet are genuine. Mistrust of the incentives was expressed repeatedly. The main concern was that the prize offering was a trap and doubt that prizes would be awarded.
4.1.2 Intangible rewards. This category of reward was mentioned as frequently as tangible rewards. About 13 per cent of respondents gave comments that would fit within this dimension. The most frequently mentioned form of intangible reward was some manifestation of “interest”. The three major dimensions of interest were fun, relevance, and benefit.

Fun. People expected internet-based surveys to be “more fun” and “more interesting” to do. The predisposition of respondents is to view surveys as “boring”, “not interesting”, and even “a waste of time”. When asking people to respond on the internet, it should be kept in mind that there is an opportunity cost to respondents, i.e. the option of browsing at thousands of other fun sites instead of filling out the questionnaire. This obviously may influence willingness to participate, especially considering that potential respondents may have to pay for the internet connection fee out of their own pocket. Key sources of fun mentioned were visual design, technical features, the survey topic and wording. Colours, pictures, instant feedback in charts or graphs, a clock showing the percentage of completion, background music, humour, and an interesting topic are ways to reduce boredom of doing a survey and making it more worthwhile for the respondents. There is a “two edge to the sword” aspect to fun, however, as an overly fun survey may encourage ineligible respondents to participate, potentially invalidating the results of the study.

Relevance. The relevance factor resembles commitment/involvement theory, which also stresses that experience or association with the researcher or research organisation leads to feeling of responsibility to help with the survey questionnaire. People care more about a survey if it is relevant to them. As one respondent commented, “unless the survey is made explicitly relevant to the one being surveyed, there is little chance of cooperation”.

Relevance may be considered as topic relevance (or saliency) and affinity. The difference between topic relevance and affinity is that relevance emphasises the respondents’ eligibility (having enough knowledge to participate). Saliency was considered as more important than incentive, as least to some respondents, and one of them noted that “subject matter should at least be appealing; sometimes surveys try to ‘lure’ you with prizes, etc. which just end up making one suspicious or just turned off (it is tacky)”. Targeting the survey to people who have an opinion on the subject and appreciate the value of research may result in a higher response rate. On the other hand, survey topics that were too generic seem to make people doubt the real purpose and value of the research.

Affinity, on the other hand, emphasises the respondents’ willingness (feeling interested enough to participate). It is a perceived tie between the researcher/research organisation and the respondents. For example, the research was “done by a known organisation”, “having backing from an organisation such as the university”. Experience or knowledge of the researchers’ organisation helps to improve the respondents’ willingness to help.

Benefit. Survey participants expected social benefits from surveys. The research purpose statement is very important to their decisions about whether or not to participate. The purpose statement should convey the social benefit of the survey. Two common problems with purpose statements are insufficiency and ambiguity. The feedback showed that respondents require a clearly stated survey purpose, and more information about the survey’s specific purpose contributes to understanding the value
of the survey. A higher level of perceived social value improved the respondents’
willingness to participate.

4.1.3 Costs. Feedback from the respondents revealed that cost is very strongly
associated with survey response. There are four types of internet survey cost: time,
effort, financial cost and difficulty getting access to the internet. Time and effort were
the most frequently cited barriers to internet survey participation.

Time. About 10 per cent of respondents wished to participate but faced time
constraints from their other tasks. These respondents perceive surveys as “a waste of
time”, and “too long” and dismiss surveys at first sight. In addition, time is associated
with the internet connection fee. As one respondent put it, “you pay for internet use by
the time spent on the internet, so you don’t want to spend ages filling out a survey”.

Effort. Similar to other survey formats, the effort required to do an internet survey
is closely related to the number of questions. However, it is also affected by the
respondent’s internet literacy. As one respondent stated:

Perceptions and attitudes towards the use of the internet. Why? It is possible that some
respondents might be ignorant or know little about this technology while others might be
apprehensive about the ensuring confidentiality or privacy of information provided.

Slightly <10 per cent of respondents referred to “lack of knowledge of the internet”
and “lack of computer skills” as the major barrier to participating in internet surveys
on the internet. Compared other forms of surveys, respondents need extra effort to
participate in surveys on the internet, especially those who lack internet skills. To
target a broader population, a user-friendly design and clear instructions is necessary.

