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# **The survey fatigue challenge: understanding young people's motivation to participate in survey research studies**

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### **Abstract**

Survey response rates are declining in most developed countries, and Sweden is no exception. Declining response rates are believed to be due to recent social and technological development in society. Young people are the most difficult to recruit. The increase in nonresponse is often explained by a phenomenon called “survey fatigue” – i.e. that people become overwhelmed by the number of surveys they encounter in daily life and thus become fatigued. The purpose of the study was to investigate and understand whether the explanation of “survey fatigue” is true or if there are other reasons for young people to not respond. Furthermore the purpose was to better understand how people in the age cohorts of 16-34 years can be motivated to participate in survey research. To explore the topic, 18 persons were interviewed in a semi-structured setting. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was used as a theoretical framework for understanding young people’s motivation. To the extent that the findings were generalizable, the study confirmed other research within the field, that intrinsic motivation for participating in surveys is the most likely to be consistent and also gives the best survey response quality.

**Keywords:** Survey fatigue, survey design, respondent motivation, self-determination theory, SDT, intrinsic motivation, young people

## Introduction

Quantitative surveys are important in modern society. They provide valuable information regarding a population's attitudes, habits, health, consumer spending's and opinions, to give some examples (Massey and Tourangeau, 2013a; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2009). Researchers and academic staff within the social sciences often use surveys as a means to answer questions about the researched population (Shaughnessy et al., 2009). The results derived from surveys and opinion polls are also often used by politicians and in the media to back up statements and decisions (Wenemark, Persson, Noorlind-Brage, Svensson, & Kristenson, 2011; Bornman, 2009). Thus they constitute a base both for governmental decisions and for the public's perception of society (Bornman, 2009). Since the foundation of the democratic systems is to know what the people who live in a society want and need, the information derived from surveys is a part of the democratic process (Wenemark 2010; Wenemark et al., 2011; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013b). Surveys play an important role also within the business life (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a). Today a business or organization who don't conduct surveys might be at a risk of losing valuable business (Cialdini, 2009; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013b). But today, surveys have to face the challenge of declining response rates (Massey and Tourangeau, 2013a; Massey and Tourangeau, 2013b; Wenemark 2010; Wenemark et al., 2011; van Ingen, Stoop, & Breedveld, 2009).

Earlier this year, a Swedish daily newspaper, Dagens Nyheter (DN), reported that the Swedish governmental bureau for statistics, Statistiska Centralbyrån/Statistics Sweden (SCB), have been experiencing increasing difficulties to recruit people for their studies (Örstedius, 2015). The groups that have shown to be the most difficult to recruit are people in the age cohorts between 16-34 years old – especially men – alongside with people with foreign background (Markstedt, 2012; Lundgren & Eriksson, 2013). This report is just one out of many. Decline in response rates in population-based studies has been reported from all over the world (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a; Kreuter, 2013; Peytchev, 2013; van Ingen et al., 2009; Groves, Cialdini & Couper, 1992).

The dramatic change in response rates has not gone the community of survey researchers; professional as well as academic, by. The reasons for why non-respondents refuse to participate in surveys has been researched in many different ways (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a; Kreuter, 2013; Groves, Cialdini & Couper, 1992). In spite of this, there is a lack of research on respondents' motives for participation. Few studies have investigated factors that may increase respondents' motivation, not only to participate but also to be committed to the topic of the

survey (Wenemark, 2010, Wenemark et al., 2011). A popular explanation for declining survey response rates is that it can be explained by a phenomenon called “survey fatigue” – i.e. that people become overwhelmed by the number of surveys they encounter in daily life and that they thus become fatigued (Porter, Whitcomb, & Weitzer, 2004; Örstadius, 2015).

The purpose with this study is to understand how young people (since they are the most difficult to recruit) can be motivated to participate in survey research and the type of psychological mechanisms that are involved in creating motivation to participate in surveys. Alongside with this, the purpose is to further investigate the phenomenon called ”survey fatigue”, to understand if there exists a survey fatigue among young people or if there are other explanations for the decline of survey response. The theoretical framework, used in this study to better understand the underlying motives for participating in survey research, is the motivation theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

### **Declining response rates**

Since the heydays of social surveys in the 1960’s to 1980’s it has become increasingly more difficult to get people to willingly respond (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a). Sweden was once a leading country when it came to survey participation. The first Swedish national election study, conducted in 1956, had a response rate of 95 % (Svensk Samhällsvetenskaplig Datatjänst, 1984). In 2014, the equivalent national election study carried out by SCB, had a response rate of 52 % (SCB, 2014). This means that the national election studies have undergone a decline of 43 % in response rates since 1956 (Svensk Samhällsvetenskaplig Datatjänst, 1984; SCB, 2014). And the pattern is clear. In survey after survey, the response rates are declining and SCB are starting to worry about that the negative trend makes it more difficult to measure for example unemployment rates and changes in the Swedish economy (Örstadius, 2015; SCB, 2015).

In the US, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, who provide official information about current matters in America and the world, are reporting about the same problem (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press [PEW Research Center], 2012). As a non-partisan research center they conduct public opinion polling, demographic research and other data-driven social science research. From 1997 to 2012, the response rates of the sampled households that completed an interview in a typical telephone survey in the US, fell from 36 % to nine percent (PEW Research Center, 2012). One of the explanations for the decline is that it has become increasingly difficult to reach people. During the same period of

time, the contact rates (the share of households in which an adult was reached) decreased from 90 % to 62 % (PEW Research Center, 2012).

