

Polio Exhibition Title Test

Background

On Tuesday, July 13, 2004, between 11:30 and 1:30, interviewers intercepted 400 people just before they entered the museum from the National Mall and randomly distributed 100 each of four different questionnaires. The questionnaires were identical except that each set had a different exhibition title:

1. Is this your first visit to this museum, The National Museum of American History? Yes No

 2. We are planning a new exhibition called:
[title here]
If this exhibition were now on view, how interested would you be in seeing it?

 Not at all interested
 Somewhat interested
 Very interested
 Extremely interested

 3. How old are you? 12-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60+

 4. What is your gender? Male Female
-

The four titles tested were:

**Polio Fifty Years after the Vaccine
Whatever Happened to Polio?
Polio – and then what?
The Legacy of Polio**

The study had a very high response rate (over 95%) and included about 90% of visitors entering the museum from the Mall entrance.¹

¹ This study was designed, conducted, and analyzed by Andrew Pekarik and Ioana Munteanu of the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Policy and Analysis on behalf of the polio exhibition team at the National Museum of American History.

Audience Profile

Overall 59% of respondents were making their first visit to the museum, and 54% were female. The age distribution is shown in Table 1.

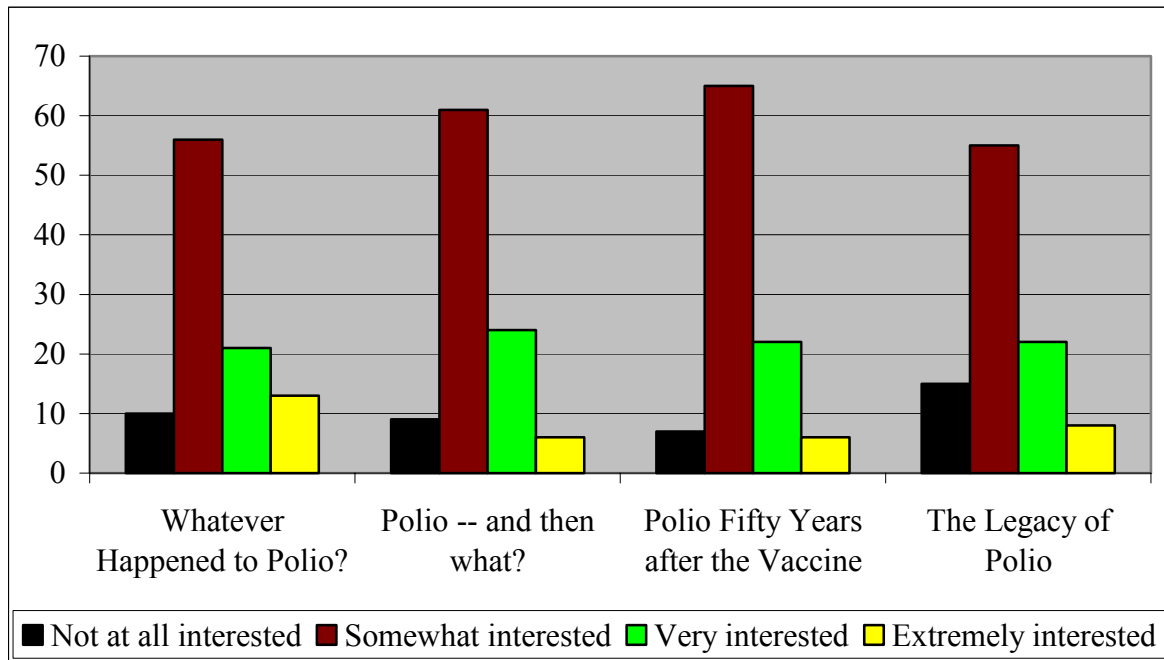
Table 1
Ages of Title-test Respondents

Age	Percent
12-19	23
20-29	10
30-39	15
40-49	21
50-59	20
60+	11

Title Differences

The original proposed title, “Whatever Happened to Polio?” scored highest in this test, and “The Legacy of Polio” scored worst. The other two alternatives were roughly equal.

Figure 1
Levels of Interest by Title



Analysis

The original title, “Whatever Happened to Polio?” scored highest because about 7 percent more visitors said that an exhibition with that title would be “extremely interesting.” When we examine the data more closely, we find that this 7 percent was comprised of first-time visitors. In other words, “Whatever Happened to Polio?” outscored the other titles because it excited more first-time visitors. Conversely “The Legacy of Polio” scored worst because more first-time visitors were “not at all interested” in an exhibition with that name.

Overall the study shows a relatively low level of interest in the exhibition. Only one-third of visitors are willing to say that they would be “very” or “extremely” interested, and thus likely to make an attempt to see the exhibition. In a study of this kind, “somewhat interested” should be considered equivalent to a polite “no thank you.”

The combined data also suggests that repeat visitors are slightly more interested in the topic than first-time visitors (33% of repeat visitors say “very” or “extremely” vs. 29% of first-time visitors). Women are slightly more interested than men (33% vs. 28%). Visitors between the ages of 30 and 49 are considerably less interested in the subject than either younger or older visitors, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Age by Interest
“Very interested” and “Extremely interested” only
All Respondents

Age	Percent “Very” or “Extremely” interested
12-19	37
20-29	34
30-39	22
40-49	20
50-59	37
60+	35

Conclusion

The original title should be used and the exhibition heavily advertised to first-time visitors through hotels and other tourist media, especially those favored by older and younger visitors. The exhibition will need to be aggressively promoted to overcome the relatively low interest of visitors. The graphic chosen to accompany the exhibition title is likely to be an important factor in increasing (or diminishing) the attracting power of the title.