Developments in Social Science Methodology
Anuška Ferligoj and Andrej Mrvar (Editors)
Metodološki zvezki, 18, Ljubljana: FDV, 2002

Response Behaviour in Audience Research: A Two-Stage Design for the Explanation of Nonresponse[1]

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Abstract

Audience research by means of surveys has a long tradition, certainly within arts and humanities oriented research. Yet, due to selective sampling and unit nonresponse it frequently lacks the methodological rigour to make scientifically valid statements based on sample estimates. This is one of the first attempts to explore unit nonresponse in audience research. More specifically, it focuses on the explanation of nonresponse by the socio-demographic and more topic related characteristics of a theatre audience. Using a two-step procedure for the on-site collection of data, the characteristics of respondents are compared with those of nonrespondents. In step 1 the composition of the theatre audience is compared to a proxy of a theatre population benchmark based on a weighted sample of the Flemish population (APS–2000). The validity of this best available method is discussed. Step 2 compares respondents with nonrespondents on a micro-level: ignoring unit nonresponse in step 1, we use logistic regression to map selection in step 2. The chance of cooperating with the survey has been found to increase with educational attainment and vary according to occupational category. Moreover, involvement with survey topic is confirmed as a strong predictor of survey participation. Gender, age and experience with theatre remain insignificant in predicting response behaviour. These findings are compared with the socio-demographic correlates of response behaviour in general populations. Implications for statistically controlling for nonresponse bias in audience research are discussed. Suggestions for further research are presented.

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1 Introduction

Audience research in theatres by means of surveys has a long and venerable tradition, certainly within arts and humanities oriented research (e.g., Davis and McConachie, 1998; Greisenegger, 1984). Through the on-site collection of data by means of a survey, researchers try to map and analyse a diversity of personal, aesthetical and attitudinal characteristics of a theatre audience. Yet, however rich in theory and subtle in reasoning this research may be, it frequently lacks the methodological rigour necessary to be able to do scientifically reliable and valid statements on the composition of the audience or – for example – its aesthetical expectations and evaluations. Due to high nonresponse rates the findings from these studies need to be approached with a certain amount of scientific scepsis (e.g., Eversmann et al., 1992). In this article we attempt to tackle this methodological neglect and turn the attention to unit nonresponse and nonresponse bias in audience research. More specifically, this article focuses on the explanation of unit nonresponse through the socio-demographic and more topic related characteristics of a theatre audience in a survey on high arts participation.

The relevance of topic and situationally specific research on response behaviour has theoretical as well as policy relevance. First of all, the theoretical importance of analysing nonresponse in audience research is situated in the possibility to test the applicability of a general theory on response behaviour in a unique surveying context with a similarly specific population (see for example Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1996; Holt, 1997). Unlike in household surveys, the potential respondents are not contacted at their home residence but in the theatre itself. Hence, problems of sample persons not being at home, troubles with physical impediments when trying to gain access to the housing unit such as locked appartment buildings, etc. are irrelevant in this research context. Other impediments and barriers become more salient, such as time restrictions and interference when trying to contact members of the audience, spacial problems to let respondents fill out the questionnaire, etc... Moreover, the audience attending cultural manifestations is in no respect representative of the general population, which makes an analysis of the composition of the so-called silent minority in a theatre audience an intrigueing endeavour (Goyder, 1987).

Second, the analysis of nonresponse in audience research has direct policy relevance. When one of the policy objectives is to stimulate and broaden cultural participation – i.e. try to ensure that all social groups attend manifestations of the legitimate culture, such as theatre, opera, musea of plastic art, etc.[3] – one needs indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of policy initiatives. If these estimates are influenced by nonresponse error, the external and internal validity of the findings

[3] This is the case in Flanders today (Anciaux, 1999).

is seriously threatened (Berk, 1983) and policy makers risk drawing wrong conclusions or initiate inadequate or irrelevant social programs. Hence, insight is needed in the composition of the group of 'phantom respondents' (Brehm, 1993) to be able to correct statistically for nonresponse error, so that the chance of implementing inadequate social interventions – because based on inadequate estimates – is minimised (see for example Van Goor and Stuiver, 1998; Winship and Mare, 1992).

2 Theoretical perspectives

2.1 Research questions

Several factors have been acknowledged to influence the decision to comply to a survey request in general populations, ranging from elements related to the larger social, economic and/or political environment (Couper and Groves, 1996; Harris-Kojetin and Tucker, 1999) to other determining factors more closely linked to the specific situation in which the request is made. These pertain to attributes of the survey design (Heberlein and Baumgartner, 1978), to characteristics of the agency that establishes initial contact (Brehm, 1993; Hornik and Ellis, 1988), to the interaction with this agency (Carton and Loosveldt, 1999) and to respondent characteristics – to which our attention in this article is turned. The following research questions will be addressed:

1. in what respect(s) do respondents of a survey on high arts participation differ from nonrespondents? More precisely, what characteristics of the members of a theatre audience significantly increase the chance of participation in a survey ? Not only potential socio-demographic differences will be examined, but also possibly relevant correlates with regard to topic salience, i.e. topic involvement and experience with theatre, will be put to the test;
2. in how far do the ideas concerning the sample person's characteristics and survey response in general populations apply to survey response in specific populations, i.c. a theatre audience? In other words, can the hypotheses to explain nonresponse by means of respondent characteristics derived from a theory of participation in household surveys within a general population justifiably be used in the study of nonresponse within audience research ? This research question will thus entail a comparison of the key ideas of the seminal theoretical framework on nonresponse in household surveys in general populations by Groves and Couper (1998: 119-151) with the main answers and findings of the first research question.

The next section provides a brief overview of the various theoretical perspectives with regard to survey participation in general populations. More

particularly, the impact of the different socio-demographic respondent features and the more theatre related concepts on response behaviour will be outlined and hypotheses will be formulated.

2.2 Theoretical perspectives and hypotheses

Social science research on response behaviour in surveys has always devoted considerable attention to the socio-demographic differences between respondents and nonrespondents. It is not only of natural interest to be able to control the representativeness of the sample by looking if it mirrors aggregate population characteristics (Brehm, 1993: 26). An analysis of significant socio-demographic differences also makes an explanation of survey participation possible. Yet, the socio-demographic characteristics of potential resondents cannot be considered as having a direct causal effect on response behaviour. Rather, they have to be considered as indirect measures of social-psychological constructs exerting influence on the decision to cooperate. Their usefulness as explanatory variables in the decision to participate in a survey is mainly situated in the extent to which they are related to certain shared life experiences. As indicated by Groves and Couper:

- "*[t]he shared experiences of socio-demographic groups may produce various predis-positions to those requests [i.e. survey requests from governmental, educational and commercial institutions] and reflect features of their current lifestyles that affect how they react to such a request*" (Groves and Couper, 1998: 121).

