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Title of the presentation: **Getting People to Respond: Insights from an Incentive Experiment in Polish GGS**

Extended Abstract

Topic

In recent years, researchers conducting social surveys have faced a growing challenge of declining response rates. This trend has been observed across various countries and survey modes, raising concerns about data quality, representativeness, and the increasing costs of data collection. In response, certain measures have been introduced to encourage participation, among which the use of respondent incentives has gained particular attention. Incentives—whether monetary or non-monetary, conditional or unconditional—are increasingly seen as a practical tool to boost response rates, especially in self-administered modes such as online surveys (e.g. Emery et al. 2020).

In the paper I will present the rationale, design, and results of an experimental study conducted within the ongoing round of the Polish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). The aim of the study is to assess the effects of different incentive models in increasing participation in a representative online survey in Poland, evaluating their effectiveness for different socio-demographic groups.

Theoretical focus

Previous research (e.g. Church, 1993; Singer et al., 1999; Edwards et al., 2002; Petrolia and Bhattacharjee 2009) has shown that incentives can positively influence survey participation by reducing perceived burden and increasing perceived value of involvement in social study. However, the effectiveness of incentives depends on several factors, including their type (monetary vs. non-monetary), certainty of transfers (lottery vs certain transfer), and conditionality (unconditional vs. conditional). Literature suggest that unconditional (prepaid) incentives are more powerful than conditional (postpaid) incentives and that money is more powerful than other types of incentives (Göritz 2004; James and Bolstein 1992; Larson and Chow 2003; Messer and Dillman 2010; Krawczyk 2011).

In Poland, as well as in the broader context of Eastern and Central Europe, not many experimental studies of incentive effects have been conducted. And the scarce results of these studies are mixed – on one hand indicating the preference for small material incentive (Sztabiński et al. 2012) and on the other confirming the effectiveness of prepaid, unconditional financial incentives (Smyk, van der Velde, 2024). The current study adds to the limited regional knowledge base and supports development of evidence-based approaches to data collection.

Data

The empirical basis for the experiment is the first wave of the ongoing round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-II) in Poland, launched in the third quarter of 2025. The GGS is an international, longitudinal study focusing on demographic behaviours, family dynamics, and intergenerational relations. In Poland, the survey targets a representative sample of 10,000 individuals aged 18–59, selected using stratified random sampling. GGS is conducted using a mixed-mode approach: CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) and CAPI (Computer-

Assisted Personal Interviewing). The incentives experiment is embedded within the CAWI component and involves 2,000 respondents.

Methods

The experiment covers four groups, 500 respondents each (2,000 in total). The experiment participants were randomly selected from the main sample while maintaining the stratification criteria. There are three treatment groups (T) and a control group (CG) combining different types and conditions of incentives. These models are:

T1: Unconditional incentive of 70 PLN (approx. 16.5 EUR).

T2: Mixed mode – unconditional and conditional incentive (20+50 PLN).

T3. “Early birds” – unconditional incentive higher if the respondents finalises the survey within 3 weeks from receiving the invitation letter (70 PLN in the first weeks, 50 PLN afterwards).

CG: Conditional incentive of 70 PLN – which serves as the reference condition, reflecting the standard incentive model used in the main survey.

The primary outcome measure is the response rate within each group, with secondary measures including time to completion, item nonresponse, and effects of each incentive model in different socio-economic groups. Future analysis will include short- and long-term effects of each incentive model on response rate in the next waves of the GGS.

Expected findings

Given the limited evidence on incentive effectiveness in Poland and the region, especially in the context of representative online surveys, the study is expected to generate novel insights into respondent behaviour. It is hypothesised that:

- The mixed model (unconditional and conditional incentive) will have the strongest effect on increasing response rates.
- The “Early birds” model may lead to higher initial engagement, but the mixed model and the model with conditional incentives only can result in better completion rates.
- The effects of incentives may vary across demographic groups.

The findings will contribute to the broader methodological literature on survey participation and provide practical recommendations for future large-scale data collection efforts in.

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