

# Effects of Differential Branding on Survey Materials

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## Abstract

Brand identification is one of several factors which may help (or hurt) survey participation rates. For example, the government and other widely-recognized organizations may have an easier time recruiting survey participants than would an organization that is less well-known. In the same vein, when a well-known organization changes its branding, there is the potential that this could help (or hinder) survey recruitment efforts.

A case-in-point, in 2008 The Nielsen Company introduced a new corporate logo and color scheme, retiring their long-used logo and “visual identity”. Since many of Nielsen’s materials are mailed to households across the nation, it was hypothesized that households included in a test sample of respondents to receive materials with the new materials might not identify with the new Nielsen look and be less likely to respond to a new brand image. This test was conducted with a portion of our national TV ratings diary sample in October 2008. The goal was to ensure respondent cooperation was not negatively impacted when replacing the current, well-known Nielsen TV Ratings logo with the new Nielsen Company identity. Through this test, all ancillary materials involved in the diary process, from postcards, transmittal letters, envelopes, and the diaries themselves, were updated to reflect the new corporate branding. Testing the new identity on material used to recruit sample households is critical to evaluate the impact of changes. Analysis of this test will include a review of key outcome metrics involved with the survey process (response rates, refusals, etc.). The outcomes of the test will be deemed successful if all of the metrics involved are shown to have null results when compared to the current metric analysis.

**Key Words:** mail materials, design

## 1. Background

Brand awareness has long been addressed as an important factor in market research. Brand awareness tends to be more likely considered by the consumer and, if done appropriately, enhances the perceived quality of the product (Macdonald and Sharp, 1996). A company’s branding identification then has potential to impact survey participation. When respondents have a positive image of an organization there is higher potential for their response when contacted by the organization. Much like the marketing of a product, the branding on mailed survey materials that are sent out can solidify an organization’s image in the mind of respondents. This recognition may encourage (or deter) recruitment for the survey. Familiarity with an organization has the potential to increase the respondents’ trust and to provide legitimacy to the survey. For example, surveys that are associated with government tend to see a higher response rate than those

associated with (Dillman, Sinclair, and Clark, 1993). Much of the focus of that organizational awareness falls onto the branding of materials and how the organization promotes itself.

Within the survey research community, the focus of print materials is more on individualization towards the respondent and less on the organization responsible for the survey (Dillman, Sinclair, and Clark, 1993). By having the materials identify itself with the company that is distributing the survey or the intention of the collected data, this brand then creates a sense of legitimacy that may impact respondents more than other variables. This concept of branding should be considered when determining why respondents choose to participate in a survey from various organizations.



In 2008, when Nielsen implemented a new logo and branding, it was hypothesized that this kind of change would have some kind of affect on survey participants. The Nielsen Company’s new logo and identity was established to create cohesion across the various companies within Nielsen. The Nielsen Media Research branch of The Nielsen Company has long used its own logos and tagline as a way to identify itself exclusively with the TV Ratings, its primary service. This test was to ensure respondent cooperation is not negatively impacted when replacing the current, well-known “dancing TV” logo to the new Nielsen Company corporate identity. Through this test logos on all ancillary materials involved in the diary process—including postcards, transmittal letters, envelopes, and the diaries—were updated.

Testing the new identity on material used to recruit sample households is critical to evaluate the impact of changes. The risk of implementing this process without proper testing is high and could lead to a significant decline in data quality. To test this, Nielsen examined the effects of making these updates to diary materials. Further, this test was hypothesized to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the new logo within other parts of the company that have not yet updated their mail materials.