Shared life experiences constitute a certain predisposition and result in certain durable habits guiding patterns of thought and action – what Bourdieu calls 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984; Goyder et al., 1999) – patterns that thus also pertain to compliance to survey requests.

In this view, which essentially considers the socio-demographic features of potential respondents as proxies for more social-psychological correlates, two types of processes with regard to decision making are of particular relevance, i.e. a thorough calculation of the pros and cons of survey participation on the one hand and a more shallow, heuristic approach based on much quicker and more impulse driven considerations on the other (Groves and Couper, 1998: 32). It is exactly this more shallow consideration that is the most promising in explaining survey response behaviour. The potential respondent generally lacks the personal interest and the necessary time and knowledge to be able to make a balanced and thorough consideration of the benefits and costs of complying with the survey request and resorts to the more heuristic approach. Several principles of compliance have been found to underlie the response decision, such as reciprocitation, social validation, authority, liking, etc. Also helping tendencies – based on the norm of social responsibility, which motivates people to help others who are in need – can influence the decision to participate (for a more thorough discussion see Groves,

Cialdini, and Couper, 1992). We will discuss the different theoretical undergirdings as we review the empirical evidence on the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on survey participation in general populations.

Gender. Most studies conclude that gender either exerts no influence on response behaviour (DeMaio, 1980) or report only a small tendency for women to have higher cooperation rates (e.g., Smith, 1983). This gender effect can possibly be attributed to women's higher susceptibility to social influence, due to role differentiation at home:

- "*When a request for information comes from outside the home, they [i.e. women] are more accustomed to interacting with nonhousehold members from the home setting*." (Groves and Couper, 1998: 136)

This rationale for women specifically applies to household surveys in which the interviewer establishes contact at the home of the respondent. Yet, it remains a matter of debate if this theoretical explanation is generalizable to a setting outside of the home, such as a playhouse.

Age. The impact of age on survey participation is a rather ambiguous matter. Some of its ambiguity results from the fact that studies on nonresponse commonly use bivariate statistical techniques and that age is linked to educational attainment and occupational category: older cohorts tend to have less education and lower SES (e.g., Goyder, 1987: 85). Furthermore, its impact is often misunderstood since many studies fail to distinguish between different forms of nonresponse: noncontact is frequently confounded with refusal.

And indeed, empirical evidence shows that older people are more easy to contact at home, largely because of their lower employment and reduced mobility, certainly at an advanced age (Groves and Couper, 1998: 133). However, they tend to have higher noncooperation rates, which is explained as a result of social isolation – a confirmation of the disengagement hypothesis stating that the elderly in large measure retire from social life (Goyder, 1987: 114; Krause, 1993). A factor that could increase the chance of a positive response to a survey request, is the greater civic duty and social responsibility present among the elderly, who experience a demand from a governmentally related institution to perform a task – such as cooperating with a survey – as legitimate (see Groves and Couper, 1998: 133). These opposing forces related to age could account for the somewhat ambiguous findings in the nonresponse literature. Yet, there is more reason – and empirical evidence – to assume that the chance of survey participation in general populations decreases with age (DeMaio, 1980).

Education. Education is typically considered as an indicator of SES. Past literature indicates that lower educated groups elicit lower cooperation to surveys. This is explained – by means of social exchange theory – as a consequence of a lower class conception that perceives surveys as an instrument serving the interests of the middle class and that:

- "*they [i.e. the lower educated] may believe that in relationships with those more fortunate they are routinely unjustly disadvantaged*." (Groves and Couper, 1998: 126).

The negative relationship can further be interpreted as an instance of self-disqualification, i.e. some form of working class deference resulting in an inclination of the lower educated to feel unfit and not qualified to successfully complete the survey task (Goyder et al., 1999: 14; also see Brehm, 1993: 31). Yet, the social exchange theory can lead to a second, opposite hypothesis. People with lower SES – and more particularly people with lower educational attainment – may be more inclined to see the benefits of reciprocating for the public assistance provided by the government (see also Gouldner, 1960). This hypothesis has been confirmed – somewhat unexpectedly in the light of the previous empirical evididence – in Groves and Couper's own research, based on a government survey dealing with policy issues. The confirmation of this hypothesis may be due to the unique nature of the survey, of which the results could have implications for the (re)distribution of public money (Goyder et al., 1999: 2). This redistribution of resources is much less pertinent in audience research which generally deals with more aesthetic and evaluative matters of a play. To conclude, we cling to the first hypothesis and assume a positive relationship between educational attainment and survey cooperation.

Occupational category. Occupational category can also be considered as an indicator of SES. Hence, the same ideas on the impact of educational attainment on response behaviour apply – *mutatis mutandis* – to occupational category: we expect a positive relationship.

Issue salience. Issue salience refers to the degree in which the topic of the survey is relevant or important to respondents. The intuitively easily recognised hypothesis is as follows: if the topic is salient to the potential sample member, then she/he will be more prone to participate to the survey (Heberlein and Baumgartner, 1978). For example, people who express little interest in politics more often refuse to participate in a survey on election behaviour (Couper, 1997). Survey participation is almost twice as likely for someone who is interested in the survey topic than for somebody who is not (Martin, 1994). The explanation for this consistent relationship is that:

- "*salient topics may offer some chance of personal gain to the respondents because their group might be advantaged by the survey information, and also that the chance to exhibit one's knowledge on the topic would be gratifying*." (Groves and Couper, 1998: 145)

There is no information available on income and marital status[4], although both have been found to have a significant impact on the chance of cooperation (e.g.,

[4] There was a trade-off between collecting data on cultural participation and data on response behaviour. The questions concerning income and marital status were only included in the second questionnaire and so they cannot be analysed as predictors of response behaviour.

Brehm, 1993; DeMaio, 1980; Smith, 1983). The various hypotheses on the impact of respondent characteristics in general populations on survey cooperation are summarised and visualised in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent characteristics and their expected impact on survey participation within general populations.

