GESIS Panel Survey Style Guide

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Please make sure to use the most recent version of this document, which can be found here: http://tinyurl.com/GESISPanelDocs

The following related materials can be found under the URL mentioned above:

- GESIS Panel Proposal Submission Procedure Description
- GESIS Panel Passenger Unipark License Request Form
- GESIS Panel Proposal Submission Form
- Example: GESIS Panel Offline Questionnaire
- Example: Template for Designing an Online Questionnaire (*.gpx)

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GESIS Panel Survey Style Guide

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1. Aim and structure of the GESIS Panel Styleguide

This document gives the orientation for researchers who are planning to implement a questionnaire in Questback EFS Survey (Unipark) software environment to submit it to the GESIS Panel. It first outlines general rules concerning a GESIS Panel questionnaire, then gives an overview of the general structure of GESIS Panel online questionnaires, and finally provides a broad overview of question formats which are accepted by the GESIS Panel, and instructions how to implement various question types in Unipark. The GESIS Panel team provides a template of an Unipark-questionnaire (gpx-file GESISPanel_template_submission.gpx) which can be found in http://tinyurl.com/GESISPanelDocs, preprogrammed with the GESIS Panel layout. It contains examples of all the question types explained below.

Researchers submitting proposals via GESIS Panel Submission Website (http://gesispanel.gesis.org/submission/) should use the provided template. Please do not change any layout settings. The gpx-file can easily be imported in Unipark as follows: START → Projects → Project import: browse project file. Please import as an “anonymous survey”.

2. General remarks: Offline mode as the least common denominator

GESIS Panel is a mixed-mode panel featuring online and paper-and-pencil questionnaires. The offline mode delimits the style and technical possibilities of the questionnaire. This has several implications:

- Not all question types which can be implemented in Unipark are accepted in the GESIS Panel (see paragraph 3.3.).
- Generally, we do not force the respondents to provide an answer. Moreover, they can skip a question without further probing.
- A “back-button” is included per default.
- A “don’t know” category is not offered by default. However, it can be included if it is a substantial answer or the researcher has other reasons to include it (e.g. comparability), see paragraph 3.5 for details on the implementation.
- As a general rule, we apply a one page per question design. However, if two or more questions are logically related it is possible to implement more than one question per page. The number of questions which can be implemented on one screen depends on the size of the questions.
- Filter questions should be avoided and are permitted only in exceptional cases. As an alternative to filter question a “does not apply” category has to be included.
- Randomization of either questions or items is not possible.
- Plausibility checks are not possible.
- Inclusion of multimedia elements is not possible.
Please remember the general rules for questionnaire submission:

- The submitted questions have to be in German (GESIS Panel Proposal Submission Procedure Description).
- The maximum duration of submitted questionnaire should not exceed five minutes.

3. GESIS Panel online questionnaire

In each panel wave the GESIS Panel online questionnaire follows the same structure. It starts with a welcome page, followed by a second page including instructions, and then the questions of the several studies are following. At the end of the questionnaire some survey evaluation questions are included and finally an end page finishes the questionnaire.

3.1. General structure of the questionnaire

Welcome page

On the first screen respondents are welcomed to the current survey. No topic is mentioned, only the specific month (“October-/November-Survey”). Information about duration of the survey, incentives, and data protection is provided.

Vorab ein paar Hinweise zum Ausfüllen:

- Es geht um Ihre persönlichen Erfahrungen und Meinungen.
- Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten.
- Wählen Sie stets die Antwortmöglichkeit aus, die Ihrer persönlichen Einschätzung am besten entspricht.

Figure 1: Example welcome page.
Second page

On the second page general instructions about filling out the survey are provided.

Standard survey evaluation items

At the end of every wave of the GESIS Panel, a set of standard survey evaluation items is implemented (the full set of survey evaluation questions can be found in the Appendix).

End page

The final page provides information about the amount of incentive respondent received for the survey and the approximate date of invitation to the next survey.
3.2. General structure of questions

First of all, a question consists of the following elements (not all elements have to be used for every question) (see Figure 4):

I. Introduction preceding the question “descriptive text”
II. Question text (bold font)
III. Instructions / explanatory text
VI. Answer categories / option

3.2.1. Introductory text [Unipark question type: 998]

The introductory text of a question should be programmed separately as 998-type question and placed on the same page as the question. No bold formatting is intended for introductions. If you wish to highlight a word or a phrase within the introduction, please use the capital letters to do so. No italic font or underlying words should be used for highlighting.

