

SOCIAL MEDIA IN SURVEY RESEARCH: CAN FACEBOOK FRIENDSHIP ENHANCE TRADITIONAL SURVEY STRATEGIES?

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The U.S. Department of Labor is funding an evaluation of the YouthBuild program, a program that serves high school dropouts. This presentation describes how the YouthBuild Evaluation team used Facebook to engage and retain sample members, and assesses the relationship between Facebook friendship and survey response. Preliminary analyses show that Facebook friendship is strongly associated with survey completion, including less expensive forms of survey completion, controlling for sample member characteristics.

Background

There are a number of challenges associated with collecting data from young, hard-to-reach populations (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Data collection challenges

Stage of Data Collection	Key Challenges
Locating	Highly Mobile Limited "electronic footprint"
Contacting	Cell-only "households" Housing instability Non-traditional modes of communication
Gaining cooperation	Appeals to civic duty, benefits of research unlikely to be compelling

In order to address these challenges, we created an engagement and retention plan that incorporated the use of Facebook, a social media website used widely by our sample members. Sample members were recruited to become Facebook "friends" with the study.

Research questions and analyses

This study examines whether Facebook friendship is related to survey completion, timing of completion, and mode of response in a longitudinal survey of youth. More specifically, we examined whether our Facebook friends were more likely to complete the follow-up surveys than sample members who do not use Facebook (nonusers) or sample members who use Facebook but are not our friends (nonfriends), controlling for gender, age, race/ethnicity, housing stability, evaluation and incentive random assignment status, and the number of phone numbers provided at baseline.

Additionally, we examined whether our Facebook friends were more likely to complete their surveys early or in less expensive modes after controlling for sample characteristics at baseline. The table on the following page shows each of our research questions and the analyses we used to answer them.

Table 2. Research questions and analyses*

Are Facebook friends more likely to:	Analyses
Complete the follow-up survey(s)? Complete the follow-up survey(s) early?	Binomial logistic regression holding controls at their means
Complete the follow-up survey(s) in a less expensive mode?	Multinomial logistic regression holding controls at their means

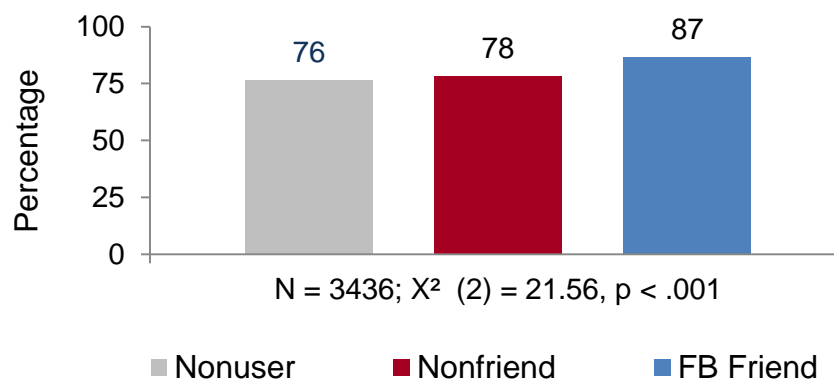
*Models control for the following characteristics at baseline: gender, age, race/ethnicity, housing stability, evaluation and incentive random assignment status, and the number of phone numbers provided at baseline.

Findings

Sample members who became our Facebook friends completed the 12-month and 30-month surveys at higher rates than sample members who did not use Facebook (nonusers) or who used Facebook but did not become our friends (nonfriends). The 12-month results are shown in Figure 1 below.

Our Facebook friends also completed the 12-month survey earlier and were more likely to complete in less expensive modes, compared to nonusers and nonfriends.

Figure 1: Adjusted predicted probability of response to the 12-month survey, by Facebook (FB) status



Conclusions

Preliminary findings suggest that Facebook may be a useful tool for sample engagement and retention in longitudinal survey research. However, future research is needed to further assess the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between Facebook friendship and survey response in longitudinal research.

To find out more:

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