Hypothesis	Variable	Expected effect on survey participation
1	Gender	No effect or positive effect for women
2	Age	No effect or negative effect
3	Educational attainment	Positive effect
4	Occupational category	Positive effect
5	Issue salience	Positive effect

3 Research design

3.1 Specificity of the population: description of the Flemish theatre audience

Before comparing the survey respondents in our audience research with the nonrespondents, it is advisable to describe the contemporary theatre audience – the population under study here – in terms of its distinctive socio-demographic characteristics and to draw attention to the differences with the general population. It is well known that the composition of the audience attending cultural events does not mirror the general population (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984). The aim in this paragraph is to explore – albeit briefly – the most important and salient differences between people attending plays and people who do not, in order to illustrate the specificity of the population under study. The data used for that purpose come from the APS–2000 survey[5]. The APS–2000 survey is organised every year and probes into the value orientations, the attitudes and the leisure activities of the Flemish population by means of a standardised face-to-face interview. Sample size for 2000 is n = 1345 with a response rate of 64,5%. A comparison of the sample estimates with population data reveals that people with lower educational attainment, especially older women, are underrepresented in the APS survey (Loosveldt and Carton, 2001). Therefore, the data was post-stratified by means of a weighting coefficient based on the population distribution of age*gender*education using Iterative Proportional Fitting (NIS, 1998). Since population distribution for age is only available from 18 years or older, some cases

[5] APS stands for Administration Planning and Statistics and functions as a policy-oriented research unit within the Flemish Community.

had to be omitted from the analysis, resulting in an eventual sample size of n = 1204.

Table 2 shows the results of a comparison between cultural participants and non-participants with regard to their socio-demographic characteristics. Cultural participants are defined as those people who have attended at least one play (theatre) during the previous year. Non-participants have not attended one play during the preceding year. The socio-demographic features included are gender, age, educational attainment and occupational category.

Table 2: Comparison of the socio-demographic characteristics of cultural participants and non-participants based on weighted APS2000–data (n = 1204).

Variable	**Particip.**		**Nonpart.**		**Significance**
	n	%	n	%	
Gender					χ^2 = 1,92, df = 1, p > 0,05
Men	281	48,0	321	51,9	
Women	305	52,0	297	48,1	
Age					χ^2 = 38,23, df = 5, p < 0,0001
18 – 24	72	12,3	64	10,4	
25 – 34	126	21,5	102	16,5	
35 – 44	126	21,5	120	19,4	
45 – 54	115	19,6	94	15,2	
55 – 64	83	14,1	87	14,1	
65 – 79	65	11,1	150	24,3	
Educational attainment					χ^2 = 115,6, df = 4, p < 0,0001
No or primary education	90	15,4	223	36,1	
Lower secundary	107	18,3	157	25,4	
Higher secundary	217	37,0	167	27,0	
Tertiary (not university)	128	21,8	46	7,4	
Tertiary (university)	44	7,5	25	4,0	
Occupational category					χ^2 = 82,4, df = 7, p < 0,0001
Student	38	6,6	22	3,6	
Unemployed/pensioner	133	23,2	220	36,4	
Housekeeper	45	7,9	68	11,2	
Farmer/manual worker	86	15,0	142	23,5	
Clerical employee	159	27,7	88	14,5	
Small shopkeeper	36	6,3	24	4,0	
Managerial employee/executive	61	10,6	24	4,0	
Employer/professional	15	2,6	17	2,8	

First of all, the audience attending theatres is not selective with regard to gender, i.e. the percentage women in the culturally active part of the Flemish population is not significantly larger than in the culturally non-active part ($\chi 2$ = 1,92, df = 1, p > 0,05).[6]

Second, cultural participants generally tend to be younger than non-participants – mainly due to an overrepresentation of students and middle-aged groups on the one hand and an underrepresentation of people older than 65 within the culturally active on the other. Further empirical support for this selectivity with regard to age can be found in the difference between the mean age of theatregoers (43,5 years) and non-theatergoers (48,2 years). This difference is statistically significant (t = 5,00, $p < 0,0001$).

Thirdly, the theatre audience also seems to be selective with regard to educational attainment: as much as 66,3 % of the cultural participants has received at least higher secundary schooling against only 38,4 % of the culturally inactive, a difference of 27,9 percentage points. The higher educational attainment is one of the key features of cultural participants; a finding that has been replicated in an extensive and quite unequivocal empirical literature on high arts participation (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Van Eijck, 1997).

The same rationale *grosso modo* applies to the differential composition of the two subpopulations with regard to occupational category (χ^2 = 82,4 df = 7, $p <$ 0,0001). The unemployed/pensioners, farmers/manual workers and housekeepers – belonging to the lower classes – are overrepresented within the culturally inactive, while members of the theatre audience tend to occupy more middle and upper class jobs. As can readily be seen in Table 2, the unemployed and pensioners (23,2 % vs. 36,4 %), farmers and manual workers (15,0 % vs. 23,4 %) and housekeepers (7,9 % vs. 11,2 %) are underrepresented in the theatre audience, while clerical employees, managerial employees/executives and small shopkeepers are overrepresented, respectively 27,7 % vs. 14,5 %, 10,6 % vs. 4,0 % and 6,3 % vs. 4,0 %, largely comprising the middle and higher classes. Due to the small number of cases (only 32), little can be said about the relation between employers/professionals and theatre attendance. It would seem that they are not overrepresented within the culturally active.

The contemporary theatre audience is not a representative sample of the total Flemish population, but a rather selective – at least with regard to its socio-demographic characteristics – and specific subgroup. Cultural participants generally tend to be younger, higher educated and have a higher SES than non-participants. There are no significant differences with regard to gender.

[6] Some studies do find empirical support for a gender difference with regard to cultural participation: women would be more inclined to participate in the high arts resulting in an overrepresentation of women within the subpopulation of cultural participants (e.g. Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000).

These findings based on the APS–2000 data are concurrent with earlier population research on the composition of theatre audiences in Flanders (see for example Elchardus, Hooghe and Smits, 1999; Jacobs and Stoffelen, 1998). Possible explanations for these differences need not bother us here, but can possibly be attributed to differential social background with Bourdieu's so-called habitus as a crucial explanatory element (Bourdieu, 1984), to different levels of schooling (Ganzeboom, 1989), to differential status considerations (Veblen, 1965) or to a combination of all three.