3.2.2. Instructions

Instructions should follow or precede the question text. No formatting with bold type is intended for instructions. To highlight a word or a phrase within the instruction, capital letters should be used.
3.3. Accepted question types

There are several types of questions you can choose from. Please note that only a standard subset of possible question types accessible in Unipark are permitted because of the mixed-mode character of the panel. In the following section all question types which are accepted within the GESIS Panel will be listed and described.

All questions which are shown in the screenshots can be found in the Unipark template GESISPPanel_template_submission.gpx.

3.3.1. Single choice questions [Unipark question types: 111, 113]

3.3.1.1. Single response list (vertical) [Unipark question type: 111]

- Items in single response lists and vertical scales have to start with a capital letter.
- If an item is a full sentence, it has to end with a full stop.
- If an item is a continuation of the question, the question has to end with an ellipsis and the item has to start with an ellipsis (see Figure 7).
- “Don’t know” category or other “does not apply”-categories which do not constitute the scales should be set in italic font. In vertical response lists these categories should be visually separated by a blank line.
- Alternating colors should not be used in single response lists.
- It is possible to include an open category (see Figure 6)

Figure 6: Example single choice question (vertical)
3.3.1.2. **Single response list (horizontal) [Unipark question types: 113, implemented as 311]**

- Single choice questions with a horizontal answer scale have to be implemented as a matrix question with one item left blank. Please see the screenshot of the Unipark implementation below for details (see Figure 11).
- Answer options of horizontal scales should not be capitalized, alignment is with the lower bound. The answer options should be placed above the scale.
- “Don’t know” category or other “does not apply”-categories which do not constitute the scales should be set in italic font (see Figure 10).
- The “don’t know” category should be marked in Unipark as a missing value (see 3.5 Implementation of the “don’t know” category).
- A maximum of eleven scale points should not be exceeded.
Wie wichtig ist es Ihnen persönlich, wie die kommende Bundestagswahl ausgeht?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sehr wichtig</th>
<th>wichtig</th>
<th>mittelmäßig</th>
<th>nicht so wichtig</th>
<th>überhaupt nicht wichtig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 9: Example single choice question (horizontal)

Eine Partei kann nur in den Bundestag einziehen, wenn sie mindestens 5% der Zweitstimmen erhält – außer sie gewinnt in drei oder mehr Wahlkreisen die meisten Stimmen.

Auf wie viel Prozent sollte diese Hürde gesenkt oder erhöht werden, oder sollte sie gleich bleiben?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>1%</th>
<th>2%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>6%</th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>8%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>weiß</th>
<th>nicht</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 10: Example single choice question with don’t know (horizontal)

Figure 11: Unipark implementation of horizontal single choice question
3.3.2. Multiple response questions [Unipark question types: 121, 122]

- Vertical arrangement of the items is preferred, however it is also possible to choose the horizontal arrangement of the items or a combination of both (e.g. two columns).
- As in the case of single choice, vertical scale items have to start with a capital letter and end with a full stop if they are full sentences.

Figure 12: Example multiple choice question (vertical)

3.3.3. Open question (fields for text input) [Unipark question types: 141, 142, 143, 144]

Due to the restrictions of the paper-and-pencil mode, there are restrictions on the number of open questions we can integrate into one wave questionnaire and on the size of the text field provided for the answer. A typical open question within a standardized questionnaire provides an answer field for single words or numbers (see Figure 13 and Figure 14). The rule of thumb for longer open questions is providing the maximum of 5 lines in the answer field (see Figure 15). The width of the multiline textbox should be limited to 80. The number of open questions and the size of the text box have to be discussed with the project manager responsible for the wave.
Im Folgenden möchten wir Sie bitten einige Fragen für unsere Statistik zu beantworten.

