

Incentives and draws

Measures to **increase** and maintain the **motivation of participants** in the HISBUS students panel



HISBUS students panel

1. The **members of the virtual village for students** agreed in **written enquiries** carried out by HIS Hochschul-Informations-System to give information on current topics of the education and higher education policy in online questionnaires and E-mail enquiries at regular intervals over a longer period of time.
2. The future participants **are the first time contacted by E-mail** and enter their **postal address** into the invitation E-mail.
3. The **access information** together with an **incentive are sent to the participants by mail**.
4. The participants enter their access information on the panel site <https://hisbus.his.de> and take part in the basic data survey.
5. With the following individual **WWW enquiries draws** take place among all of the participants.

Several experiments on the effectiveness of incentives:

Incentives at the beginning of the panel membership

Experiment 1: Incentives prior to start of enquiry

Question: Which incentives result in the most returns?

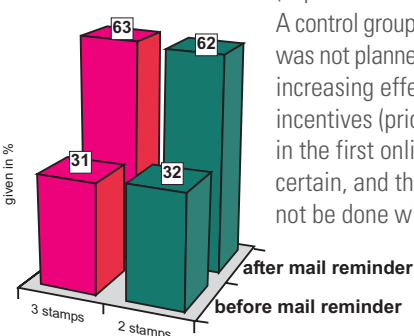
Experimental design: Prior to the participation in the first online enquiry the following incentives were submitted (in four random samples) to the future HISBUS members by mail: 3 stamps, 2 stamps + shopping cart chip, 1 shopping cart chip and 1 stamp (Experiment 1a).

In a next design in addition the effect of 2 stamps and 3 stamps on the return was investigated

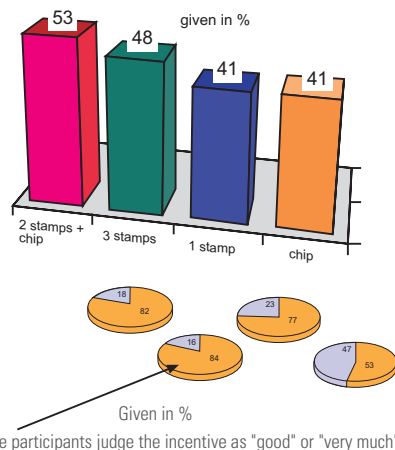
(Experiment 1b).

A control group without incentives was not planned, since the return-increasing effect of prepaid incentives (prior to participation in the first online enquiry) seems certain, and the enquiries should not be done without this effect.

Experiment 1b: Returns per incentive before and after mail reminder given in %



Experiment 1a: Returns per incentive before mail reminder



Results

Up to the time of the first mail reminder the most returns were achieved by sending 2 stamps + 1 shopping cart chip (53%), followed by the 3 stamps (48%).

In addition the participants were asked for a valuation of the incentives received. Question: "By mail you received a small thank-you from us for your willingness to cooperate. Did you like this kind of thank-you?" (very much-B-C-D-not at all).

The participants' valuations lead to the assumption that an incentive must be of a certain minimum value to be accepted as a symbolic appreciation: One stamp or definitely one shopping cart chip does not seem to be enough for this.

Another experiment showed on the other hand that it does not matter, whether two or three stamps are sent: without mail reminder both incentives led to 31 and 32% return, by a reminder this could be increased to 63 and 62%.

Obviously the present, the appreciation as such has the motivating effect, not primary the amount of the financial value - provided that it does not fall below a minimum value of approx. 2 stamps.

On experiment 1: Feedback / statements of panel participants

comments regarding the incentives, which was taken by 72% of the interviewees. The evaluation showed that the incentives were nearly exclusively positively valued, and the experience was that of a surprising and symbolic appreciation (positive feedback: 94% - negative feedback: less than 10%).

"I was very surprised. I think I've never been that pleased to hold a stamp in my hand. Good idea, useful and completely sufficient to express appreciation."

"I liked this thank-you even more since I didn't expect it! Thank you very much!"

As factors with a positive effect on the participation almost 10% of the interviewees mentioned in addition - and thus exceeding the original formulation of the question - their interest in the project, and also "details" like the personalized project cover letter and the cover letter of the customer (BMBF).

"I found it very nice that the cover letter was personalized (using my name) and that the ministry in addition said thank you."

"For me by the personalized cover letter this kind of enquiry becomes more concrete."