## 2. Methodology

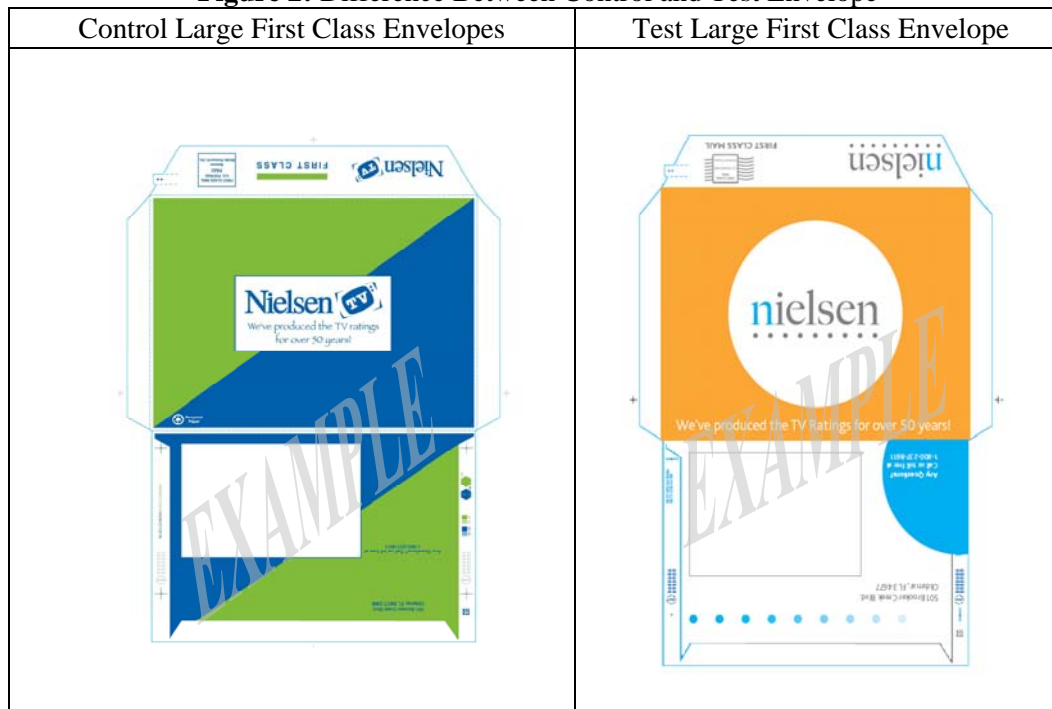
The current design of the mail materials used for the TV ratings diary service focuses on Nielsen as the TV ratings company. As shown in Figure 1, the focus of this logo is to ensure that the household identifies the survey directly with the TV ratings and thus is encouraged to participate. There was a longstanding belief within Nielsen that this logo, along with the tagline, provided an identification that gave respondents legitimacy in the survey materials that are mailed to the household. The new Nielsen corporate logo and color scheme focuses more on Nielsen as a total organization and steers away from associating the company with only one of its entities. Figure 1 shows the difference between the two logos being tested. With the new logo, there were also series of guidelines to follow to ensure that the integrity of the Nielsen brand was consistent across all parts of the company. The challenge then was to ensure that we had combined the need of the branding guidelines and those that gave specific influence to the TV ratings.

**Figure 1: Difference Between Logos**

Old “Dancing TV” Logo	New Corporate Logo
	

When considering all of the materials that needed to be updated with the branding the biggest concern was the design of the envelope used to mail the diaries to respondents. Through previous testing at Nielsen, since the envelope is the first thing a household sees when receiving the diary package, the design of the envelope has impacts to the overall diary response (Bailey, Bennett, Link and Lavrakas, 2007). For this test, in order to ensure that the best possible envelope was chosen for mail-out of the diaries, cognitive interviews were conducted during which respondents were asked for their reactions to various versions of the envelope. These interviews tested four versions of a large first class envelope that would contain the TV ratings diary. The interviews were conducted over two days and were done using an external moderator. Respondents were recruited from a panel in the Tampa Bay area and had little to no previous experience with Nielsen. These interviews highlighted some key points in not only brand awareness but material design and its effects on respondent participation. In response to one of the envelope designs some respondents stated it would deter participation due to its home-made and unprofessional look. Based on these interviews, a final envelope design was selected that combined aspects of two envelopes most well-received by the cognitive interview respondents (see Figure 2). The feedback from respondents was that they thought the envelope should not only look professional, but should have something that would stand out to them in the mailbox; something they wouldn't want to just immediately toss in the trash.

**Figure 2: Difference Between Control and Test Envelope**



The interviews were held in preparation for the test which was conducted during the October 2008 TV ratings diary survey. This test split a randomly selected national sample in half where 14,591 households were mailed the updated diary materials and 14,575 households were mailed the current TV ratings diary materials using an RRD sampling frame. For this test any mail material related to the TV rating diary was changed (See Table 1). Since this test focused mainly on changes to the mailed materials and logo, no

changes were made to the phone scripts used for recruitment prior to the diary mailing. However, in order to ensure that we maintained some reference to our diary materials' relevance to the TV ratings, we continued to display our standard tagline.

