European Science Foundation
Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)

ESF SCSS Exploratory Workshop

Internet survey methodology: Toward concerted European research efforts

Scientific Report

Dubrovnik, Croatia, 26-28 September 2005

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the ESF workshop was to bring together leading survey research methodologists researching the use of the Internet for survey research. Although this data collection mode is increasingly popular, its methodological quality is often questionable. Due to the novelty of the method the standardized guidelines for successful implementation have not yet been successfully developed, to the extent they have been for face-to-face, telephone, and mail survey modes. In particular, the issues of how to solve the problems of non-coverage and non-response remain critical. In addition, the developing information-communication technology (which presents an integral part of this data collection mode) continuously offers new opportunities for designing Internet surveys. These features need to be appropriately evaluated by survey methodologists in order to determine their impact on the quality of obtained survey data. The objectives of the workshop were thus to foster European research collaboration in order to improve the quality of survey research in academic and applied areas.

Event took place in Dubrovnik, Croatia, between 26 and 28 September 2005. It was attended by 30 leading researchers in the field, from nine European countries (Croatia, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom) and United States. Experts came from different institutions in which Internet-based data collection is used for scientific and applied areas. This offered wide range of different viewpoints on discussed topics, which is advantageous for adequate evaluation of present issues.

According to timing, each paper presentation was about 20 minutes long and there were additional ten minutes for discussion. In addition to paper presentations, "How to" guides for implementing Web surveys were also part of the workshop programme. These were intended for extensive discussion on specific topics regarding Internet-based data collection. First ten minutes of "How to" guides were available for presentation and additional 20 minutes for discussion. Workshop was thus structured in the way to promote debate among participants. Such structure enabled sharing new ideas for future research and consequently contributed to development of the field.

There was total of 23 presented papers and four "How to" guides for implementing Web surveys. Each contribution offered new information on different issues regarding Internet-based data collection. Every presentation was followed by creative discussion and evaluation of stated findings. Important part was also exchange of experiences and good practises in Internet surveys implementation.

Workshop was divided into nine thematic sessions[1], covering several aspects of Internet survey data collection. In general, following topics were presented:

- problem of non-response in Internet survey data collection and strategies of minimizing it to ensure higher data quality;
- studying response process with different available techniques and considering characteristics of specific segments of population;

[1] Initially, ten sessions were planned. However, due to cancellation of one presentation, two sessions were merged into one, resulting in nine sessions overal. See Assessment of results for more details.

- effects of questionnaire design (e.g. layout, question wordings) on quality of obtained data ;
- different aspects of privacy concerns, their impact on data quality and overview of existing codes of ethics regarding Internet survey data collection;
- development of criteria for evaluating software products for web-based surveys and use of Internet data collection for implementation of various experiments;
- problems of inference and evaluation of techniques used to ensure adequate statistical generalization;
- applications of Internet survey data collection.

In-depth presentation, evaluation and discussion of these topics along with contacts among participants contributed to importance of the ESF Workshop. Some of the most prominent benefits of the event are:

- dissemination of new findings regarding Internet survey methodology;
- extensive discussions on topics and exchange of experiences in using Internet-based survey data collection;
- opportunity to acquire personal contacts among experts;
- fostering new collaborations for future research projects.

ESF Workshop was thus a successful event, which contributed important findings and guidelines for Internet survey methodology. It also offered many opportunities for future collaboration of European researchers in this field.

SCIENTIFIC CONTENT

Background

An Internet survey is a data collection method using a survey questionnaire. Different Internet services, such as e-mail, World Wide Web or other Internet-based services, are used in the process of data collection.

Use of Internet survey data collection began at the end of 1980's with introduction of e-mail surveys. Rapid development and wide usage of World Wide Web from the mid 1990's fostered development of Web-based surveys which has become prevailing mode of Internet survey data collection. Lately, there are also other types of Internet-based surveys, using integrated technology solutions, such as mobile Internet surveys, WebTV surveys, Internet CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) and others.

This data collection mode offers numerous advantages in comparison to other modes. Costs of implementation and data collection are in many cases significantly lower. Speed of data collection is usually larger and there are no time and geographical limitations. Data collection is completely computerized what potentially produces higher data quality. In addition, Internet-based questionnaires enable high level of flexibility (e.g. multimedia elements), which may have positive impact on respondents and offer many possibilities of use.

Internet survey data collection has become an important tool for a wide range of research fields, including marketing and public opinion research, customer satisfaction studies, internet usage studies, psychological experiments and others. Internet surveys thus already become an important part of survey industry.