3.2 Specificity of surveying context

The fact that potential respondents are not contacted at their home but in the playhouse itself, makes insight in impediments for surveys response in household surveys slightly inapplicable to audience research. Other problems and obstructives can be identified to be far more typical for the audience research context. It is not our intention to discuss this matter in detail. We only want to review the specific difficulties encountered in audience research to be able to account for the different specific forms of nonresponse in audience research.

The most pertinent problem faced by researchers is the severe time restriction when contacting members of an audience on-site to participate in the survey. A theatre audience typically arrives at the playhouse between thirty and five minutes before the play starts. Contact can be established before the play when the audience is queueing to enter the auditorium or when it leaves the theatre – cf. an exit poll (Moon and McGregor, 1991). The agency that establishes contact is faced with a trade-off, i.e. the time and attention necessary to convince one member of the audience to participate in the survey leads to a decreasing amount of possible contacts. The small amount of time the contacting agency has at her/his disposal before – or after – the play necessarily has to be either devoted to contacting members of the audience or to convincing initially uncooperative members. This is especially the case in theatres with large crowds. Also theatregoers arriving late are hard to contact – and if contacted, often refuse. Moreover, due to the lack of a real sampling frame, it is impossible to re-contact uncontacted or initially uncooperative members of the audience.

Also spacial problems and limitations – when respondents are asked to fill out the questionnaire on-site – may possibly result in a lower cooperation rate: the lack of a quiet spot without disturbance from outside or interruptions from other people might discourage initially cooperative members of the audience to respond (see also Pol, 1992). Another impediment for cooperation is the fact that people often make arrangements after the play and need to leave immediately without being able to fill out the questionnaire on-site. If time demand is a frequently cited reason for refusal in household surveys (see for example Helgeson, 1994), the time

demands of a survey in audience research becomes an even more pertinent motive for noncooperation.

3.3 Sampling procedure and data collection

During the months February and March 2001 the University of Ghent carried out an extensive audience research in 3 theatre institutions in Ghent (Belgium)[7]: the audience of 24 performances of 10 different plays – selected by means of 'time and place' sampling[8] – was contacted on-site to participate in a survey on arts participation. The principal aim of this survey was to analyse the socio-demographic composition of the theatre audience, its aesthetic expectations, its evaluation of the play and organising cultural institution, its lifestyle, its reading and leisure habits and its attitudes towards governmental subsidising of the legitimate arts. It was anticipated that it would be difficult to achieve good, i.e. scientifically acceptable, response rates, taking into account the large scope of the research questions and considering the practical problems of administering a 30 page questionnaire on-site. Therefore, the data was collected in two steps (cf. Pol, 1992; Pol and Pak, 1994).

The first step consisted of collecting data on socio-demographic characteristics of the theatre audience, its aesthetic expectations and its evaluation of the play by means of a self-administered 6-page questionnaire. Students of the 1st licentiate Sociology of the University of Ghent attempted to contact every member of the audience before the beginning of the play, when queueing or just waiting to enter the playhouse, and handed over the questionnaire.[9] This questionnaire was supposed to be filled out on-site after the play and returned to the students. At the same time, depending on the size of the audience[10], every contacted and cooperative 3rd, 4th or 5th member of the audience was given a second 20-page

[7] Namely, *Nieuwpoorttheater*, *KC Vooruit* and *Nederlands Toneel Gent (NTG)*. These three institutions form a relatively representative sample of the available cultural offer – at least with regard to professional theatre – in Ghent (Belgium).

[8] As the population of people attending theatres is unknown, no sampling frame as such is available. Therefore, we had to resort to techniques of nonprobability sampling that would still maximise aselectivity and representativeness. We opted for 'time and place' sampling, randomly selecting 24 performances out of a total of 68 that were being played at that time, i.e. between 07.02.2001 and 03.03.2001 in the three institutions.

[9] The students were easily recognizable as research-assistents. They all had a clearly visible tag attached to their clothes with their names on and 'Ghent University' beneath. Each potential respondent was given a pen that had to be returned with the questionnaire. No incentives were used. A total of 1962 people out of 4003 complied with the survey request and returned the 6-page questionnaire.

[10] The selection interval increases with the size of the audience, as we only needed a limited number of filled-out questionnaires per performance. Moreover, the 4 to 5 students per performance, who functioned as contacting agencies, would have been unable in a big-sized audience to contact and convince every third spectator to cooperate. Therefore, bigger selection intervals were necessary in bigger audiences.

questionnaire – with a pre-stamped envelope – which was supposed to be filled out at home and returned by mail. This formed step two. The 20-page questionnaire contained the remaining questions on lifestyle, reading and leisure habits and attitudes towards subsidising cultural institutions and was linked via unique numbers to the short questionnaire from step 1. Table 3 shows the realised response rates at both steps in the data collection.[11] The rates in step 1 pertain to those people who also have received a questionnaire in step 2[12].

Table 3: Response rates of the first and second step in the different theatre institutions.

	Total eligible	**Contact rate[a]**	**Coope-ration rate[b]**	**Refusal rate (indirect and direct)[c]**	**Response rate[d]**
	n	***Con/N***	**Coo/Con**	***Ref/Con***	***Coo/n***
KC Vooruit	304	66,0 %	67,3 %	32,7 %	44,4 %
Nieuwpoorttheater	395	66,3 %	71,0 %	29,0 %	47,1 %
NTG	349	65,0 %	71,4 %	28,6 %	46,4 %
Total step 1	1048	65,8 %	70,2 %	28,2 %	46,2 %
KC Vooruit	133	(100 %)	60,2 %	39,8 %	60,2 %
Nieuwpoorttheater	186	(100 %)	54,3 %	45,7 %	54,3 %
NTG	162	(100 %)	59,3 %	40,7 %	59,3 %
Total step 2	481	(100 %)	57,6 %	42,4 %	57,6 %

[a] Number of contacted units divided by total eligible units; [b] Number of completed interviews divided by number of contacted units; [c] Direct refusal refers to the immediate refusal to cooperate when faced with the survey request, i.e. people do not accept the questionnaire from the contacting agency. Indirect refusal means that people accept the questionnaire but do refuse to fill it out and/or hand it back in. Direct refusals were rare;
[d] Number of completed interviews divided by total eligible units.