**Table 1: Updates to Materials**

Material	Changes
Postcards	- Replaced “dancing TV” Logo with new Corporate Logo - Updated signature & address
Letters	- Updated letterhead - Updated signature & address
Diaries	- Replaced “dancing TV” Logo with new Corporate Logo
Envelopes	- Replaced “dancing TV” Logo with new Corporate Logo - Revised to coincide with corporate colors
FAQ	- Replaced “dancing TV” Logo with new Corporate Logo - Revised to coincide with corporate colors

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Analysis Plan

Analyses were conducted to examine diary response rates (similar to AAPOR RR#4) for those households who returned valid diary data that could be used for the ratings versus those that had returned a diary unusable to measure ratings and those that did not return a diary at all. Return analyses helped determine whether the branding change affected the long term goal of the TV ratings.

#### 3.2 Analysis

Overall, there was no statistical significance ( $F = 3.56$ ,  $p < .06$ ) between the test and control based on the response rate. However, there was a slight upward trend of 1.1 percentage point in response among respondents who received the new branding materials compared to the control group. When looking at other methods of return (e.g. post office return rate), there are also no differences. Table 2 outlines the TV diary response rates for the test group compared to the control.

**Table 2: TV Ratings Diary Response Rates**

		Diary Return				Total
		Diary Returned	Not Returned	Not Useable	Post Office Return	
Treatment	Control	4,782 32.8%	8,380 57.5%	796 5.5%	617 4.2%	14,575
	Test	4,947 33.9%	8,182 56.1%	847 5.8%	615 4.2%	14,591
	Total	9,729	16,562	1,643	1,232	29,166

Further, when returned households were broken out based on key demographics (age, race, and Hispanic identity) there was no statistical significance between test and control. Mainly, there were only marginal changes between the two groups. This aspect was key in determining any potential impact that could have influence on the ratings results reported by Nielsen.

**Table 3: Demographic Breakouts for Returned Households**

	Control	Test
Age of Head		
<35	15.2%	14.5%
35-54	34.6%	34.9%
55+	50.2%	50.6%
Race*		
Black	12.2%	12.3%
Origin*		
Hispanic	5.1%	6.4%

\*Treatment markets only

#### 4. Discussion

Although there has been a lot of research in the marketing community of the effects of branding, survey research literature is relatively sparse when it comes to evaluating branding's influence on respondent participation. This test began the evaluation by changing the Nielsen TV ratings diary logo to be more consistent with the corporate branding. After completing the test we concluded that replacing the old, ratings-specific logo with a new, generalized Nielsen Company image did not significantly change participation rates. These results did, however, bring up questions to consider for future research.

The results of this test seem to imply that changes in brand identification are not important in gauging survey response rates. However, there is still something to be said for the fact that respondents do likely want to know *something* about a given research company before deciding to participate in a study. This likelihood gives added relevance to the fact that, while we did replace logos on all our materials, the tagline referring to “producing the TV ratings for over 50 years” remained in tact. In this sense we continue to create some level of separation from the corporate identity, and must ask ourselves how response rates may change if we removed the tagline and, in accordance with full company mandate, any specific reference to the TV ratings.

For this test, although all materials were changed to some degree, the main change was the replacement of the old logo with the new one. By keeping the tagline of “producing the TV ratings for over 50 years” we are still separating this TV diary survey from any other survey materials the household might receive from Nielsen. The remaining issue would be to examine the removal of the tagline. If the tagline were removed, would it positively or negatively affect diary response rates?

By keeping the test materials similar to the control cell, with the exception, to some degree, of the envelopes, there is more question as to what impact there could have been by completely redesigning the materials. For one, if the materials were truly redesigned to be more modern, as the new branding was designed to be, would that have greater impact on younger respondents? It is also worth asking whether respondents truly noticed a difference between the Nielsen TV ratings “brand” they are used to versus the Nielsen Company “brand” due to the non-significant results. Further, respondents could be

unfamiliar with the old brand making the branding change unknown to the majority of the households that participated in October.

Familiarity and trust between survey administrator and respondent are important. If respondents are familiar and comfortable with a brand, they are more likely to trust it. And, because they trust it, they are more willing to participate in the studies conducted by companies with that brand. Trust between these two groups can lead to better data and potentially higher response. The marketing of a survey should be considered in the design, however it is also just as important to recognize the goal of the survey itself within that design.

### **References**

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