However, there are several important methodological issues arising from this data collection mode. Most often mentioned is the problem of non-coverage, which is the case when some units of population cannot be measured using specific type of data collection. Usage of Internet-based data collection is therefore often limited to specific populations with relatively high access to Internet services. Another frequently stated problem is problem of non-response, which usually arises because of impossibility to contact some units or their refusal of completing the questionnaire. There are also several other important issues, including measurement errors, errors due to respondent or survey questionnaire itself (e.g. questionnaire design or wordings of questions), effects of surveying mode and others.

Due to novelty of the Internet data collection mode these issues are still highly unsolved. Standardized guidelines which would provide references for high-quality implementation of Internet data collection has also not been developed yet successfully to the extent as for some other surveying modes. On the other hand, ever faster development of information-communication technology continuously offers new opportunities for designing Internet surveys.

Objectives of workshop

The basic aim of the ESF workshop was to bring together leading survey methodologists, researching the usage of the Internet for survey research. Features and issues of Internet survey data collection mode need to be appropriately evaluated by experts in order to determine their impact on the obtained data quality. Discussion among researches from different institutions contributes to development of methodological guidelines for implementing Internet-based surveys and consequently to higher quality of survey research in European academic and applied areas.

Regarding Internet data collection, European scientific and commercial organizations are in disadvantage in comparison to those in North America. There were also very few opportunities for European researches to meet and discuss new ideas regarding this topic in Europe. Another aim of the workshop was therefore to promote European research in the field of Internet survey methodology and to foster research collaboration among European researchers in this field.

ESF Workshop thus offered exploration of novel ideas, extensive exchange of information, development of future collaborative actions among European researches and many other benefits.

Overview of discussed topics

Topics discussed on the workshop were divided into nine sessions. Workshop began on Monday, 26 September 2005 with opening by convenors Vasja Vehovar and Michael Bosnjak and organizer Katja Lozar Manfreda. That was followed by brief self-presentation of each participant. After the introductory part, first session began.

Session 1: Non-response problem (chaired by Michael Bosnjak)

Non-response is one of the problems which might have significant impact on lower data quality. Internet surveys are often considered to provide lower response rates comparing to some other survey modes. However, there are several methods used to adequately decrease this problem. Aim of this session was to present several solutions to decrease non-response rates in Internet surveys.

In the first presentation, Anja Göritz presented an overview of incentives usage in Web-based surveys. She presented results of several meta-analyses and experiments evaluating material incentives, comparative effectiveness of different kinds of incentives and different context factors that moderate such effectiveness.

Olle Bälter considered the problem of long questionnaires which may negatively affect response rates. He introduced the solution of using computer games questionnaire design techniques which make questionnaire answering more interesting and therefore present smaller burden for respondent.

Contribution of Tracy Tuten Ryan investigated adequacy of reminders for non-respondents. There are usually little costs in using them in Web surveys and they are often quite effective for reducing non-response. However, it was stressed that probably smaller motivation of respondents who did not respond after first invitation might significantly reduce quality of collected data.

Session 2: Studying response process (chaired by Silvia Biffignandi)

Second session was dedicated to the process of responding to an Internet questionnaire. This process might be affected by several factors, like respondent's characteristics, design of questionnaire etc. There are also several different methods of tracking survey response process in Internet-based surveys.

Vasja Vehovar presented contribution prepared together with Darja Lavtar, which identified socio-demographic segments that have specific non-response behaviour as well as the corresponding personal determinants of the non-response behaviour.

Gustav Haraldsen addressed the importance of collecting client side paradata as electronic observations that are collected while the respondents fill in Web questionnaire. He introduced treating client side paradata as observations, similar to those which allow qualitative testing during the phase of instrument development.

Contribution by Roger Tourangeau, Mick Couper and Mirta Galešič (presented by Roger Tourangeau) introduced the use of eye-tracking technology for Web-based experiments. They presented usability of this technology for studying response process through study of different aspects of questionnaire design and wording.

Session 3: Non-response problem (continued) (chaired by Wolfgang Bandilla)

Third session continued the discussion on non-response problem topic started in the first session.

Uwe Matzat focused on ego-centred network data collection using Web surveys. Author presented comparison between the use of Web data collection and data collection with the help of an interviewer. His main focus were differences in drop-out rates, number of missing values and different properties of the networks.