Wie viele Personen leben ständig in Ihrem Haushalt, Sie selbst eingeschlossen?
Zählen Sie dazu bitte auch Kinder, bzw. Personen, die normalerweise mit Ihnen zusammen wohnen, aber momentan abwesend sind z. Bsp. im Krankenhaus oder in Ferien.

Figure 13: Example open question, numeric

Und in welcher Region leben Sie?

Figure 14: Example open question, single line

Haben Sie noch weitere Anmerkungen?
Hier können Sie Lob oder Kritik ausdrücken. Bitte bedenken Sie, dass wir Ihnen aus Datenschutzgründen hierzu nicht persönlich antworten können. Geben Sie in dieses Feld aus diesem Grund auch bitte keine Telefonnummer oder andere Kontaktdaten ein. Wenn Sie Fragen haben, können Sie uns gerne unter 0521-1246 564 anrufen oder eine E-Mail an info@gesis-gesellschaftsmonitor.de schreiben.

Figure 15: Example open question, multiple lines
3.3.4. Matrix questions

3.3.4.1. Standard matrix questions [Unipark question type: 311]

- The size of the matrix question depends on the length of the single items. The general rule of thumb is that the matrix has to fit on a single screen without scrolling.
- One matrix question should not exceed ten items. GESIS Panel team may require to split a matrix question into two subsequent pages for the online mode.
- The maximal number of scale points should not exceed seven.
- An item should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop if it is a full sentence.
- If an item completes a sentence, it should start with an ellipsis and end with a full stop.
- It is not advisable to use matrix questions where items are continuations of the question and end with a question mark. It is advisable to rephrase the question so that no question marks are needed at the end of the items.
- If a matrix question contains three or fewer items, alternating colors should not be used.

Figure 16: Example matrix question
3.3.5. Semantic differential [Unipark question type: 340]

- The general rule of thumb for a number of items in the semantic differential question is that the question has to fit on a single screen without scrolling. This is the case when semantic differential question does not exceed 15 items if items are single words.
- GESIS Panel team may require to split a semantic differential question into two subsequent pages for the online mode.
- The number of scale points should not exceed seven.

![Figure 17: Example semantic differential](image)

3.3.6. Advanced questions – user defined [Unipark question type: 911]

User programmed questions should only be used in exceptional cases. The GESIS Panel team has no resources to provide any support concerning user defined questions. Please use only HTML, no javascript.

3.4. General remarks

- To emphasize a word within an introduction, question or remark, capital letters should be used.
- Variable name convention: GESIS Panel team will rename your variables according to the naming convention of the GESIS Panel. Variable names or labels can be either in English or in German.
- If you are using a scale labeled with numbers, never use the value “0” even if a scale starts with “0”, because “0” is defined as missing value in Unipark. Values should start with 1. You can label the value “1” as “0” (see example “single_choice_horizontal_0 scale” in the template).
- Codes for Missing data: Unipark has standard codes for missing data (-66, -77 and 0). These should not be changed in the submitted online questionnaire.

3.5. Implementation of the “don’t know” category

We do not recommend using a “don’t know” option. It can be used if it is a substantive category (in the case of knowledge questions) or for purposes of comparison if a question is replicated from other survey.

“Don’t know” category and similar “does not apply” categories which do not constitute the scales should be set in italic font and be visually separated by a blank line in vertical response lists.

Figure 18: Example “don’t know category” in a vertical scale

For horizontal response lists, it suffices as well to set the “don’t know” category in italic font.

Figure 19: Example of the “don’t know category” in a horizontal scale
Code “98” has to be assigned to the explicitly offered “don’t know” category. The “don’t know” category should be marked in Unipark as a missing value (see Figure 20).

**Figure 20: Unipark implementation of the “don’t know category”**
Appendix

Standard survey evaluation items

Figure 21: Survey evaluation questions: Evaluation of several aspects of the questionnaire.

Figure 22: Survey evaluation questions: Comprehensibility of questions.
Figure 23: Survey evaluation questions: Whether the questionnaire made the respondent think about things.

Figure 24: Survey evaluation questions: Overall evaluation.

Figure 25: Whether respondent interrupted the answering process.
Figure 26: Presence of others during answering the questions, place of filling out the survey, device used to fill out the survey.

Figure 27: Text field for feedback.