Success and failure of recruitment of respondents into an international web panel

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Research question

• Popularity of web surveys on the rise, but representativeness is still a challenge

• Several international surveys consider going online, plans of international e-registers of data (eHealth)

• What are the obstacles and opportunities of recruiting and maintaining (= avoiding attrition) a representative international web panel?
CRONOS: The case of Estonia

Villar et al 2017; Internet use estimates from Eurostat 2016
CROss-National Online Survey (CRONOS)

• Part of the SERISS project
• Six 20-minute surveys every two months in a period of one year
• Various topics: questions about values and opinions on family life, work, social and political issues, health, etc.
• Recruitment by piggy-backing on ESS8 respondents (Oct 2016 - Jan 2017)
  • Welcome survey to stay in touch
• £5/€5 incentives per survey invitation
• Respondents without internet access were offered a tablet with internet
• Contacts per wave: invitation + three reminders
CRONOS Recruitment Procedure

• About an hour after the start of ESS8 interview
• Brief verbal description of the panel (panel duration, time burden, topics, incentives, tablet offer to eligible respondents) along with a leaflet
• Tablet offer
  • Initial design (UK & SI): probe 18+ respondents whether they have access to internet outside of work; if not, include the tablet offer
  • Adapted design (EE): present the tablet offer to 18+ respondents who stated they never use the internet
• Unconditional (pre-paid) incentives
  • e-gift cards of a supermarket chain
  • €10 in every other wave (1st, 3rd, 5th wave)
CRONOS Recruitment Stages

CRONOS Recruitment stages

- ESS response rate
  - Estonia (n = 2,998): 65%
  - Slovenia (n = 2,323): 66%
  - GB (n = 4,655): 43%

- Recruitment rate
  - Estonia (n = 2,998): 38%
  - Slovenia (n = 2,323): 35%
  - GB (n = 4,655): 26%

- Participation rate
  - Estonia (n = 2,998): 24%
  - Slovenia (n = 2,323): 21%
  - GB (n = 4,655): 15%

Villar et al. 2017
CRONOS Recruitment: Reasons for not participating

- Lack of internet /computer abilities: 38%
- No time, too busy: 10%
- Not interested, does not want to participate: 17%
- Survey(s)-related issues: 7%
- Logistic reasons: 3%
- Other: 3%

38%
Recruitment Step 2: Consent for international data transfer

• Asking for respondents’ consent for storing personal data on Questback in Germany, allowing access to NSD in Norway
• Email asking for consent a few weeks after recruitment, reminder (identical email) a week later, phone call if no answer
• 2.4% of the emailed respondents dropped out due to concerns over the data going abroad
• Not all respondents replied, not all who withdrew gave a reason => Percentage of dropping out due to concerns over data going abroad likely to be twice as high
CRONOS Recruitment Stages

CRONOS Recruitment stages

ESS response rate
Recruitment rate
Participation rate

Villar et al 2017

Estonia (n = 2,998)
Slovenia (n = 2,323)
GB (n = 4,655)
CRONOS sample w/ and w/o tablet respondents

![Graph showing CRONOS sample representativeness.](Villar et al 2017)
CRONOS sample w/ and w/o tablet respondents

CRONOS sample representativeness (100% = age group in Estonian population)

Villar et al 2017
CRONOS Recruitment Procedure: Tablet sample

- 428 ESS8 respondents (out of 1948) eligible for a tablet
- 82 were recruited during ESS8 interview (12 of them actually had access to internet)
- 46 confirmed recruits after follow-up calls
- 38 eventually accepted the tablet
Tablet issues

• Samsung Galaxy Tab A6 LTE in all 3 countries
  • Central purchase of tablets – more obstacles than expected

• Average age of participating tablet respondents: 70 years

• Measures to avoid attrition
  • Setting up tablets ASAP – as simple as possible
  • Instruction during tablet delivery, help sheets, helpline
  • Despite that, unforeseeable / difficult-to-handle problems come up
Selectivity: MLR model

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<td>Male*Age</td>
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Selectivity: Gender

Gender balance in Estonian population and CRONOS

- Estonia: 47% Male, 53% Female
- CRONOS recruited: 44% Male, 56% Female
- CRONOS W2: 39% Male, 61% Female
Selectivity: Age

Age balance in Estonian population and CRONOS
Selectivity: Age

Age balance in Estonian population and CRONOS

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-75
- 76+

CRONOS recruited
CRONOS W2
Selectivity: Age & Gender

Over-/underrepresentation of gender and age groups (100% = gender/age group in Estonian population)

CRONOS recruited Male
CRONOS recruited Female
Selectivity: Age & Gender

Over-/underrepresentation of gender and age groups (100% = gender/age group in Estonian population)
Selectivity: Education

Educational balance in CRONOS

- Primary education: 10% (CRONOS recruited), 6% (CRONOS W2)
- Vocational education: 36% (CRONOS recruited), 32% (CRONOS W2)
- Secondary education: 20% (CRONOS recruited), 21% (CRONOS W2)
- Higher education: 34% (CRONOS recruited), 41% (CRONOS W2)
Challenges of international surveys

• Organisational and methodological difficulties multiply (because of societal differences, difficulties to guarantee methodologically equal treatment)

• Data protection and privacy regulations become a bigger challenge and may have an additional effect on the centrally coordinated sample

• Panel sample management requires a lot of communication at the local level – needs coordination, but cannot be carried out fully automated

• Incentives
  • Difficult to achieve comparability in terms of type (cash vs different types of vouchers), value (real and subjective value), and distribution (by email vs post)
  • Can create market distortions
Positive sides

• 20% response rate is good, could be higher

• Respondents who took up participation are committed, high completion rates so far (after 6 moths)

• Although the sample is not perfectly representative (overrepresentation of more positive and trustworthy persons, underrepresentation of 76+ population) it has better representativity of younger and middle-aged population, men than in traditional F2F surveys

• More data from each respondent (panel waves + F2F)

• Quicker?
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