

# Invitation Process

*The invitation process, in particular incentives and invitation wording, has the potential to impact the quality of data collected from a survey. To understand how different invitation methods can affect data validity, Lightspeed Research conducted a study that measured how panellists responded to targeted (invitations that pre-identified the subject matter) and non-targeted invitations to participate in a research study on fishing. This fact sheet will examine the results of this study and its effects on data collection.*

## Methodology

In 2005 Lightspeed Research set out to gauge the rate at which panellists responded to targeted and non-targeted invitations by conducting a research study on fishing. Panellists were asked whether they fished, how often they went fishing and, if they qualified, which brands of rod they were familiar with and used. To qualify for this survey, respondents had to fish at least once a month.

A sample for the research was selected and divided into two groups, demographically matched by age and gender. While the actual questionnaire taken by both groups was identical, the invitation process was altered. A non-targeted invite was sent to one group of panellists. The invitation explained that the survey would last about 5 minutes and if completed, respondents would win 10 entries for the monthly prize draw. There was no mention of the questionnaire subject matter.

A second invite clearly indicated that the study was looking for people who went fishing at least once a month (targeted invite). This group of panelists were informed that if they qualified and completed the survey they would receive a three Euro electronic gift voucher. This targeted invitation process is currently widely used in the online research industry.

## Results

The results showed that when the invites were targeted, the incidence rate (the number of completed surveys based on those who screened out) was significantly higher than for non-targeted invites, with an incidence rate for the targeted invite at 11% compared to the non-targeted invite at 6%. A slight increase in incidence rates was to be expected, as some respondents would not commence a survey which they knew they would not qualify; however, the actual difference between incidence rates was much higher than expected. This increase in the 'targeted' incidence response rates is attributed to those who: a) did not read the survey invitation precisely; or b) decided that they wished to collect the small incentive.

In both groups, those that met the qualifying criteria were then asked 4 questions regarding fishing rod brands. The list of brands was made up of 15 real brands and 10 fake brands. The results of the brand awareness question are shown below:

	Non Targeted		Targeted	
	Count	%	Count	%
Aware of real brands	371	91%	449	79%
Aware of fake brand	38	9%	119	21%

*Percentage of 'fake' brands mentioned out of total brands mentioned*

The percentage of respondents from the non-targeted invite who mention the fake brands shows the probable 'halo effect', however there is a significant increase in fake brands mentioned by the targeted invite group (from 9% to 21%). This result was also shown when respondents were asked to list the brand of rod they actually used. In the targeted invite group 14% of respondents mentioned a fake brand, compared to only 5% by non-targeted respondents.

## Conclusion

It could be surmised that a reasonable number of the panellists who responded to the targeted invite did not actually participate in fishing. Therefore the results from this targeted sample are potentially invalid in obtaining the opinions of people who fish. This research shows how the invitation process can impact the quality of the data collected. Targeted invitations that provide subject matter and incentives for qualifying could cause respondents to take a survey just to receive the incentive, even if they know they do not qualify.

The invitation process proves a key differential in the way online panels operate and emphasizes the importance of understanding how different invitation methods can affect the quality of results, even putting into question the validity of data received through targeted invites. It is for this reason that Lightspeed Research ensures the use of the non-targeted invitation method to provide the highest quality research results for our clients.