### **Reasons for declining response rates**

Groves, Cialdini and Couper (1992) argue that the perception of legitimacy of societal institutions may influence the level of social responsibility a person feels to respond to a survey request. Massey and Tourangeau (2013a) mean that the decline in survey response rates is the result of the past years' social and technological trends. The possibilities to participate and engage with your surroundings have changed with the emergence of the Internet. Not only has the Internet changed the modes of research methodology, it has also changed how people communicate and interact with people, authorities, media, governments etc. (Brick and Williams, 2013; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a). With the emergence of the Internet we have entered a sharing society (Brick and Williams, 2013; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013b).

The technological developments that have occurred over the past 20 years have affected the survey climate in many ways (Porter et al., 2004). As an example, a variety of opportunities to distribute surveys on various topics have emerged. Survey software products such as Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), Qualtrics ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)), and Survey Gizmo ([www.surveygizmo.com](http://www.surveygizmo.com)) allow not only anyone to easily create and distribute a survey, but also to receive the results illustrated in easy-to-read graphs (de Bruijne & Wijnant, 2013).

As part of the technological development, communication modes have also changed. For example fewer and fewer households use landline phones today (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a), which may be the reason for why telephone surveys have been more affected by declining response rates than other survey contact modes (Kreuter, 2013). Noncontact in relation to survey requests can be explained with the fact that people make themselves uncontactable on their cellular phones since the caller ID function is making it easier to ignore a cellular phone call (Brick & Williams, 2013; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a).

Massey and Tourangeau (2013a) and Porter et al. (2004) argue that increased working hours and increased commuting has led to that people spend quite few hours at home and that the hours that are the most productive for surveys are the same hours as people generally have their few remaining hours of in-home leisure time is a circumstance that has been theorized as leading to a feeling of "survey fatigue".

### **Efforts to increase response rates**

Improving response rates in surveys has been in the focus of scientific research a research field since the late 1940's (Brick & Williams, 2013). Within the field of research methodology, numerous variables that may affect response rates have been investigated (Parsons & Manierre, 2014). Everything from monetary incentives to sending out reminders have been studied as means to enhance response rates. The area of monetary incentives seem to be the most discussed of all when it comes to efforts to improve response rates (Brennan, 1992; Curtin, Presser & Singer, 2000; Singer & Ye, 2013). Many experts are of the opinion that monetary incentives need to be increased despite the fact that monetary incentives also increase the risk of attracting people who respond because of the incentive with the implication that this might affect their sincerity when answering the survey (Parsons & Manierre, 2014; Curtin, Presser & Singer, 2000; SCB, 1997). Several researchers mention that increasing the monetary incentives for participating is a solution that to some extent will offset the trend of decreasing response rates (Kreuter 2013; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013b; Tourangeau 2004). Compared to giving no incentives, studies have shown that incentives are very effective to increase response rates, so effective in fact that total costs actually can be reduced by giving incentives compared to giving no incentives (Chen, Lei, Li, Huang, & Mu, 2015). At the same time, research has shown that respondents motivated primarily by monetary incentives (extrinsic motivation) have the lowest response rates and the lowest levels of response quality suggesting that incentives is a complex motivation method that has to be used delicately (Brüggen, Wetzels, de Ruyter, & Schillewaert, 2011).

Reminding people to participate is a method that has to be used with care in order to increase response rates. Researchers do recommend to use reminders as a way to improve response rates; often it is recommended that at least two reminders are sent out (Brennan, 1992). But it is also important not to exhaust people with repetitive reminders since it can cause distress (Wenemark, 2010). Sending out e-mails or text messages with survey reminders might be perceived as intrusive by the receiver and thus cause a negative psychological reaction with the receivers (Chang, Rizal & Amin, 2013).

### **Psychological theories of survey participation**

Within the field of social psychology a number of concepts that all are influential in survey participation have been defined (Cialdini, 2009; Groves et al., 1992). One of them is the concept of *reciprocation*. Reciprocation involves the fact that every society has a norm that

you should meet others as they meet you (Cialdini, 2009). The concept of reciprocity means that when you are approached in a positive manner you will feel obliged to return the favor. According to Groves, Cialdini and Couper (1992), incentives are most efficient when given before the survey request (regardless of whether the respondent will participate or not) not afterwards. Another concept is the one about *liking*. This means that people are more inclined to be positive towards people they like (Cialdini, 2009; Groves et al., 1992). In survey research this concept can be applied in a way that people are more inclined to participate if they like the person or the company behind the request (Groves et al., 1992). Another concept is about *scarcity*. People tend to be more positive to attend to a request if the opportunities to do so are scarce (Groves et al., 1992). The concept of scarcity in survey research builds upon the fact that people value the opportunity to voice their opinions as rare and thus valuable (Groves et al., 1992). It has also shown to be more efficient if the request comes from someone who has *authority* to ask people to participate. If the sender appears to be authorized by society to make such invitations, people are more likely to consent to participate (Groves et al., 1992).