Paper by Katja Lozar Manfreda, Michael Bosnjak, Iris Haas and Vasja Vehovar (presented by Katja Lozar Manfreda and Michael Bosnjak) questioned frequently stressed lower response rate of Web surveys comparing to other modes. Using meta-analysis of 36 published experimental comparisons they have shown that this common assumption of lower response rate does not hold true when scrutinized using meta-analytical research procedures.

First "How to" guide for implementing Web Surveys was prepared by Anja Göritz, who encouraged extensive discussion among participants on effectiveness of using different incentives types in Internet surveys.

Session 4: Questionnaire design (chaired by Annica Issakkson)

Different aspects of questionnaire design (e.g. length and layout of questionnaire, wordings of questions) may have significant impact on quality of data collection. Session 4 therefore focused on different influences of questionnaire design.

Don A. Dillman summarized results from a number of Web survey experiments regarding influences of visual layout on answers. These studies included variety of question formats. Author also introduced some implications of alternative visual formats for conducting mixed-mode surveys.

Mirta Galešič focused on effects of questionnaire length on quality of responses in Web surveys. She presented findings from a study regarding effects on question item non-response, length of open answers, non-differentiation and response times.

Paper by Fred Conrad, Mick Couper, Roger Tourangeau and Mirta Galešič (presented by Mick Couper) addressed potential of increasing data quality by providing feedback to respondents about their answers. They also presented differences in responses between usage of client-side feedback, server-side feedback and no feedback.

Session 5: Privacy concerns and data quality (chaired by Gösta Forsman)

Primary aim of the fifth session was to address ethical issues and privacy concerns of Internet-based surveys which might influence quality of collected data.

Adam Joinson examined use of personalized survey questionnaire in relation to respondent's perception of privacy. On the basis of series of outlined experiments author argued that such personalization poses a threat to anonymity in a survey environment.

Contribution by Carina Paine, Adam Joinson, Tom Buchanan and Ulf-Dietrich Reips (presented by Carina Paine) considered the problem of privacy and self-disclosure online. Authors presented results from various studies, including development and testing of different privacy and self disclosure measures for use in Web-based surveys.

Katja Lozar Manfreda conducted discussion on ethical issues in implementing Internet surveys ("How to" guide) with presentation of several open issues and existing codes of ethics. Presentation was followed by discussion on different codes, practises and approaches in European countries and United States.

Session 6 (chaired by Mick Couper)

Session 6 consisted of two parts. The first part was dedicated to discussion on software for implementing and conducting Web survey, while Internet-based experiments were the topic of the second part.

The third "How to" guide was prepared by Vasja Vehovar, Gašper Koren, Katja Lozar Manfreda and Jernej Berzelak (presented by Katja Lozar Manfreda). It focused on software

products for Web surveys, presented some characteristics of these products and evaluated different criteria for choosing them. These criteria have been then discussed by participants.

Ulf-Dietrich Reips presented Internet as a setting for experimental research, which enables gaining understandings of different causal relationships. Author summarized recent trends in Web experimenting and evaluated several Internet research techniques like multiple site entry technique, custom randomized response techniques and others.

Second contribution of Ulf-Dietrich Reips was a "How to" guide on performing Internet-based experimenting. He presented some of such experiments, relevant Web pages and experiences in conducting experiments as a headword for discussion.

Session 7: Problem of inference (chaired by Gustav Haraldsen)

Innitially planned Sessions 7 and 8 (both focusing on the problem of inference) were merged into one session due to the cancellation of one paper, i.e. paper by Annica Isaksson, Stig Danielsson and Gösta Forsman.

Using Internet-based surveys, problems of inference often arises because of frequent use of non-probability samples. Session 7 thus considered measures and techniques of overcoming this problem.

Wolfgang Bandilla considered usage of pre-recruited panels of Internet users to overcome limitations of volunteer panels. Author evaluated main disadvantage of former methods, which arises because potential respondents go through different stages before being sampled to participate in an online survey. Presentation mainly quantified non-response bias involved.

Paper by Annica Isaksson and Sunghee Lee (presented by Annica Isaksson) focused on problem of variance estimation of propensity score weighted estimator, used as solution of the selection bias in observational studies. Presenter exposed comparison of different simple variance estimators, based on their performance in a study carried out by authors.

Maria Varedian introduced the use of regression imputation method as adjustment needed to make inference about public from a panel of volunteer respondents. She presented assumptions of this method giving unbiased estimator of population mean, and simulations carried out to study behaviour of the estimator under model violations.

Contribution by Silvia Biffignandi, Enrico Fabrizi, Monica Pratesi and Nicola Salvati (presented by Monica Pratesi) addressed necessary adjustments for selection bias in self-selected surveys. Authors handled the statistical problem using empirical data collected with Web survey and evaluated possibility of adjusting for selection bias using propensity scores.

