Do you need a foot-in-the-door or is a toe enough?
Scripting introductions to induce tailoring and increase participation in telephone interviews

Motivation

- Survey designers/managers often require interviewers to read introductory text verbatim, and some interviewers are more comfortable with a strict script.
- HOWEVER, cooperation success is highest when interviewers tailor their introduction to the person on the phone (e.g., Groves & Couper, 2002; Lavrakas, Kelly, & McClain, 2016).
- We wanted to see whether a new introduction could increase cooperation in the Washington Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS).

Phase 1 (Aug 2018): Hook Questions
One of the following was randomly assigned to 50% of interviews (8,477) and added to the intro script:
- “Have you heard of this survey?”
- “Can I take a minute to tell you about it?”
- “Have you seen any news stories about this survey recently? It’s often published in major newspapers and reported in the nightly news because it’s such a large and important survey about health in Washington.”

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Phase 2 (Sep 2018): Schedule-a-callback
The following was added to the intro script in 50% of interviews (9,891):

- “Is this a safe and convenient time to talk?”
- If not, I can schedule a more convenient time to call you back.
- With an option to ask: “What’s a better time to call you back?”

Experiment Design

- Does the revised script help some interviewers more than others?
- Is variability in script effectiveness due to an interviewer’s ability to implement the revised script?
- What interviewer characteristics predict the effectiveness of the script or ability to implement the modified script?

New Experiments

- Use volunteer interviewers interested in testing alternative introductions.
- Allow for more training and longer fielding time to allow interviewers to acclimate to the new script.
- Use unscripted introductions with guidance on tailoring.

Research Questions

1) Will the revised intros…
   a. Increase cooperation?
   b. Reduce refusals?
   c. Increase scheduled callbacks?
   d. Recruit respondents with different characteristics?

2) Are there other efficiency gains or losses from the new intros?

3) Can the revised scripted introductions engage the potential respondent, get a foot-in-the-door, and facilitate interviewer tailoring?

Results

- No significant impact in cooperation rates.
- Reduction in eligibility rates in the hook question script.
- Significant increase in contacts with the schedule-a-callback script.
- Only household income showed a significantly higher percentage of lower income respondents in the schedule-a-callback script.
- More phone numbers per complete were required in the hook question script.
- A toe in the door appears to be sufficient. Overall, there was no clear/consistent pattern of improvement or harm in using either experimental script.

Future Directions

Evaluating Interviewer Effects

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