Frustration about the slow downloading speed, server crashes and failure to load
web pages are extra problems experienced by the internet survey respondents.
Addressing how to improve online surveys, one survey respondent commented:

[…] (to) make absolutely certain that when I click “submit” I won’t get any error messages.
Obviously, with the internet, this is impossible, but there is nothing worse than being told the
server is busy and I should try again later, which I most certainly won’t.

This type of cost is hardly avoidable, but survey researchers must try to avoid such
kinds of problems.

Access. Survey designers sometimes ignore the difficulty of contacting the internet
and the cost of using the internet. It was an important issue for survey respondents.
Comments about barriers to internet surveys include: “having access to the internet, it
is often assumed that everyone has easy access, or that if they don’t they will know
how to access throughout the channels that are available to them”, “[…] having access
to a computer”. Long lines at uni, cost of getting your own. Internet access, and “access
to the net – some can’t do it at work without being caught/getting into trouble”.
Suggestions for improving access included providing free access, or multi-channel to
access the survey questionnaire, fast download speed and compensation for internet
cost.

4.2 Dissonance

Refusing an internet survey did not elicit pronounce dissonance in potential
respondents. About 5 per cent of respondents commented on the ease of refusing a
survey request. People perceived internet survey contacts to be highly impersonal in
general and felt less obliged to help someone behind the computer screen.
The advantage of sending out thousands of e-mails in a matter of minutes at no cost appears to degrade the perceived value of the contact, and make the request look cheap and easy to ignore. This was revealed in comments like: “lack of direct personal interaction puts less social pressure on the person to actually take the time to do the survey”:

[... ] there isn’t the face to face thing, when someone comes up to you on the street you have to say no to their face, with an internet one you can hide behind a computer screen, which is also a benefit, if its personal stuff, but in the initial stages it can hard to persuade people to do it and “Too many people treat ‘people’ like a machine. E-mail and the internet in general is faceless and lacks intimacy and accountability”.

4.3 Self-perception
This was reflected in the respondents’ comments on why they responded to this internet survey – “warm heart, coz’ helping people can make himself/herself felt happy too”, being “a nice person” or “just helping others”, etc. This motivation is derived from people’s self-perception of being responsible and cooperative. A nicely worded survey appeal such as “We would like to get the opinion of helpful people like yourself” may be helpful to invoke self-perception based motives.

4.4 Trust
Trust related issues were of concern in their own right (independent of whether monetary incentives would be realized). Trust concerns were raised in relation to issues ranging from privacy, the researchers’ genuine identity, survey motivations, concerns about spam, internet technology.

4.4.1 Privacy. Privacy was a major concern to 12 per cent of internet survey respondents, as they worried about the confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected from them, and wanted to make sure that surveys are used for the stated purpose only. Comments reflecting such concerns include: “[...] feels less likely to be anonymous as opposed to a paper questionnaire”, “a fear of dodgy surveys with a hidden agenda”, “information can somehow be accessed in the wrong ways”, “suspicion of ulterior motives/sales pitches”. Concerns over security were mostly expressed over the control of the transferred information, access, and the possibility of a virus in email attachments and survey links. A strong demand for assurance that privacy and security are being protected was expressed.

4.4.2 Spam. Internet surveys seem to be associated with spam. “E-surveys are generally marketing”, “it’s like junk mail in the letterbox!”, “My biggest problem with this one is the spam approach [...]”. However, since any unsolicited email is spam, “there were very few alternatives for this survey”. People differ in their reactions to “spam”. Some strongly reacted to survey invitations, for example, “I don’t appreciate to be bulk emailed without my consent!!!”, “I hate people sending me emails when I haven’t invited them to!” and “Just spamming every damn mailbox you can get your dirty little hands on!!” Others were not as opinionated, but routinely ignore any email contacts that appeared to be spam, for example, “Because we receive so many junk emails, it becomes easy to ignore genuine requests” and “too much junk mail, this could been seen as just more of the same”. Overall, <5 per cent of respondents were concerned about being spamed.
4.5 Summary of findings

Figure 2 shows the key issues addressed by the respondents. The time and effort required was the most frequently cited barrier to doing an internet survey (197 times), followed by the lack of feeling of interest/benefit/relevance (115 times), incentive (103 times), privacy concern (102 times), visual design (63 times) and questionnaire length (55 times). Many respondents stressed the importance of clear and direct wording of the questions (40 times) and trust issues (35 times). Some respondents also expressed interest in knowing more about the survey (35 times), such as its purpose and social value. Another important theme was the respondents’ irritation/concern about being spamed (34 times).