Sessions 8 & 9: Applications (chaired by Don A. Dilllman)

Last two sessions of the event considered an overview of some applications of Internet survey data collection. This offered extensive outlook on variety of good practises and different experiences of this data collection mode.

Paper by Sanne Smeenk, Martine van Selm and Rob Eisinga (presented by Martine van Selm) presented challenges encountered during design and implementation of a survey conducted among 10,000 respondents from seven European countries. Different phases of survey preparation and implementation were evaluated to provide a wide variety of in-practice experiences.

Zoë Dowling focused on the use of Web surveys in statistical agencies and stressed the importance of respondents' perception of this new option. Authoress presented results of a study conducted in UK, focused on respondents' experience of mandatory surveys. It was demonstrated that, on the whole, respondents are receptive to the idea of Web-based data collection, although there are varying expectations regarding the Web questionnaire.

Silvia Biffignandi, Enrico Fabrizi, Federica Zucchi and Daniele Toninelli conducted experimental study on the firms in an Italian province and Enrico Fabrizi presented results of this study. He presented results about survey mode chosen by firms, response rates and different data quality indicators.

Study by Peter Werner and Gösta Forsman (presented by Gösta Forsman) examined whether mail invitation to a Web questionnaire differs in response rate and costs from a traditional mail survey. Each respondent has been offered to choose between a paper questionnaire and a Web questionnaire. Authors also compared their findings to similar studies reported in the literature.

The final presentation of the workshop was carried out by Åse Nossum who summarized experiences with Internet based State Preference analysis. This analysis is used to identify preferences of the various passenger groups. Authoress presented findings from five different data collection modes and respondent recruiting methods.

Workshop closed with some final speeches and participants' discussion about the event and plans for the future.

ASSESMENT OF THE RESULTS

Participants of the ESF workshop agreed that workshop was successful and productive event for the field of Internet survey methodology. There were also initiatives to organize more similar events in Europe. Benefits and outcomes of the workshop are numerous. Most prominent are stated below.

Dissemination of new findings
Workshop focused on several aspects of Internet survey data collection, including non-response issues, response process studies, questionnaire design, privacy issues and others. Workshop consisted of highly professional presentations of new findings on different areas of Internet survey methodology. Dissemination of these findings among scientific community provided experts with up-to-date information for current and future research projects.

Extensive discussions on topics and exchange of experiences
Each presentation was accompanied with discussion of research findings and exchange of ideas. "How to" guides which consisted of overviews of the findings regarding a particular topic enabled even more in-depth debate on specific topics and implicated important ideas for development of new solutions and guidelines. In addition, shared experiences of experts from different research institutions and different countries provided others with more in-practice aspects of Internet survey data collection usage.

Opportunity to acquire personal contacts among experts
ESF Workshop was unique opportunity to form new personal acquaintances among leading experts in the field. These are an important factor for development of future studies and evaluation of findings.

Fostering new collaborations
Face-to-face exchange of findings and ideas provided an opportunity for experts to consider new collaborations for future research projects. Such collaborations present necessary condition for successful development of Internet survey methodology in Europe.

Selected papers are planned to be published.

ESF Workshop has thus contributed to the development of the field in Europe and in general. Through extensive discussions it provided new findings and ideas regarding several open issues of Internet survey methodology. These contribute to the formation of standardized methodological guidelines for implementation of Internet survey data collection and higher quality of obtained data.

Workshop also encouraged collaborations among European researchers in the field, which represents an important step toward concerted European research efforts. One of such collaborations is the ESF programme New technologies and data collection in social sciences (NewTecDC) which dedicates an important part to Internet surveys. Several researchers, present at the workshop, are involved also into this programme.

PROGRAMME

Monday 26 September

Arrival

13.30-14.00 **Workshop opening**

14.00-15.30 ***Session 1:* Non-response problem**
(3 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Anja Göritz
The use of material and nonmaterial incentives in Web-based studies: A review

Olle Bälter
Using Computer Games Design to Increase Response Rates

Tracy Tuten Ryan
Do reminders minimize nonresponse at the expense of data quality? An investigation into the effect of reminders on data quality in web-based surveys

15.30-15.45 *Coffee-break*

15.45-17.15 ***Session 2:* Studying response process**
(3 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Vasja Vehovar, Darja Lavtar
Nonresponse segments in Internet surveys

Gustav Haraldsen
Using Client Side Paradata as Process Quality Indicators in Web Surveys