It is immediately clear that the total response rate in step 1 (46,2 %) is a long way from the ideal 100 percent. Table 2 further indicates that there do not exist great differences between the three institutions with regard to contact and cooperation rates in step 1. Contact rates approximate 66 % and the differences

[11] This procedure can be considered as a sort of panel design – a 'quasi' panel design as it were – in which step 1 would be the first wave and step 2 the second wave.

[12] The reason for only including the rates for those who have also received the second questionnaire is that one has an immediate view of the 'funnel'-effect from both steps in the data collection in absolute numbers. Still, the response rates and sample distributions of the audience selection (eligible n = 1048) – used for our purposes here – mirror the rates and distributions when all members of the audience are put into play. The fact that every member of the audience in step 1 was contacted had to do with the content oriented research questions like the evaluation of every specific theatre performance. A selection of only 20 persons per play would have been inadequate for these research purposes. Total eligible n in step 1 (i.e. when all people are included who have received a questionnaire in step 1) = 4003, with KC Vooruit comprising 1449, Nieuwpoorttheater 1372 and NTG 1182 eligibles.

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between the cooperation rates (67,3 %, 71,0 % and 71,4 %) and the response rates (44,4 %, 47,1 % and 46,4 %) do not reach the level of significance (all *p*-values exceed 0,20). The trade-off between contacting and convincing potential respondents and the spacial impediments seem to be applicable to the three theatre institutions with the same intensity. Yet, there do exist certain significant fluctuations in contact and cooperation rates between the 24 performances (table not shown). Possibly, various characteristics of the specific performances, such as size of the audience, length of the performance, complexity, weekend performance or not, etc. interact with respondent characteristics. Furthermore, the influence of and interaction with characteristics of the contacting agencies cannot be ruled out either – concurrent with findings from household surveys in general populations (e.g., Campanelli and Sturgis, 1997; Groves and Couper, 1996). Nevertheless, these issues – however relevant – remain out of the scope of this article.

3.4 Methods and variables

Step 1. To be able to model nonresponse in step 1, we would ideally want micro-level data on the nonrespondents collected on-site with regard to their socio-demographic characteristics. However, given the practical limitations and time restrictions for data collection in theatres, we will have to resort to other methods to estimate nonresponse in step 1. The second best method would be to use population benchmarks of the theatre audiences of the three institutions and compare the socio-demographic characteristics of our sample with these benchmarks on an aggregate level (cf. Groves and Couper, 1998: 49). But as no such benchmarks – because no sampling frame – are available in audience research, we have to resort to yet another, even more imperfect way to assess the nonresponse: the composition of the audience in step 1 is compared to a proxy of the population of theatregoers in Ghent based on APS–2000 data. In other words, we use the socio-demographic composition of the subpopulation of theatregoers in Flanders as a proxy for the theatre audience in Ghent and take this as a benchmark.

A few remarks on this best available method are appropriate. First of all, the validity of this proxy depends on its being representative for the population of theatregoers in Ghent. Possible differences between the estimates from the audience research and the weighted APS–data can be attributed to nonresponse, but also to a possible difference in composition between the Flemish and the Ghent theatregoing population. Second, the comparison is slightly aggravated by a difference between the sampling procedures. In the audience research the chance of being sampled is proportional to the frequency of going to the theatre, while every member of the sampling frame in the APS–survey has an equal probability of eventually becoming a sample member. Finally, the comparison of the composition of both samples might be hindered by differential nonresponse bias, due to differential motives of nonresponse, i.e. the different survey topics might

cause different groups of people – with a different socio-demographic profile – not to cooperate (cf. Goyder et al., 1999: 2; Martin, 1994). When analysing nonresponse in step 1, we will have to pay attention to – and try to control for – these pertinent caveats.

Step 2. Our research design does make a thorough comparison on a micro-level possible between respondents and nonrespondents on the mail questionnaire in step 2. Hereto, we link our two-step data collection technique to the three-step research procedure as described by Hox et al. (Hox, de Leeuw and Vorst, 1995). In this procedure – specifically developed for research on nonresponse – step 1 ideally consists of collecting data from a captive audience, so that response rates can be maximised towards 100 percent. This ideal situation, in which potential respondents can be forced to participate in a survey, is rarely encountered in a real life context. Therefore, obtaining maximum response rates is limited to fairly 'unnatural' circumstances and/or populations, such as university students, army populations or employees of a business organisation. In step 2 then, that audience is administered a second questionnaire, to which cooperation is totally voluntary. The third and final step consists of carefully linking the data collected in step 1 with the data obtained in step 2 and subsequently comparing the characteristics of the respondents with the nonrespondents to the second questionnaire.

So, we apply this three-step procedure to map unit nonresponse on the mail questionnaire in step 2 – ignoring the unit nonresponse in step 1 – and analyse the socio-demographic and attitudinal factors that influence the response decision. The statistical technique used for that purpose is logistic regression (Hosmer and Lemeshov, 2000) with response or nonresponse on the mail questionnaire in step 2 as the dependent variable. Yet, a number of variables needed recoding, so as to make logistic regression practically feasible by avoiding too small a number of cases in the categories of some variables. Educational attainment and occupational category are two cases in point. The operationalisation of age and gender is straightforward: age is measured in years and gender is coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = male, 0 = female).

Educational attainment, originally comprising 11 categories in APS, is rendered to a dichotomous variable with people having completed secondary education or lower as a first category and persons with a higher education (university or not) as a second category. This coding can be considered as a very crude measure for SES.

Occupational category is also recoded. The original 9 categories from APS are reframed into 6 categories that maintain theoretical as well as practical value. Theoretically, the objective is – or should be – to keep the different job categories internally as homogeneous and externally as heterogeneous as possible. This ensures that interpretations based on 'shared life experiences' – as is the case here

– remain valid.[13] The 6 categories are: student, i.e. persons still full-time pursuing an education, unemployed/pensioner/housekeeper, i.e. those persons who are voluntarily or unwillingly absent from the workforce, clerical employee/teacher, small shopkeeper, managerial employee/executive and employer/professional.

