
Response Rates in European Business Tendency Surveys

Gerhard Schwarz (WIFO)

Brussels, 14 November 2013

Overview

Response rates and survey quality

Driving factors of response rates

Survey experiment

Response rate and data quality

Metadata provided by ECFIN

Quality indicators:

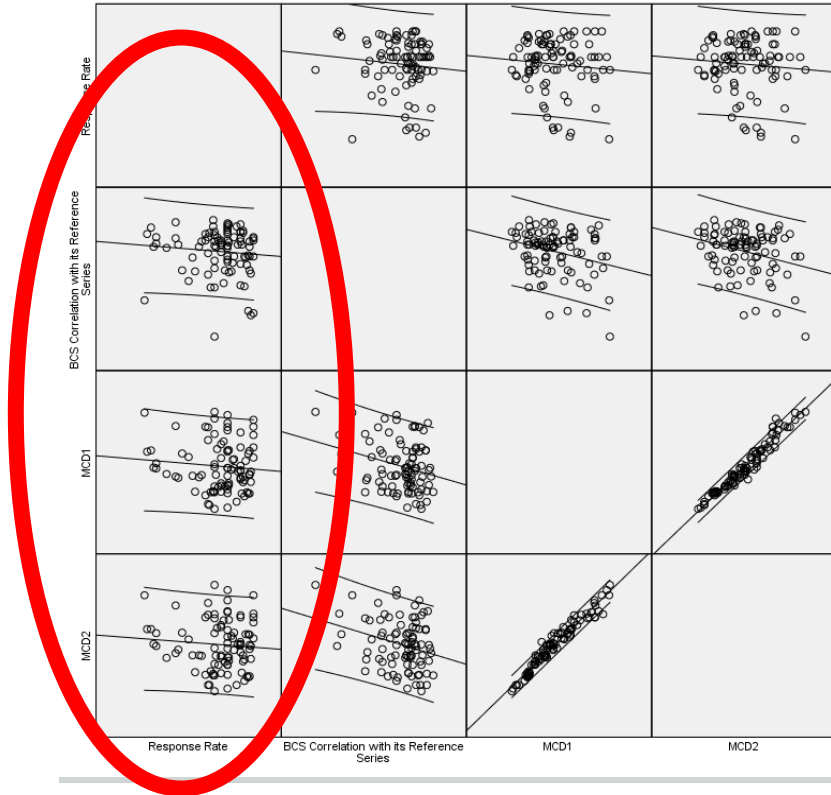
- Corr.Coeff. of BCS and reference series
- MCD1
- MCD2

Correlation analysis and OLS

OLS-Predictors

- Response rate
 - Type of institute: national bank or statistical institute (yes/no)
 - Panel (yes/no)
 - Quota sampling (yes/no)
 - Sector (industry, construction, services, retail trade)
 - Fieldwork method (postal, fax, email/online, telephone)
 - Type of member state (New member state or candidate country, yes/no)
 - Country size (inhabitants in millions)
 - Effective sample size (in thousands)
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Findings



No relation between response rates and quality measures.

However, response rates could be used to measure “efficiency” of a survey process.

Drivers of response rates

OLS regression - predictors:

- Type of institute: national bank or statistical institute (yes/no)
 - Panel (yes/no)
 - Quota sampling (yes/no)
 - Sector (industry, construction, services, retail trade)
 - Fieldwork method (postal, fax, email/online, telephone)
 - Type of member state (New member state or candidate country, yes/no)
 - Country size (inhabitants in millions)
 - Effective sample size (in thousands)
 - Means to increase response rates (yes/no)
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Significant findings