Roger Tourangeau, Mick Couper, Mirta Galesic
Use of eye-tracking for studying survey response processes

17.15-17.30 *Coffee-break*

17.30-19.00 ***Session 3:* Non-response problem (continued)**
(2 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Uwe Matzat
The Quality of Ego-Centered Network Data: A comparison of online versus offline data collection

Katja Lozar Manfreda, Michael Bosnjak, Iris Haas, Vasja Vehovar
A meta-analysis of response rates in Web surveys compared to other survey modes

"How to" guides for implementing Web Surveys
(1 guideline: 10 minutes speaker + 20 minutes discussion)

Anja Göritz
How and when to use incentives in Internet Surveys

Dinner

Tuesday 27 September

9.00-10.30 ***Session 4:* Questionnaire design**
(3 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Don A. Dillman
Some Influences of Visual Layout on Answers to Web Surveys

Mirta Galesic
Effect of questionnaire length on quality of responses in web surveys

Fred Conrad, Mick Couper, Roger Tourangeau, Mirta Galesic
Interactive Feedback Can Improve the Quality of Responses in Web Surveys

10.30-11.00 *Coffee-break*

11.00-12.30 ***Session 5:* Privacy concerns and data quality**
(2 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Adam Joinson
Audience Power, Personalized Salutation and Responses to Web Surveys

Carina Paine, Adam Joinson, Tom Buchanan, Ulf-Dietrich Reips
Privacy and Self disclosure online: Implications for web-surveys

"How to" guides for implementing Web Surveys
(1 guideline: 10 minutes speaker + 20 minutes discussion)

Katja Lozar Manfreda
Ethical issues in implementing Internet surveys. Overview of existing codes of ethics and open issues

12.30-14.00 *Lunch*

14.00-15.30 ***Session 6:* "How to" guides for implementing Web Surveys**
(1 guideline: 10 minutes speaker + 20 minutes discussion)

Vasja Vehovar, Gasper Koren, Katja Lozar Manfreda, Jernej Berzelak
What is important when choosing Web survey software?

Software experiments
(1 paper: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Ulf-Dietrich Reips
Using Internet-based experiments to study conditions for Web-based surveying

"How to" guides for implementing Web Surveys
(1 guideline: 10 minutes speaker + 20 minutes discussion)

Ulf-Dietrich Reips
How to perform Internet-based experimenting

15.30-15.45 *Coffee-break*

15.45-17.45 ***Session 7:* Problem of inference**
(4 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Wolfgang Bandilla
Online-Access-Panels Based on Probability Samples: Can they Yield Representative Results?

Annica Isaksson, Sunghee Lee
Simple Approaches to Estimating the Variance of the Propensity Score Weighted Estimator Applied on Volunteer Panel Web Survey Data--a Comparative Study

Maria Varedian
Adjustment of Web Panel Survey Estimates by Regression Imputation

Silvia Biffignandi, Enrico Fabrizi, Monica Pratesi, Nicola Salvati
Web surveys: inference using weighting and imputation in the survey on graduates

Dinner

Wednesday 28 September

9.00-10.30 ***Session 8:* Applications**
(3 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Sanne Smeenk, Martine van Selm, Rob Eisinga
Web surveying academics in seven European countries: challenges encountered

Zoë Dowling
Web Data Collection for Mandatory Business Surveys – the respondents' perspective

Silvia Biffignandi, Enrico Fabrizi, Federica Zucchi, Daniele Toninelli
Response Rates and Data Quality Issues in a Mixed Mode Survey About the Diffusion of the E-Business in a Firm's Population

10.30-11.00 *Coffee-break*

11.00-12.30 ***Session 9:* Applications (continued)**
(2 papers: 20 minutes speaker + 10 minutes discussion)

Peter Werner, Gösta Forsman
On the Cost-Efficiency of Mixed-Mode Data Collection with a Web Response Option: Results of a Survey Experiment

Åse Nossum
Stated Preference Surveys on Internet – an Effective Method for Finding Passengers' Preferences?

12.45-13.15 **Workshop closing**

Departure

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

Workshop was attended by 30 participants from ten countries:

Country	*Number of participants*
Croatia	1
Germany	4
Italy	6
Netherlands	3
Norway	2
Slovenia	3
Sweden	4
Switzerland	1
United Kingdom	3
United States	3

There were 14 female and 16 male participants. The age structure of participants is presented in table below:

Age	*Number of participants*
20 – 29	5
30 – 39	14
40 – 49	5
50 –	6