People also tend to act *consistent* with their attitudes, beliefs, words and actions (Cialdini, 2009; Groves et al., 1992). Within survey research this can mean that if a person holds the belief that it is important to participate in research, then they will be likely to act according to that belief (Groves et al., 1992). People also tend to use the *social validation* of what others do as a guideline for how to act (Groves et al., 1992). In survey research this can mean that if it becomes apparent that other people participate respondents can identify with that and follow the same example (Groves et al., 1992).

Several researchers also report about the importance of the salience of the survey topic. This means that topics that respondents find very interesting are more likely to affect people's motivation to participate (Porter et al., 2004; Senf, 1987).

### **Motivation in survey research**

Motivation can be defined as an inner state that steers actions and behavior and orients us to fulfil our goals (Pittman, 1998). It represents the reasons for people's actions, desires, and needs (Pittman, 1998). A person's motivation can consist of several different layers or goals to be fulfilled for a person to feel motivated (Kenrick, Neuberg & Cialdini, 2002).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a motivation theory that has been applied in many different areas of research (Deci & Ryan, 2002). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), there are

three basic psychological needs that must be fulfilled for an individual to feel positive motivation: *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness*. To explain this, an individual must experience relatedness with other people in the activity which he performs in order to feel motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore a person must know that he or she has competence in the undertaken activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). And finally, a person must experience autonomy or independence in order to feel motivated to perform a task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This means that the person performing the activity must feel that it was his or her own decision to perform the chosen activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

	Types of motivation:	Regulatory styles:	Regulatory processes:	Survey participation:
<p>Low level of autonomy</p> <p>High level of autonomy</p>	<b>Amotivation</b>	Non-regulation	Lacking intention to act	See no value to participate.
	<b>Extrinsic motivation</b>	External regulation	Act to satisfy an external demand: external rewards or punishments	Receive external rewards, e.g. incentives
		Introjected regulation	Act out of egoistic motives: internal rewards and punishments	Avoid feelings of guilt or embarrassment.
		Identified regulation	Act out of personal importance	Being recognized
		Integrated regulation	Act out of value to society	Give opinion, helping others
	<b>Intrinsic motivation</b>	Intrinsic regulation	Act based on interest, joy, satisfaction	Interest, enjoyment, curiosity

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of Self-Determination Theory and how it can be applied to survey participation.

SDT recognizes that there are different types of motivation. The motivation types can vary from amotivation to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2002). According to Deci and Ryan, motivation depends on the person, the task and the social context (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2002). Amotivation is when the person lacks intention and motivation to act (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Extrinsic motivation holds different levels of control where external and introjected regulatory styles holds more control while identified and internal regulatory styles hold more autonomous motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan,

2002). A person with intrinsic motivation finds the task itself enjoyable and interesting and acts completely autonomously (Wenemark, 2010). The types of motivation according to SDT are summarized in Figure 1.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has rarely been applied to survey research. Marika Wenemark, in her dissertation (2010), however did investigate the effects of a survey design inspired by SDT on respondent satisfaction, response rate and data quality in a self-administered survey. The results in the study supported that SDT can be useful as theoretical framework for studying motivation in survey research and an interesting additional source to provide ideas on how to design surveys with potential to motivate respondents (Wenemark, 2010).

### **Research questions**

The questions that are posed in the present study are: *are young people really suffering from survey fatigue or do they just need to be motivated differently and how can young people be motivated to participate in survey research studies?* The target group for the study was people aged 16-34 years old, since they are the most difficult to recruit for survey participation (Markstedt, 2012; Lundgren & Eriksson, 2013).

### **Method**

Since relatively little research has been done on how people are motivated to respond to surveys in today's survey climate, an explorative methodology was considered to be the preferred method for the study. The method that was decided upon was to use semi-structured qualitative interviews. This due to the fact that qualitative interviews allows the researcher to reach a deeper understanding of the questions they are studying (Langemar, 2008; Ahrne & Svensson, 2011; Neuman, 1999).

### **Participants**

In total, 20 face-to-face interviews were completed. Two of the interviews were however excluded from the results and analysis due to the fact that there was doubt regarding the sincerity of the statements and the interviewed persons' reasons to participate in the interviews.

The remaining 18 persons whose interviews were analyzed and included in the results section had an age range of 17-34 years (17-22 years, 33 %; 23-28 years, 39 %; 29-34 years, 28 %). The selected age span for the study was persons aged 16-34 years, but the youngest person that could be recruited for this study was 17 years. In terms of occupation, one third of the interviewed persons were in or about to finish, upper secondary school (or equivalent), one

third were studying at university, and one third were professionally active. While ideally there should have been a fifty-fifty percent split between genders, the group of interview persons included 40 % male and 60 % female respondents. A total of seven men being interviewed was deemed to be sufficient to rule out that the results were influenced by a skewed gender balance among the participants as well as to be able to do a general analysis of whether there were any specific gender differences in the results.

In terms of background as many as 40 % were born and raised abroad, one person was born in Sweden but with parents who were born and raised in another country, and 55 % were born and raised in Sweden by native Swedish parents. Compared to the average of 16 % of the Swedish population who are born in another country (<http://www.migrationsinfo.se/migration/sverige>) this is a high figure of participants born in another country and most likely due to the fact that the recruitment was done in an academic environment. No persons were however excluded from participating in the interviews or from analyzing the results due to their nationality. The analysis of the results did not reveal any particular response patterns that could be traced back to the nationality of the participants.