As for topic salience, two different indicators are used: experience with theatre and involvement in theatre. Experience with theatre refers to the number of plays attended by the respondent during the 12 preceding months. This measure is dichotomised using the median, i.e. 5 plays, as a cutting point. The argument to use this variable as an index of topic salience is that people who spend a considerable amount of their free time going to the theatre, will be much more involved and interested in actions of any kind pertaining to their favorite pastime – such as a survey on arts participation. Also involvement with theatre enters the analysis as a measure of topic salience. Involvement with theatre is a dichotomous variable and refers to whether the respondent has a season ticket for a theatre institution or not. Both single-item measures of sample members' interest in the survey topic are based on content or face validity.[14]

4 Analysis and results

4.1 Nonresponse in step 1

Before going into more detail on the respondent related correlates of nonresponse in step 1, it is necessary to elaborate on the caveats associated with the proxy of the population benchmark. With regard to the first problem – i.e. that the Flemish population might not be representative for the theatre population in Ghent with regard to certain characteristics – it is necessary to try to control for known and/or obvious differences that will distort a detailed comparison between the distributions of the aggregate socio-demographic features. One of these obvious differences is that Ghent is a town with a large university. By consequence, the audience in Ghent will contain relatively more university students in its theatre-attending population compared to the general population in Flanders.[15] Therefore, it would seem advisable to exclude the category 'students' from subsequent

[13] One category – farmer/manual worker – had to be removed for practical reasons, since it only contained 6 cases, which is far too small an amount to run logistic regression.

[14] In this sense, Martin's critique that research on topic salience often uses 'measures of unsubstantiated validity', might also apply to our research (Martin, 1994: 329-330). There is indeed no theoretical framework on which to base the measurement of topic salience. Still, the measures used here have a defensible face validity.

[15] This is based on the assumption that the closer one lives to a theatre institution – *ceteris paribus* – the more chance of attending a theatre performance in that institution. The validity of this assumption is confirmed in an empirical study in the Netherlands (see Verhoeff, 1991).

analyses in step 1.[16] Yet, other socio-demographic differences between the theatre audience in Ghent and the Flemish theatre audience can exist which we are not able to control for – and thus can threaten the validity of the proxy as a population benchmark.

The second caveat, regarding the different chances of becoming a member in the two samples, can be controlled for by means of a weighting procedure based on the number of times people have attended a theatre performance during the previous year.[17] The third problem related to survey topic and a different socio-demographic nonresponse profile cannot be controlled for statistically. Moreover, the analyses are bivariate so that statements on the net effects of socio-demographic features are limited and need to be approached with a certain caution. Hence, the results from the analysis of nonresponse in step 1 will be tentative not claiming any definitive explicatory power.

Table 4 shows a comparison of the aggregate socio-demographic characteristics of the weighted audience sample with the proxy of the theatre population for the three institutions in Ghent based on Flemish APS–2000 data. An analysis of the different components of nonresponse – i.e. noncontact and refusal – is impossible and so conclusions only apply to overall survey partcipation.

It becomes immediately clear from Table 4 that gender exerts no influence on the response decision. Although the audience sample tends to overrepresent women, the difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0{,}72$, $df = 1$, $p > 0{,}30$), in accordance with the first hypothesis. Gender does not infuence the decision to respond in audience research. Women's higher susceptibility to social influence does not seem to apply to survey participation outside the home (cf. Groves and Couper, 1998: 136).

Our results show a significant relation between age and the response decision ($\chi^2 = 50{,}6$, $df = 5$, $p < 0{,}0001$): age is slightly negatively related to response, thereby confirming hypothesis 2. The difference in percentage points is largest in the second and last age group, respectively 13,6 and –9,9. These differences may be confounded by the fact that older cohorts tend to be lower educated and have a lower SES (Goyder, 1987: 85). Furthermore – as an explanation of an age effect – the time of day and the specific situation in which the survey request takes place in

[16] This implies a loss of 93 cases in the audience sample and 38 cases in APS–2000. Moreover, this exclusion makes an analysis of the response behaviour of students in step 1 impossible. This procedure however does make the proxy of the population benchmark a more valid instrument. One could also argue that university teachers should be excluded from the analysis (based on the same argument to exclude students). Yet, the proportion of university professors would be too small to make a difference.

[17] The more frequently people attend a theatre performance, the greater the chance of entering the audience sample. The questionnaire included a question on the exact frequency of attendance and a weighting procedure was based on this variable: weight = 1/[(1 + v18)*geometric mean or 0,2416]. The application of this weighting procedure results in a loss of 21 cases due to item nonresponse on the weighting variable. Total n in the weighted audience sample is now 335.

audience research, may increase the perceived burden of the questionnaire and discourage older members of the theatre audience to cooperate. The greater civic duty prevalent amongst the elderly apparently does not explain response in the audience research context.

Table 4: Comparison of aggregate socio-demographic characteristics from the weighted audience sample with the composition of the Flemish theatre audience (based on weighted APS–2000 survey).

Variable	**Audience sample**		**Flemish theatre audience according to APS2000–data**		**Significance**
	n	%	n	%	
Gender					$\chi^2 = 0{,}72$, df = 1, $p > 0{,}30$
Men	152	45,4	259	48,3	
Women	183	54,6	277	51,7	
Age					$\chi^2 = 50{,}6$, df = 5, $p < 0{,}0001$
18 – 24	8	2,5	31	5,8	
25 – 34	123	36,7	124	23,1	
35 – 44	77	22,9	124	23,2	
45 – 54	88	26,2	113	21,0	
55 – 64	32	9,5	79	14,8	
65 – 79	7	2,2	65	12,1	
Educational attainment					$\chi^2 = 261{,}5$, df = 3, $p < 0{,}0001$
No or lower secondary	11	3,3	178	33,2	
Higher secondary	36	10,7	189	35,3	
Tertiary (not university)	168	50,2	126	23,5	
Tertiary (university)	120	35,7	43	7,9	
Occupational category					$\chi^2 = 125{,}4$ df = 6, $p < 0{,}0001$
Unemployed/pensioner	35	10,5	133	24,9	
Housekeeper	10	2,9	45	8,5	
Farmer/manual worker	5	1,4	86	16,0	
Clerical employee	153	45,8	159	29,7	
Small shopkeeper	28	8,5	36	6,7	
Managerial employee/executive	63	18,7	61	11,4	
Employer/professional	41	12,3	15	2,8	

The distribution of educational attainment in the audience sample is concurrent with the findings of the large body of literature claiming a positive relationship between education and survey response (see for example Brehm, 1993; Loosveldt

and Carton, 2001): those who have attained a bachelor degree, are overrepresented in the audience sample (χ^2 = 261,5, df = 3, p < 0,0001). The difference in percentage points is a remarkable 54,5. People with a degree of secondary education or lower comprise 14 % of the audience sample compared to 68,5 % in the proxy of the population benchmark. Hence, hypothesis 3 is confirmed: paralleling response behaviour in household surveys in general populations, the response decision in audience research seems to be positively related to educational attainment. The feeling prevalent among the lower educated as being unfit and unqualified to fill out a survey may explain this relation – an instance of self-disqualification. Also social exchange theory can account for the positive relation: the lower educated tend to feel routinely disadvantaged in relationships with those more fortunate (Groves and Couper, 1998: 126).