Statistical Offices & National Banks: +23 %-points

Quota samples: +35 %-points

Postal surveys: -11 %-points

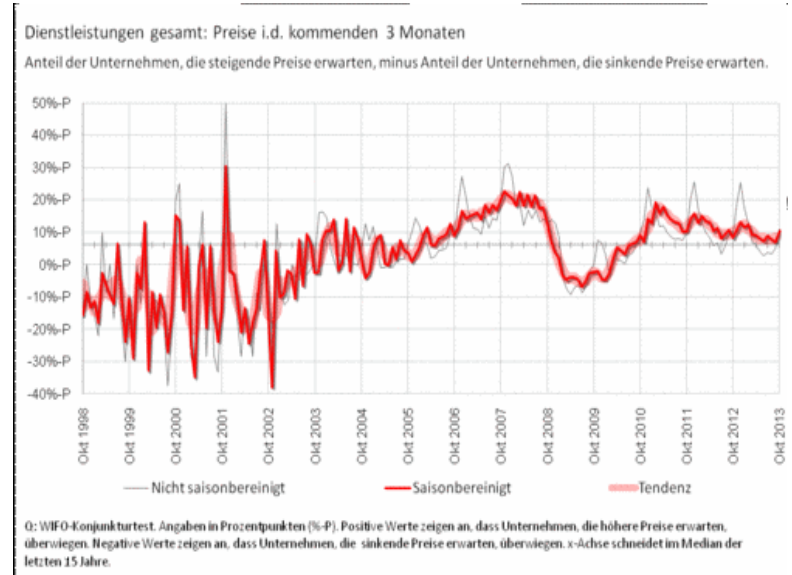
Measures to increase response rates:
insignificant

Caveats

Different concepts of
“response rates” -
depending on sampling
methods

Metadata sometimes
idiosyncratic, ambiguous

Metadata is cross sectional,
quality indicators are
longitudinal



Survey experiment

TDM (Dillman) and behavioral economics give clear indications how response rates could be improved

WIFO tested some of them in an experiment

Sample and fieldwork

3,728 Austrian firms from manufacturing,
construction, services (and tourism)

6 or more employees

Not yet part of WIFO's panel

All treatments were assigned randomly

Respondents were addressed by mail (online option)

Fieldwork during September 2013 (well into October)

Definitions

WIFO's panel is based on voluntary participation

We distinguish two rates when recruiting new participants:

Response rate: % of respondents answering the questionnaire

Conversion rate: % of respondents joining the panel

What didn't work

- Layout of the cover/reminder letter (alternative, S-shaped layout)
 - Adding WIFO's red logo to the questionnaire & marking the questions red
 - Avoid printing a firm identifier on the cover letter
 - Call to action in the post scriptum
 - Format of the envelope (B4 or C5)
 - Sealing the envelope
 - Changing the researcher signing the cover/reminder letter
 - Naming the EU (ECFIN) as partner/sponsor on questionnaires
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Authoritarian cover letter

Response rate: 14 %

+4 %-points compared to base level

Conversion rate: 10%

+4 %-points compared to base level

Other letters showed no effect (social proof, self-interest)

Researcher's acad. title maybe detrimental

Token of appreciation

Token: Pen with survey's logo

Appropriate, logical link, stays around for months

Response rate: 13 %

+3 %-points compared to base level

Conversion rate: 7%

+2 %-points compared to base level

Frequency of participation

No influence on response rate

Conversion rate in initial contact: 7%

+2 %-points compared to base level

Conversion rate in reminder wave: 7%

+4 %-points compared to base level

94% opted for the quarterly frequency

Additivity of these three measures

Response rate: from 7% (0 measures) to 12% (1 measure) to 27% (2 or 3 measures)

+5 and +20%-points comp. to base level

Conversion rate: from 3% (0 measures) to 6% (1 measure) to 23% (2 or 3 measures)

+3 and +20%-points comp. to base level

Gap between response and conversion closes

Reminder

1,062 firms, subset of those not responding to the initial contact

The reminder turned out to be highly efficient, adding to the initial response/conversion:

Reminder response rate: 12%

Reminder conversion rate: 6%

Firm and social demographics

No sector effects, no size effects, no sex effect

(Academic) title of contact person:

Response rate in initial contact: 12%

+3 %-points compared to base level

Conversion rate in initial contact: 7%

+2 %-points compared to base level

Response rate to reminder: 16%

+6 %-points compared to base level

Conversion rate of reminder: no effect

Summary

No effect of response rate on survey quality

Higher response rates by statistical offices & national banks, quota sampling (!), lower for postal, increasing measures: no effect (?)

Metadata carry some complexities

Measures derived from TDM & behavioral economics highly effective