The mean age of the interviewed persons was 24.89 (compared to 25 in the target group) and the median age of the interview persons was 24.5 (compared to 25 in the target group). Only two interview persons (11 %) had their own family with children.

No further of inclusion/exclusion criteria's, apart from making an effort to balance background criteria's such as gender, age and occupation, were used. In the results and the analysis sections, the participants have been given fictitious names so that no individual can be recognized as a participant by his or her name.

## **Procedure**

The interview persons were recruited by using a so-called availability sampling, using a snowball sampling technique. Availability sampling means that people who are available to the researcher are recruited, in contrast to a sample completely handpicked from the population (Langemar, 2008; Ahrne & Svensson, 2011; Neuman, 1999). Snowball sampling means that the persons who are recruited, are asked to, in their turn, recommend additional people who could participate in the study (Langemar, 2008; Ahrne & Svensson, 2011; Neuman, 1999).

First two different invitations that could be shared with others, was placed on Facebook: one that was going out to the network of friends and acquaintances of the author, and the other to a specific Facebook group with masters students at Lund University (see Appendix

A). The invitations were addressed to people who were either interested in participating or who knew someone who was. If they knew someone, they were encouraged to share the invitation to this person. No specific screener was being used to determine whether the respondents were qualified for the survey more than that they should be in the right age span.

During the course of the interviews, people who attended the interviews were asked if they knew someone who could also be interested in being interviewed on this topic. As a result of the snowball recruitment the sample includes groups of people who are known to each other in different ways (friends, acquaintances, relatives). There were however no groups of people who were known to each other that was larger than four persons.

The interviews were carried out, either in a study room at the Department of Psychology in Lund, or at a Starbucks café at the central train station in Malmö, depending on what was most convenient for the interview persons. Two of the interviews were carried out in the interviewed person's home, due to the convenience of the interviewed persons. All interviews were recorded by using the voice recording function on the iPhone.

The interviews were carried out by using a semi-structured interview design. This means that the interviewer has a framework of questions to ask, but is at the same time free to follow-up on interesting topics that emerges during the interview and that might be of importance for the topic of the interview (Lantz, 2013; Wibeck, 2010). The advantage of using a semi-structured design is that the interviewer doesn't risk that topics that are important for the field of the study are overseen just because they are not part of the interview questions (Lantz, 2013; Wibeck, 2010). During the course of the interviews, the interviewer was trying to follow good interviewing principles like asking as open questions as possible, allowing for the interviewed person to shape the interview, to allow for quiet periods as the respondent often continues a reasoning after a quiet period which can add richness to the interview etc. (Lantz, 2013; Krag, Jacobsen & Nilsson, 1993; Wibeck, 2010). The interviews lasted for 30-45 minutes each.

The interviews were performed in Swedish or in English depending on the mother tongue of the interviewed person (for interview guide in English see Appendix B). After the completion of the interviews, the interviewed persons received a gift card, as an incentive for their participation (<https://www.presentkorttorget.se/supergiftcard.aspx>).

## **Ethics**

Before starting the interview, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the method to be used, who was responsible, that their participation was completely

voluntary and that they could discontinue the interview at any time without any negative consequences. They were also asked if they agreed to that the interview was recorded. Together with this request, the interviewed persons were informed that the recordings and all written material resulting from the interviews would be kept with the interviewer, and only with the interviewer, that it would be used for analysis purposes and that the material would be deleted once the thesis had been submitted and approved. They were also informed that everything they said during the interview would be treated as confidential and that nothing of the reporting from the interviews would be traceable to them as individuals. All this in accordance with the ethical guidelines written in the Law on Ethics of Research Involving Humans (SFS, 2003:460) and the American Psychological Association's (APA's) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (American Psychological Association, 2010).

All interviewed persons were asked to give verbal consent before starting the interview, after the above mentioned information had been read out loud to them. The verbal consent was documented on the recordings but the interviewed persons were not asked to consent in writing.

### **Analysis method**

The outcome of the interviews was analyzed by using a thematic analysis of the interviews. Thematic analysis is carried out through the process of coding in six phases to create meaningful patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). The phases are: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Boyatzis, 1998). The interviews were transcribed in a manner that the audio files were played and all important sayings from the interviews were written in a document. The material was first sorted into an Excel sheet using broad themes. The initial broad themes were following the structure of the interview guide in order to create sense and meaning to the material. These themes found in the first attempt at analysis were then extrapolated and structured into the following areas: *responding to surveys*, *survey fatigue*, *motivation – incentives* (extrinsic motivation), *motivation – interest, enjoyment, curiosity* (intrinsic motivation), *motivation – helping others, helping society* (extrinsic motivation), *motivation – being recognized, obligation* (extrinsic motivation) and finally *the relationship with the sender* (level of motivation or amotivation).

Then, each theme was analyzed in order to give meaning to the results. Double identity paragraphs (if a statement combined two themes) were dealt with by allocating the statements to the theme that seemed to be the most relevant for each statement. Due to time constraints

and lack of research affiliates, no double coding of the content of the interviews was carried out. This is otherwise the preferred procedure in order to increase the reliability of the coding's (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011; Fejes & Thornberg, 2009).