Draws with the individual online enquiries - Maintaining the readiness for participation

Experiment 2: Draw dates

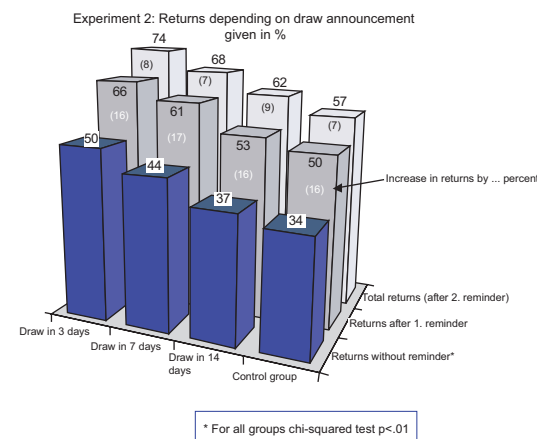
Question: Does the time of the draw have an effect on the readiness for participation? Phrase in the mail cover letter: "Among all participants taking part until November 8th we draw a flight for two persons to Pisa..."

Experimental design: Within the framework of the HISBUS survey regarding the topic "Preparation at School for the Studies" in November 2003 a flight for two persons to Pisa, an MP3 player with USB stick and four book vouchers each worth € 30 were drawn.

Four samples were formed, each of them being given a different draw date - 3, 7 and 14 days after the start of the online enquiry -, and one of them being the control group without any announcement of a draw.

Results

The longer the time-to-draw, the less the returns. The most returns can be achieved with the announcement of the draw after three days. Compared to the control group the returns are 16 percent more.



By reminders (approx. in a one-week-interval) almost another half of the returns received so far could be achieved. The returns can be increased significantly within each group, but the differences at the beginning cannot be leveled out this way: They remain on a higher level.

Conclusion: By announcing an early draw date the returns will increase significantly.

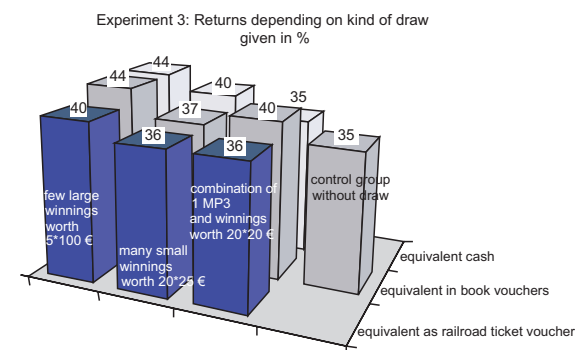
Experiment 3: Draw items

Question: Which draw items and which divisions lead to the most returns?

Experimental design: Within the framework of the current online enquiry "Service and Advice Offers for Students" in March 2004 10 samples were formed, each being announced a different combination of winnings. To take part in the draw the participation had to be carried out within three days. A control group was not given an announcement of a draw.

Results

Most returns were achieved by announcing a draw of 5 * € 100 as well as by the announcement of a draw of 5 book vouchers worth € 100 each (both of them 44%). This means a 9 percent increase of returns compared to the control group.



The draw of few large winnings lead to more returns than the draw of many small or combined prizes.

Obviously railroad ticket vouchers are less motivating than book vouchers or cash. Both with the draw of book vouchers and of cash returns of 40 % can be achieved.

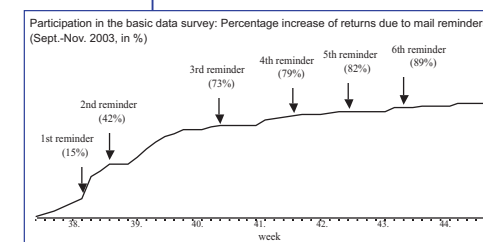
The selection of suitable prizes seems to be of major importance: A flight for two persons - as in experiment 2 - is probably a more attractive prize than cash or vouchers with identical financial equivalent in the end.

This assumption we will try to verify by further experiments.

DIGRESSION: Mail reminders in the HISBUS panel

Mail reminders are part of the recruitment procedure of the HISBUS panel: They help in lessening the media transition which is inevitably associated with the move from the letter to the WWW site login, and in addition they motivate the yet indecisive to participate.

The number of mail contacts has a positive effect on the readiness for participation and thus the amount of returns. In the HISBUS panel it could be demonstrated that by six mail reminders within a two months period the returns could be increased to 89%.



GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung



<https://hisbus.his.de>



Hochschul-Informations-System, Tel.: +49(0) 511 - 1220-0, www.his.de
Autorin: Janka Willige, 2004