Occupational category follows the rationale of education. The unemployed/pensioners, housekeepers – i.e. those voluntarily or unwillingly absent from the labour force – and the farmers/manual workers are seriously underrepresented in the audience sample, respectively 10,5 % vs. 24,9 %, 2,9 % vs. 8,5 % and 1,4 % vs. 16 %.[18] These job categories largely comprise the lower classes. The middle and higher social classes are overrepresented compared with the proxy of the population benchmark. Clerical employees, small shopkeepers, managerial employees and employers/professionals are more inclined to participate in audience research, hereby confirming the expected positive relationship between occupational category and response behaviour in hypothesis 4.

To summarise, the selectivity of response in step 1 seems to be negatively related to age and positively linked to educational attainment and social class – operationalised through occupational category, a very crude measure. A comparison of the distribution of gender in the audience sample and the proxy of the population benchmark does not reveal any significant differences. These findings are concurrent with the ideas and hypotheses derived from a theoretical framework on nonresponse in household surveys in general populations. Women's higher susceptibility to social influence at home cannot be extrapolated to situations outside the home, such as a request for survey participation at a playhouse. Also the assumed greater civic duty and social responsibility present among the elderly does not seem to influence the compliance with a survey request in audience research. Especially the disengagement hypothesis for the elderly and social exchange theory seem to be most promising in explaining response behaviour in this context.

Of course, the results presented in Table 5 – and the subsequent acceptance or rejection of the various hypotheses – need to be approached with a certain caution, since only bivariate relationships were analysed. But there is more. Given the huge differences between the sample and population proxy distribution of educational

[18] As they are equally underrepresented within the culturally active Flemish population, as illustrated in Section 3.1.

attainment and occupational category, it is unlikely that nonresponse alone can account for these differences. Other interpretations – which not necessarily undermine the validity of the nonresponse interpretation – might be appropriate here. Two would seem to be applicable: a problem with the internal validity of the item in the APS–survey and the tendency for social desirable answers. First, the item 'how many times did you attend a theatre performance last year ?' from APS–2000, on which the proxy for the theatre population in Ghent is based, might mean different things to different people. The lower educated might interpret 'theatre performance' broadly, including performances played by amateur companies, schoolchildren, etc., while for the higher educated the term might refer to plays performed by professional companies only. Second, the answers might suffer from a social desirability bias (Wentland and Smith, 1993: 180) and the frequency of theatre attendance for some groups of people might be overestimated. In this case, there would be a tendency of the lower educated to overreport theatre attendance. Hereby, it is assumed that theatre attendance is considered as a socially desirable behaviour.

4.2 Predictors of response behaviour on mail questionnaire (step 2)

Ignoring selective nonresponse in step 1, we now turn our attention to predictors of response behaviour on the mail questionnaire in step 2 after contact has been established, i.e. we focus on correlates of cooperation or response given contact.[19] In this case, the data open the possibility for a much more thorough and rigid analysis of the socio-demographic and more topic related predictors of nonresponse than in step 1. The method used for computational purposes is logistic regression with response or nonreponse on the mail questionnaire as the dichotomous dependent variable. We have analysed the data in 2 different steps. Step 1 consisted of calculating the bivariate relationships between each socio-demographic and attitudinal feature and response on the mail questionnaire. In a second step multivariate modelling is used to calculate the net effect of each independent variable. Table 5 shows the results of the logistic regression.

Neither gender nor age exert a significant effect on the response decision in step 2. Both zero-order and multivariate coefficients remain insignificant in the explanation of cooperation with the mail questionnaire.

Educational attainment however is positively linked to survey participation in step 2: a person with a bachelor or masters degree is approximately twice (1,94 times) as likely to respond to a mail questionnaire as a similar person who has

[19] In this case, micro-data on response behaviour are available and the category 'student' is re-entered in the analysis.

attended secondary school or lower. The effect – both zero order and multivariate – is significant at the 0,05 % level.

Table 5: Logistic regression analysis of response decision on mail questionnaire (step 2).

Variable		Zero order	Multivariate
	n	Exp(β)	Exp(β)
Gender[a]			
Men	168	0,905	0,982
Women	249	1	1
Age	417	1,015	1,021
Educational attainment			
Secondary or lower	137	1	1
Tertiary	280	1,707**	1,941*
Occupational category[b]			
Student	89	0,968	2,271*
Unemployed/pensioner/housekeeper	48	1,764*	1,223
Clerical employee/teacher	157	1,814**	1,918**
Small shopkeeper	19	0,324*	0,308**
Managerial employee/executive	71	1,099	0,863
Employer/professional	33	0,907	0,705
Experience with theatre (attendance)			
Above median	209	1,611*	1,366
Under median	208	1	1
Involvement with theatre			
Season ticket	88	1,818*	1,984*
No season ticket	329	1	1
Intercept		[c]	0,242**
Logistic r^2 (Nagelkerke r^2)			0,114

[a] All dichotomous variables use dummy coding ; [b] Effect coding ; [c] Not entered, differs in each computation.

* $p < 0,05$.

** $p < 0,01$.

Occupational category is also significantly related to response on the mail questionnaire, both in the bivariate and multivariate model (both $p < 0,01$). To interpret the results of this covariate we make use of deviation coding. With this type of coding, the effect of each category is compared with the overall effect of the independent variable (cf. Menard, 1995: 50). Hence, the theoretically uneasy choice for a reference category is avoided. Table 5 shows three significant effects of job category on the inclination to respond on the mail questionnaire in the

multivariate regression. On the whole, being a student and a clerical employee/teacher is strongly positively correlated with survey response, making cooperation respectively 2,27 and 1,92 times more likely than the rest. This might have to do with helping tendencies (cf. Groves, Cialdini, and Couper, 1992). The fact that the interviewers were students probably triggered tencendies among students in the audience to help other students in their research. The same helping tendency can be prevalent among clerical employees/teachers. Small shopkeepers are less inclined to cooperate with the survey in step 2: they are 3,25 times (or 1/0,308) less likely to respond than the others. Belonging to the three other job categories does not affect the chance of response. The differences between the zero order and the multivariate coefficients probably originate from the correlation between some of the independent variables[20].