Although, the two questionnaire lengths used in this study had no effect on click or completion rates, respondents directly relate the perceived time factor to the length of the questionnaire. As some respondents “scrolled down to see how many questions”, a long questionnaire affected their perception of how much time is needed for completing the survey. “Fewer” and “shorter” questionnaires are keys to reducing people’s time concern and making it possible for more respondents to participate. Moreover, respondents perceived short questionnaires and to-the-point questions as showing respect, which increased their motivation to participate.

5. Conclusions

The response issues shown in Figure 2 were categorized into applicable theory of response behaviour. As shown in Table I, the findings show that cost is the most highly mentioned factor and commitment the least mentioned factor. Based on these qualitative results, the authors conclude that cost, reward and trust are the most significant factors in survey response. Thus, the findings provide preliminary evidence that among the “original four” theories, social exchange appears to be most prominent for internet-based surveys, according to respondents. Some evidence was found to support the applicability of cognitive dissonance theory.
Some feedback from the respondents also suggested potential of self-perception theory, but to a much lesser extent compared with social exchange theory. Researchers have noted similar results (Allen et al., 1980). Therefore, self-perception theory appears to have limited value in explaining online survey response behaviour. Commitment theory also received little support from this study. This finding about commitment is unexpected, in light of prior research. For example, studies of research practitioners in Australia, Hong Kong, and The Philippines (Albaum et al., 1996) and practitioners in North America, Western Europe, and Asia-Pacific (Albaum et al., 1998) found a relatively high use of techniques based on commitment. Finally, a study of consumers in Australia and Hong Kong supported the relatively high positive impact of the theory of commitment that emerged from the studies of research practitioners (Evangelista et al., 1999). Such conflicting results may be unique to internet-based surveys. In any event, it is clear that further research is needed to clarify the issues that exist within the state-of-the-art regarding the viability of some of the theories of survey response. Clearly, social exchange continues to play a prominent, even dominant, role.

The present paper is an element of an on-going programmatic research program to understand motivations for responding (or not responding) to surveys; in the present case internet-based surveys. The open-ended content reported in this paper comes from one section of a larger survey. The paper develops a theory-based classification scheme and applies the scheme to the open-ended comments provided by respondents. The aim is to look for evidence that the hypothesized theories have relevance to understanding survey response.

Our view is that given the current state of theoretical understanding of motivation for responding to surveys, the immediate task is to determine which (if any) theories are applicable to understanding respondent motivations to respond to surveys. Once it is determined which theories have applicability, the boundary conditions of their applicability may be investigated.

Clearly, theory development aids both academic research and managerial practice. According to Hunt (1991, p. 4):

[...] a theory is a systematically related set of statements, including some lawlike generalizations, that is empirically testable. The purpose of theory is to increase scientific understanding through a systematized structure capable of both explaining and predicting phenomena. Thus, any structure which purports to be theoretical must be capable of explaining and predicting phenomena [...] Since the explanation and prediction of marketing phenomena are eminently practical concerns, the study and generation of marketing theory are practical pursuits of the first order.

As stated above, a major function of theory is explanation such that understanding and thus behaviour can be enhanced. Within the context of the study reported herein,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percent of distribution</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Frequency of response to issues, by theory of response
survey research practitioners, as well as academic researchers, can be aided in designing internet-based surveys. Clearly, designing a study and requesting survey participation within the framework of exchange would seem to be most desirable and ultimately lead to greater response. Minimizing the cost and providing a reward – not necessarily monetary – to potential respondents together with generating trust that costs will be minimized and rewards will be received is a key to success. At the same time, believing that commitment does not play a role may be a mistake, particularly in light of results from other studies. Finally, researchers may benefit from designing studies that combine the elements of the major theories. For example, exchange, self-perception and commitment/involvement fit well together. Future research needs to look into this possibility.

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Further reading


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