## **Results**

### **Responding to surveys**

When being asked if they respond to surveys, three different but distinctive patterns appeared. Within the youngest cohort, mainly the group of people aged 17-21 years, most interviewed persons said that they have not been approached with so many requests to participate in surveys – at least not by a professional company or organization. Within the age cohort of people aged 22-34, several people who went to university state that they often receive invitations for surveys from friends, classmates and acquaintances that are related to studies. Since they also often use surveys as a means in their own studies, they can easily relate to the role as being the one who sends out survey requests and hence they feel the obligation to comply the requests for participation. Of the persons aged 22-34 years, who were working, several confirmed that they value the time it takes to participate against what they gain from participating more carefully. This reasoning is exemplified by a quote from one of the interviewed persons: *“My motivation to participate is much related to how much time it takes. Then you sort of calculate how much time it will take you in relation to what you can do with that time if you don't participate”* (Christopher, 24 years).

Of the two interviewed persons that had families with kids, both confirmed that they rarely take the time to respond to surveys. They both declared though, that the main reason for this was time constraints. Two persons concluded that they never reply to survey requests since they are simply not interested and that they do not trust the companies that send out such requests.

### **Survey fatigue**

Several interview persons discussed that the frequent occurrence of telephone marketing and sales calls, spam sent to their e-mail addresses etc., compete within the same attention span as requests for survey participation. Several persons reported that they adapted strategies how to screen out spam and unwanted calls. As an example, most interviewed persons used different e-mail addresses for different purposes and several reported that they either do not pick up the phone if they receive a phone call from an unknown number, or they block the

caller if it's from a telemarketing company for example. Postal invitations also compete within this attention span and several of the interviewed persons said that it is very easy that a postal invitation just become lying around and not attended to, or that it becomes sorted in the same category as advertising mail. All of these issues are said to build up a feeling of survey fatigue, since people feel they constantly need to fight off companies or organizations that wants to get hold of them.

### **Motivation – incentives (extrinsic motivation)**

Something very prominent during the interviews was that the interviewed persons thought it self-evident that they should receive something in return for participating in surveys. It was expressed in terms of giving and taking – i.e. that if you give your time to a company or organization to respond to a survey, you should get something in return. This is how one girl expressed herself on the topic: *“It is very difficult to motivate me. If it will take me time, I will want to receive some kind of reward. Either I want to know that it is for a good cause, or I want to know that I get something tangible in reward for it”* (Molly, 23 years).

One interview person also discussed the positive feeling if a company send you something in advance instead of promise an incentive after the survey has been done: *“If you receive something from a company it definitely increases positive feelings towards that company and that you want to participate. Maybe it is related a little bit to the principle of reciprocity, but it is still positive”* (Diana, 18 years).

Several of the interviewed persons expressed it as it is a matter of respect in a manner that if you agree to give your opinions, which are important for the sender, then it would be disrespectful not to give them something in return.

### **Motivation – interest, enjoyment, curiosity (intrinsic motivation)**

Several of the interviewed persons reported that they did take some surveys that are just for fun. Examples of the kinds of surveys that were reported taken just for the fun of it were: ‘Which Disney princess are you?’ ‘Which is your real profession?’ or ‘Which color are you?’ These are surveys that you can take on different social media, like for example Facebook. The common denominator for this type of surveys was that they are taken mainly just for fun, and that they give the respondent some type of feedback – usually about the personality of the respondent.

Something that most interview persons agreed on was the importance of the topic of the survey. If it is a topic that matches one of their interests, then all of a sudden there is not

discussion about incentives or similar. Several interview persons said with emphasis that they would gladly respond to a survey that matches their interests. *“If I would receive a survey about horse equipment or horse jumping or similar, then I wouldn’t hesitate a moment to participate”* (Rebecca, 23 years).

What was obvious, but maybe not captured by the transcripts, was the energy and level of engagement that all of a sudden appeared when the interviewed persons were to talk about if they were to be asked to participate in a survey on a topic that is one of their interests or competence areas. One of the interviewed persons expressed it like this: *“I would love to participate if I were asked to give opinion about city planning in the city I live in, or how the politicians should spend their budgets, that kind of topics I would very much like to participate in discussing”* (Linnea, 26 years).

### **Motivation – helping others, helping society (extrinsic motivation)**

Most of the interviewed persons state that they can attend to a survey request if it is for the benefit of someone they know, thus helping out can be a motivational force that makes them attend to a survey request. *“If it’s for a friend I always help out”* (Olivia 19 years). A few also discuss that they are willing to attend if they know that the person behind is being helped by their participation. An example: *“If I have received good service, I gladly participate in customer survey requests since I know then that the person who gave me good service, benefits from my answers”* (Elias, 21 years).

Many also agree that they would feel very motivated to attend to a survey if they know it is for a greater cause. The reasoning goes that if it is evident that it would be beneficial for society then they would gladly attend to a survey request. *“If I would attend? Yes, I think so. But I think it depends on how you are brought up. I can, for example, think that something is important to do, to be a good citizen, while others will ignore it completely”* (Stella, 18 years).

### **Motivation – being recognized, obligation (extrinsic motivation)**

One of the interviewed persons gave an example that she has been working with clinical studies among patients with terminal cancer. She told that these people who are terminally ill even though they have very little energy and very little time left, willingly spend time being interviewed by medical students to share their stories. This was brought up as an example of how important it is to be recognized as a person. (In this case the patients got to share their stories and to be seen as the individuals they were rather than just a person who suffers from terminal illness).

