

Analyzing the Survey Characteristics, Participation, and Evaluation across 186 surveys in an online opt-in panel in Spain

Melanie Revilla
RECSM-Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Introduction

Previous research

Lot of previous research about survey characteristics, focusing in particular on the effects of the **topic**, the **question formats**, the **survey length**, and the **incentives** on survey **response rates**, **dropout**, and **data quality**

- See e.g. Schuman & Presser, 1981; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982; Oppenheim, 1992; Tourangeau, Rips & Rasinski, 2000; Brace, 2004; Saris & Gallhofer, 2014
- Mainly for mail, telephone and face-to-face surveys

With **web surveys**, different recommendations were needed, generating a new bunch of research about these same aspects

- See e.g. Couper, 2000; Couper, Traugott & Lamias, 2001; Dillman, 2000; Dillman & Bowker, 2001 ; Manfreda, Batagelj & Vehovar, 2002; Marcus, et al., 2007; Couper, 2008; Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009; Bethlehem & Biffignandi, 2011; Tourangeau, Conrad & Couper, 2013
- Nevertheless, **2 web surveys can be extremely different**, and what applies for one web survey does not necessarily apply for another (Couper & Miller, 2008)

Introduction

Two distinctions among web surveys

1. One time surveys vs panels

- Panels need respondents to continue participating in the surveys sent to them.
- Survey experience is even more important for panels, since it can affect the future participations.

2. Probability-based panels vs opt-in panels ← *Our focus*

- Differ in the way the samples are selected
- But not only!
- Usually differ also in the frequency of contacts with the panelists, in the management of the panel, in the kind of surveys sent, and in their goals

Goals of the study

Two main goals

1. Give an overview of the current situation in an **opt-in online panel**, in terms of:

Survey characteristics

Participation

Evaluation of the survey

2. Study the relationships between:

Levels of dropout

Survey evaluation



Key questionnaires' characteristics

(Topic, type of questions, estimated survey length)

Data analysed

186 surveys in Spain

Such that we get all
the information

Online fieldwork
company

All surveys programmed by Netquest
and answered by Netquest panelists in Spain
over a period of about 6 months

Exclude
external/clients
databases

Mid February to
beginning of
August 2016

Target population

Main characteristics

Also includes “general internet population” and when age limits are 16-65 or broader

Characteristic	Proportion of surveys corresponding
Target population is the general population*	13.4%
Target limited to only one gender	15.0%
Target limited to some age groups (besides the 16+ or 18+)	52.1%
More than one target of interest (within the same study)	19.3%

Interest most of the time is NOT in the general population

Target population

Examples of very specific target populations

Examples of target populations

25-50 years old who do sports at least twice a week with an intensity of 1h of sport and who bought detergent in the last 2 months

Population who has suffered or is suffering gout

30-65 years old who consume drinks of oats, almond or rice

Women from 25 to 45 years old who have colored their hair in blond in the last year

25-65 years old who have cholesterol problems and consume cocoa powder

People who need a orthodontic treatment but are not doing it

Quotas

The five most used quotas

Quotas on...	Proportions of surveys using these quotas
... Gender	78.5%
... Age	72.6%
... Geographical area	52.7%
... Level of urbanization	8.7%
... Social class	7.6%

Probably linked to
the country studied

Survey topics

The five more common topics

Main topics	Proportions of the surveys within this topic
Food / Beverages	29.0%
Society / Politics	14.0%
Health	11.8%
Insurance / Bank	8.6%
Media / Internet / New technologies	7.5%

These 5 topics
cover 71.0% of
all surveys

Question formats

Surveys including different questions formats

Proportions of the surveys with at least one ...	
...Multiple options question	83.9%
...Grid	76.3%
...Agree-Disagree question	39.2%
...Open text question	35.5%
... Ordering question	23.1%
...Dropdown menu	18.3%
...Video	7.5%
...Slider	2.7%

Gap between what the literature recommends and what is used in practice

Survey length

Estimated length of the surveys in minutes

Median = 10 min

Proportions of surveys with estimated length of...

... 1-4 minutes	8.6%
... 5-9 minutes	26.5%
... 10-14 minutes	30.3%
... 15-19 minutes	16.8%
... 20-24 minutes	10.8%
... 25-29 minutes	3.8%
... 30-40 minutes	3.2%

82.2%

Length most of the time in line with the "20 minutes rule"

Incentives

Number of points received for participating

No. pts = Est. length+2,
except if survey > 25
min or has special
requirements

Proportions of surveys with incentives of...