The two measures of topic salience show a significant positive effect on survey participation when entered in a bivariate model. However, only one measure – namely involvement with theatre – remains significant after multivariate control: people with a season ticket in one of the theatre institutions in Ghent are approximately 2 times more likely to respond to the mail questionnaire than people without such a ticket. After multivariate control, experience with theatre still exerts a positive influence on survey response (1,37) but fails to reach any level of statistical significance.

To summarise the results from the multivariate modelling of the response decision in step 2, response behaviour tends to covary significantly with educational attainment, occupational category and topic salience measured via involvement with theatre. More specifically, the chance of response on the mail questionnaire is positively related to educational attainment and topic salience and varies according to different occupational categories. Students and clerical employees/teachers clearly have a higher chance to respond, which might have to do with a tendency to help (similar) others in situations that are familiar to the respondent. Small shopkeepers are more prone to noncooperation. A social class interpretation is not as easy and straightforward as in step 1. Gender, age and experience with theatre as another measure of topic salience however remain insignificant in explaining the response decision on the mail questionnaire.

5 Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this article was to explore and analyse what respondent characteristics are related to survey response within the unique context of audience research and in what way(s) theoretical perspectives from household surveys in general populations (Groves and Couper, 1998) can justifiably be used to explain the

[20] In this case between educational attainment and occupational category.

response behaviour of cultural participants in audience research. With a two-step procedure for data collection we tried to overcome some of the practical problems associated with the on-site data collection in theatre institutions and we are able to draw several tentative conclusions with regard to respondent related socio-demographic characteristics and response in audience research. Comparing the distribution of the socio-demographic features of the audience sample with a proxy of the population benchmark (constituting step 1), response tended to be negatively related to age and positively linked to educational attainment and social class. Gender did not exert any significant influence. Taken together, these results from step 1 confirm the existing hypotheses derived from nonresponse in household surveys. Social exchange theory and self-disqualification (Goyder et al., 1999: 14) are most promising as explanations for the educational and occupational differences with regard to on site survey participation.

The validity of this conclusion however, largely depends on the validity of the proxy of the population benchmark. The remarkable size of the differences between the proxy of the theatre population and the audience sample may lead to other interpretations: problems with the internal validity of the item 'theatre attendance' and an equally probable social desirability bias in the APS–survey. Moreover, only bivariate analyses were possible and this is a major drawback, especially with regard to age and educational attainment (see Goyder, 1987: 85). Finally, the lack of a sampling frame and situational factors in the audience research context are responsible for the fact that no distinction could be made between noncontacts and refusals as a source of nonresponse.

Step 2 allowed for a more thorough analysis of socio-demographic characteristics and topic salience as correlates of survey response. Ignoring the nonresponse from step 1 and using multivariate logistic regression to model response in step 2, cooperation on the mail questionnaire – i.e. response from those already contacted and cooperative in step 1 – tended to be related to educational attainment (positive relationship) and to certain occupational categories (positively related to students and clerical employees/teachers and negatively linked with small shopkeepers). Helping tendencies were invoked as a possible explanation. What is notable here is the cumulative selective effect of education in both steps of the data collection which can pose a significant threat for both the internal and external validity of sample estimates. Finally, topic salience – intuitively easily acknowledged as facilitating response but seldom empirically analysed (for exceptions see Heberlein and Baumgartner, 1978 and Martin, 1994) – is confirmed to be a correlate of response on the mail questionnaire.

Further research on nonresponse and respondent characteristics relating to response behaviour in audience research should engage in two research lines, a methodological one and a more statistical one. The first and more methodologically oriented line has to devote its attention to the development and application of research designs that (1) enable a thorough reduction of nonresponse

in the audience research context and (2) make an analysis of nonresponding sample persons possible. Research design features expected to reduce nonresponse such as the use of incentives, the specific way of contacting the sample units in the playhouse, the sequence of the questions in the questionnaire, etc. can be put to the experimental test. A large factorial design can be used to analyse the effectiveness of a number of stimuli – and their interactions – expected to maximise response in the unique environment of audience research. To make an analysis of the nonresponding sample persons possible, two immediate options are available. On the one hand, the organisation of a large and extensive population research on arts participation can serve as a more valid basis for population benchmarks – or proxies – for the audience of the various theatre institutions. On the other hand, one can opt for a slightly different research design in which in a first step, the theatre audience is contacted on-site and asked to give a minimum of personal identification and then, in a second step, the whole machinery of mail or telephone surveys is applied using numerous follow-up procedures (cf. Pol, 1992; Dillman, 1978 and 1991). Still, the research design and method of data collection through the on-site collection of a minimum of personal data and the use of the mail questionnaire and a quiet interview location (the home) to collect a wider range of other features, as proposed in this article, has shown its value. The two-step procedure does not only open the possibility of an analysis of nonresponse. By changing the interviewer environment in step 2 a longer and relatively distraction-free survey is possible, yielding the kind of information needed by cultural institutions and government to be able to make strategic decisions based on reliable information (cf. Pol and Pak, 1994: 322-323).

Characteristics of theatre performances such as length, genre, complexity, etc. or features of the organising cultural institution comprising location and size of the playhouse, commercial affiliation or not, etc. might have an influence on the chance of survey participation in audience research. So, the second and statistically oriented line of research should try to use multi-level analysis when mapping response behaviour. Considering the effect of topic salience on the response decision in step 2, we should also question the almost exclusive preoccupation with socio-demographics when it comes to statistically controlling for nonresponse. Statistical solutions to the nonresponse problem based on socio-demographic characteristics alone, risk of being inadequate and should pay attention to the selective effects of interest in the survey topic. The use of weights to adjust the distribution of the sample to the population distribution for socio-demographic background variables does not take into account the net effect topic salience has on nonresponse. This result seriously limits the potential for a straightforward and easy statistical reduction of the effects of nonresponse.

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