Many of the interviewed persons confirmed the importance of being recognized in the process of being asked to participate in a survey. One way of receiving recognition that was mentioned several times was to feel that their answers have contributed to the cause of the survey and to receive feedback on what the results were in the end. Several of the interviewed persons said they would prefer to receive this type of feedback in real-time, but if that isn't possible, at least after the survey has been compiled. One of the interviewed persons expressed it like this: *“Often it is: ‘thank you for your participation!’ And then you hear nothing! Receiving feedback could substitute giving other incentives, then you are not just an anonymous respondent, but involved in the process”* (Adrian, 34 years).

Nearly all of the interviewed persons also agree that they have answered to surveys simply because they feel obliged to do so. The types of surveys that was being referred to were different types of feedback surveys like course evaluations or employee satisfaction studies. The responses to these types of studies were varied. Some of the respondents expressed that they simply just answer they surveys since it is a necessity but that it doesn't evoke any engagement. Others were more acknowledging that this type of studies is a chance to influence areas of importance to them. Yet, several simultaneously acknowledged the fact that the obligatory element of evaluation surveys affected their motivation to carry out the survey adversely.

### **The relationship with the sender (level of motivation or amotivation)**

Something that was very frequently mentioned during the course of the interviews were the “relationship” that was built between the sender of a survey request and the receiver and how that relationship affected the level of motivation that they felt towards the task at hand. Something that was frequently mentioned on this topic was the importance of being respectfully treated, transparency of the sender so that they did not have any hidden motives. It was also expressed as important that they were confronting people with the right balance between being personal, yet not being too personal, and a level of professionalism. Something that was also frequently discussed and brought up as something that could affect the relationship negatively were occasions when people have started to fill out a questionnaire and after a while suddenly receiving a note on the screen that says ‘thank you, but the target group is already filled’. This is explained as something that is a real turndown for the motivation and that after having experienced a few of those refusals, the motivation to attend another time in the future was gone.

## Discussion

Massey and Tourangeau (2013a) state that “*surveys are social interactions*” (2013a) and continue to explain that “*like all interactions between people, they are embedded within social structures and guided by shared cultural understandings*” (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a, page 12). The results of this study point towards that the relationship between the participant and the part that are requesting the person to participate (a researcher, a business or an association, for example) needs to be built on mutual trust and respect – i.e. conditions that are essential for any healthy relationship between two persons. Without trust in “the sender”, participants are very likely to develop amotivation towards survey requests. Hence, the social interaction that takes place between the interviewer – or the company behind the survey – and the respondent (no matter if it is in writing or in person) is a significant factor to consider when it comes to motivating respondents to participate. The results show that the interaction that needs to take place between the sender and the receiver is a complex matter. When analyzing the content of the interviews it becomes obvious that in order to build trust and engage people to participate in surveys the relationship that needs to be built is very similar to just about any relationship in a person’s life; where trust and respect are just as important but with the additional circumstance that the sender also needs to find the right balance between having a personal yet a professional tone of voice.

Based on the results, motivation seems to be very important for participation survey research. The results support previous findings that intrinsic motivation – i.e. motivation that is based on interest, enjoyment and curiosity that a salient survey topic seem to evoke, is the most preferred. But several actions that can trigger extrinsic motivation, like finding the right level of incentives and giving people feedback from the surveys are concepts that it seems like they could be developed further in order to trigger respondent motivation.

Overall, with the technological and societal development there are so many ways to speak up on things today and to make their opinion heard and their person, visible on a completely different way. Therefore, researchers today work much harder on at motivating people to set up on investigations. Massey and Tourangeau (2013a) suggest that it may be time for an industrywide campaign to legitimize social scientific studies (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a). This reasoning which also implies that a level of extrinsic motivation with the regulatory effect of acting out of value to society is confirmed by one of the interview persons of this study: “*I don’t think that people in my age reflect so much upon the fact that statistics can be so important. I think it needs to be mentioned, either in school, or in an information campaign. I*

*think my generation know very little about the importance and the purpose of statistics”* (Diana, 18 years).

The results from the interviews did not explicitly support the question posed in this thesis, i.e. that people tend to decline participation in surveys due to survey fatigue. The results rather suggest that this is a question of terminology. The results showed that the experience of “survey fatigue”, has quite little to do with the number of surveys that people are encountered by as such. Instead all the different factors that people are encountered by when being requested to participate in a survey, like time constraints and the “life puzzle”, are mentioned to contribute to survey fatigue, as well as the need to fight off intrusive marketing initiatives from different companies and organizations.

Looking at the psychological factors that may enhance motivation to participate in surveys, the results show that people are actually asking for them to be used more. They want to feel that they are contributing to something, they want to be rewarded and they expect to be thanked. Also, if their participation is important for society, they expect to receive that information.