... 4 points	0.5%
... 5-9 points	25.3%
... 10-14 points	38.7%
... 15-19 points	17.7%
... 20-24 points	9.7%
... 25-29 points	5.4%
... 30-58 points	2.7%

E-book

Online movie

Participation

From invitations to "completes"

	Minimum	Maximum	Median
No. invited	220	28,062	2,239
No. started	164	18,019	1,450
No. screened-out	1	14,291	466
No. dropouts	2	2,261	49
No. completes	90	5,015	602
Participation rate	37.3	90.7	64.5
Screened-out rate	0.1	90.8	39.4
Dropout rate	1.1	88.9*	6.7

(no. started / no. invited) *100

(no. screened out/no. started)*100

[no. dropouts/ (no. completes + dropouts)]*100

Special case where a product is sent for testing; if we exclude it, the max becomes 62.1%

Devices of participation

Proportions of respondents using different device types

Device	Minimum across all surveys	Maximum across all surveys	Median for all surveys
PC	40.9 %	100.0 %	67.4 %
Tablet	0 %	39.7 %	6.2 %
Smartphone	0 %	52.7 %	25.5 %

Because some surveys do not allow mobile participation

Almost 1/3 of mobile respondents

Survey evaluation

Average on a scale from 1-very badly done to 5-very well done

	Minimum across all surveys	Maximum across all surveys	Median for all surveys
All completes	3.2	4.5	4.1
PC only	3.3	4.6	4.1
Smartphone only	3.1	4.5	4.0

Quite good evaluations overall

No real differences between devices

Relationships DR/evaluation/survey characteristics

Regressions of DR and evaluation on survey characteristics

Explanatory variables		Dropout rate		Survey evaluation	
		Coef.	P-value	Coef.	P-value
Survey Main Topic	Food / Beverages	-.35	.88	.05	.26
	Society / Politics	-2.97	.31	-.04	.46
	Health	-3.38	.27	-.00	.93
	Insurance / Bank	-5.02	.15	.00	.98
	Media / Internet / New technologies	-4.48	.22	-.03	.69
Format of questions	Includes 1 or + slider	6.02	.27	.08	.45
	Includes 1 or + ordering	-.45	.83	.01	.83
	Includes 1 or + grid	2.28	.32	.02	.69
	Includes 1 or + AD question	3.23	.10	-.06	.16
	Includes 1 or + multiple responses	-1.78	.50	.09	.09
	Includes 1 or + video	6.12	.08	.01	.83
	Includes 1 or + open text question	3.27	.09	-.06	.12
	Includes 1 or + dropdown	.64	.79	-.04	.42
Survey length	Estimated length	.58	.00	-.00	.68
	Constant	3.46	.30	4.01	.00
Model fit	R ²	.2559		.1045	
	Adj. R ²	.1942		.0308	

No significant effect

Coef. go in expected direction but $0.05 < p \leq .10$

Effect on dropout

Conclusions

Main results

- **Target population:** often very specific; hard to have previous knowledge about them in order to use proper quotas.
- **Topic:** 29% of the surveys about food or drinks.
- **Question formats:** multiple choice and grids used very often. AD, open questions, ordering and drop-down used frequently too. Videos and sliders present in less than 10% of the surveys.
- **Estimated length:** 5-14 minutes for 56.8% of the surveys.
- **Participation process:** because of the very specific target populations and the use of quotas, it is sometimes necessary to invite a huge number of panelists, for a small final number of completes. Screened-out rates and DR vary a lot across surveys. Including AD questions, videos, open questions, and having a longer estimated length, seem to be related with a higher DR.
- **Devices used:** around 2/3 PC and 1/3 mobile participation.
- **Survey evaluation:** not much variations across surveys; similar for PC/smartphone. Not surprising that we did not find much in the regression analysis.

Conclusions

Main limits

- Only variables at the survey level: information about what happened just before the dropout for each individual would be much richer/informative
- Not able to take into account the device in many of the analyses (no information): but this could be key in explaining for instance the dropout
- Only surveys programmed by Netquest
- Only one opt-in panel: differences also within opt-in panels
- Only one country

Conclusions

Discussion

- Opt-in panels are really different from other web surveys, not just in terms of sample selection, but also in terms of the population and topics covered
 - This affects the participation process, in particular the screened-out rates, and thus the challenges faced by these panels
- There is a **gap between research and practice**, in particular related to the question formats
 - Need to work harder on spreading the results from academic research and convincing the practitioners to follow these recommendations?
 - Need to adapt further the research to practitioners' need, by looking more closely at the survey reality nowadays and trying to research further how to improve the formats that are most used?



Thank you for your attention!

Questions?



melanie.revilla@upf.edu