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Mixed-Mode Surveys

GESIS Survey Guidelines

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These slides are based on the GESIS Survey Guideline paper about mixed-mode surveys:

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A complete list of all references used on these slides can be found in the above mentioned Survey Guideline paper.

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Definitions

- Mixed-mode surveys
Surveys in which different modes are used to collect data for a single data set
- Concurrent mixed-mode surveys
The different modes for survey data collection are offered at the same time
 - ▶ i.e., respondents can choose between modes
- Sequential mixed-mode surveys
The different modes for survey data collection are introduced sequentially
 - ▶ i.e., other survey modes are only introduced to non-respondents at later stages of fieldwork/in subsequent contact attempts

Definitions

- Self-administered mixed-mode surveys
Surveys in which data are collected only with the two self-administered survey modes (i.e., web and mail)
- Targeted mixed-mode designs
Surveys in which target persons are allocated to different survey modes in advance
 - ▶ e.g., a self-administered mixed-mode survey that only offers the paper questionnaire to target persons aged 65+

Effects of mixing modes on response, sample composition, and costs

- Response Rates
Experimental evidence on response effects of mixed-mode vs. single-mode surveys is scarce and inconclusive
- Sample composition
Mixed-mode surveys mostly improve sample composition and reduce the risk of nonresponse bias
- Survey costs
Web-push-designs in which web is the only initially offered mode yield substantial cost-savings

Mode effects

- Mode selection effects

Respondents take part in their preferred survey mode

- ▶ *Wanted* effects because by offering multiple modes researchers aim for including different segments of the population

- Mode measurement effects

Survey questions are answered differently just because of the survey mode

- ▶ *Unwanted* effects as they may confound with mode selection effects
- ▶ e.g., 1) young people are more inclined to take part in a web rather than in a face-to-face survey (selection effect)
2) respondents are more inclined to disclose criminal behavior in self- rather than in interviewer-administered survey modes (measurement effect)

Questionnaire design

- Mode-specific design

The questionnaire is optimized for each mode separately

- ▶ Obtaining the best possible data for each mode
- ▶ Justified if estimates for the entire sample are key

- Unified mode design

Differences in the questionnaires are reduced as much as possible (only instructions remain mode-specific)

- ▶ Ensuring measurement equivalence
- ▶ Justified if group comparisons are key

Empirical evidence on mode (measurement) effects

- Mode effects exist but tend to be small in well-conducted mixed-mode surveys
 - ▶ Importance of questionnaire design
- Mode effects vary between different types of survey questions
 - ▶ Basic demographics vs. attitudinal (especially sensitive) questions
- Mode effects are particularly pronounced when self- and interviewer-administered survey modes are mixed
 - ▶ Very different contextual cues of these types of survey administration

Recommendations

- Use mixed-mode surveys if you expect low response probabilities for certain segments of the population in a single-mode survey (risk for nonresponse bias)
- Avoid mixing self- and interviewer-administered survey modes if the survey deals with sensitive issues
- Offer the different survey modes sequentially, starting with the cheapest mode to save costs
- Do not communicate the modes that will follow to your target persons (or only upon request)
- Consider to implement a targeted mixed-mode design if you have expectations about the mode preferences of different groups in your sample (which you can easily identify/address)

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