To conclude, Frauke Kreuter (2013) argue that when the climate for getting people to participate in surveys has changed so dramatically, researchers have to work harder in order to engage people to participate in surveys. This is a statement that can be well confirmed by the results of this study. Reversing the trend of declining response rates appear from the results to be a complex matter. The results support the reasoning’s by many of the experts in the field of survey research (Massey & Tourangeau, 2013a; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013b; Kreuter 2013) that there is likely not a single solution to reverse this trend, but rather that a combination of many different efforts is needed and the solution for improving response rates is very likely no “one-size-fits-all”.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

Using an availability sampling technique is always a limitation. The best is when it is possible to handpick people from the studied population since there is always a risk that the selected sample based on availability holds something in common that is different from the rest of the population. This study for example included a higher degree of people with other nationalities which may have affected the results. The analysis of the interview did however not show any differences that could be related to birth nationality, but the preferred would have been to balance the sample against these criteria.

Already in the beginning of this thesis work a problem arose: how to perform a study about how people want to participate in studies? And especially: how to get hold of people who do not want to participate in studies? There is always a risk that the interviewed persons have more positive attitudes to surveys compared with non-respondents.

In this study, the interviewed persons were not screened out on the criteria that they explicitly do not like to participate in survey studies. However, if it is possible to work around the fact that people who generally do not like to participate in survey studies also might be less inclined to participate in studies about survey participation, it would be advised to use non-participation as a screening criteria as a recommendation for future studies.

The interview protocol was only used as a guideline as the chosen methodology was semi-structured interviews. The benefit of using this methodology is that the researcher can follow up on interesting narratives during the course of the interviews. The limitation with this methodology is however that the interviews might not be comparable in the sense that they all follow the same structure. Since the main purpose with this study was to explore the field however, using a semi-structured methodology was decided upon, at the expense of the comparability between different interview questions.

The reliability of the coding's of the interview results could have been enhanced tremendously by using so called "double coding" – i.e. asking a research affiliate to code the interviews independently and then comparing the results. In this case this procedure was not possible to conduct, but it would have been preferred if this was being made possible.

As an explorative qualitative study has the limitation that the results are not generalizable to the population, it would be recommended to follow up the results from this study with a quantitative study. As for example people who have registered as panel members for survey research but often decline to participate could be an interesting group to study further. In general, the findings from this study also gives a hint that motivation to participate in surveys is a complex field that would need to be investigated further in many different ways to fully understand the complexity of the matter. A suggested next step in understanding the motivation to participate in surveys could also be to understand how people with different personalities are motivated to participate in survey research. This thinking is also supported by Jon Krosnick (1999).

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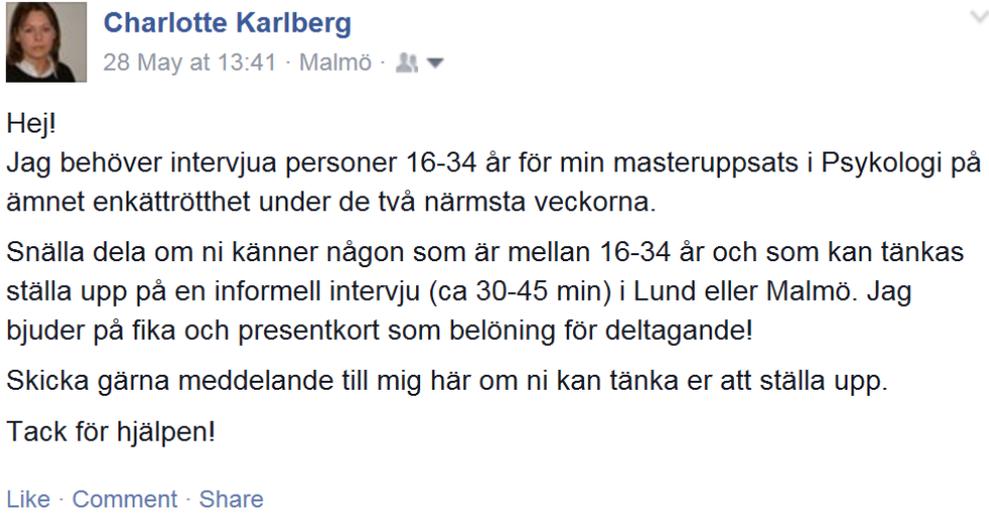
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## Appendix A.

### Recruiting for interviews version 1: sent out to the author's personal Facebook network:

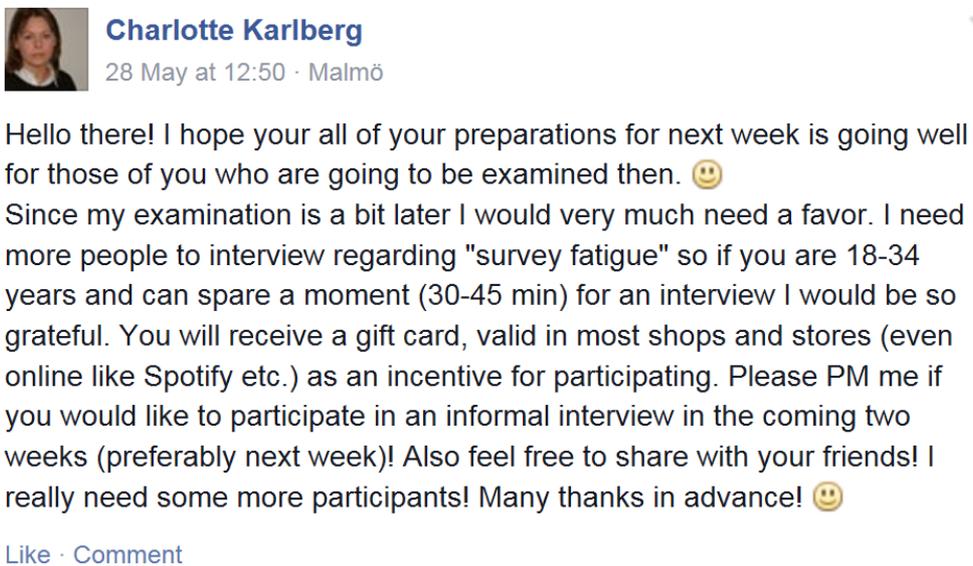


**Charlotte Karlberg**  
28 May at 13:41 · Malmö · 

Hej!  
Jag behöver intervju personer 16-34 år för min masteruppsats i Psykologi på ämnet enkättrötthet under de två närmsta veckorna.  
Snälla dela om ni känner någon som är mellan 16-34 år och som kan tänkas ställa upp på en informell intervju (ca 30-45 min) i Lund eller Malmö. Jag bjuder på fika och presentkort som belöning för deltagande!  
Skicka gärna meddelande till mig här om ni kan tänka er att ställa upp.  
Tack för hjälpen!

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [Share](#)

### Recruiting for interviews version 2: sent out to Master thesis at Lund University Facebook group:



**Charlotte Karlberg**  
28 May at 12:50 · Malmö

Hello there! I hope your all of your preparations for next week is going well for those of you who are going to be examined then. 😊  
Since my examination is a bit later I would very much need a favor. I need more people to interview regarding "survey fatigue" so if you are 18-34 years and can spare a moment (30-45 min) for an interview I would be so grateful. You will receive a gift card, valid in most shops and stores (even online like Spotify etc.) as an incentive for participating. Please PM me if you would like to participate in an informal interview in the coming two weeks (preferably next week)! Also feel free to share with your friends! I really need some more participants! Many thanks in advance! 😊

[Like](#) · [Comment](#)

## Appendix B.

### Interview guide. Qualitative interviews on motivation to participate in surveys

*Welcome! This is a qualitative interview, which means that I would like to know more about your opinions on the topic of this interview and I will very much appreciate as open answers as possible. The interview is all about what you think, so there are no right or wrong answers, it is only what you think that matters. I am planning to use the results as part of my master's thesis in psychology. The answers will be compiled and anonymized so that nothing about you as an individual that will appear in the thesis. This interview is completely voluntary, and you can choose to end the interview at any time without there being any negative consequences. If you are ok with it, I would like to record the conversation, in order to facilitate analyzing the results. The recording will only be kept with me, and will be deleted as soon as the thesis is submitted and approved. Are you ok with that? As an incentive for your participation, you will receive a gift card valid in most shops and stores. The interview will last for 30-45 minutes.*

*Are you ok to participate?*

*Just for the recording, I would like you to start by saying your first name, your age, where you come from and what you do for a living.*

*The background to my thesis topic is that it has become increasingly difficult to recruit people to participate in different types of studies, for example survey studies.*

- Do you agree on that it has become more difficult to recruit people to participate in surveys?
  - If yes, why do you think that is?
- Do you respond to surveys or other research if being asked to participate?
  - If yes, what kind of research do you participate in?
  - If no, why not?
- Are there any kind of surveys or studies that you do not want to participate in? Why?
- What motivates you to participate in a survey?
  - (Probe for but do not mention):
    - Interest
    - Enjoyment
    - Curiosity
    - Incentives: gift cards, cash or with points
    - A feeling of obligation

- To be recognized
  - To help out
  - To give opinion
  - A competition
- Are you interested in receiving feedback from the results if you participate in a survey?  
Please feel free to share how you wish to receive feedback by giving examples.
- There are several modes that you can be contacted by, when you are asked to participate in a survey. I would like you to reflect on the various contact methods and how you think they suit you personally.
  - Telephone calls
  - By post (a printed letter posted to your home address)
  - E-mails
  - Facebook or other social networking services
  - Text messages (SMS)
  - On-the-street recruitment
  - Smart phone apps
- Have you signed up to participate in any kind of panel with the purpose of participating in surveys? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Do you answer your phone if you receive a call from an unknown number?
- I would like you to reflect upon if you think telephone survey requests sometimes can be mixed up with telephone sales?
- When you are being contacted and asked to participate in any kind of research, what does it take for you to be motivated to participate?
- What do you think about reminders? Do you want to receive reminders for participating? Is there a limit for how many reminders you can take before they become annoying?
- If you think about the “tone of voice” of the one who asks you to participate. It can be in writing or in person depending on the contact mode. How would you like the attitude to be for you to feel motivated to participate?
  - *(Probe for but do not mention):*
    - A personal touch
    - The importance of your participation
    - A nice attitude
- What can make you turn down a request for participation?

- Is there a difference in your motivation to participate in different kinds of surveys depending on who is doing the survey and what the purpose is? (E.g. commercial surveys, for charity, opinion polls, for research etc.)
- Do you expect different kinds of retribution depending on who is doing the survey and what the motives with the survey are? (E.g. commercial surveys, for charity, opinion polls, for research etc.)
- Are there any other factors that can motivate you on this topic?