

Chapter 2

The Effects of Culture and Data Collection Mode on Socially Desirable Distortion and Confidentiality Concerns in Survey Research

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ABSTRACT

Internet-based surveys have emerged as a popular data collection method for researchers. Despite the popularity of Internet-based surveys, prior studies suggest that responses collected via internet-based surveys are not equivalent to those collected via paper-based survey. Thus, it is important to understand why the nonequivalence is occurred. Also, since internet-based surveys enable us to collect data from people around the globe, it would be important to understand how cultural differences influence participants' responses. In this study, the authors investigate the effects that espoused national culture and data collection mode have on confidentiality concerns and socially desirable reporting. Results indicate that data collection mode and espoused power distance influence confidentiality concerns, while data collection mode and collectivism influence socially desirable distortion.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of social science research, a great deal of data is collected from human subjects, by asking them questions (Fisher, 1993; Peterson & Kerin, 1981). Data collection for hypothesis testing is vital to the development and growth of theoretical knowledge (Dubin, 1978). Traditional methods of data collection include paper-based surveys and structured interviews. Since the emergence of Internet-based surveys in 1994 (Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996), the popularity and use of Internet-based surveys has grown considerably (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Fan and Yan, 2010; Nulty, 2008; Sills & Song, 2002). Compared to traditional methods of data collection, Internet-based surveys have several advantages, including lower data collection costs, shorter delivery time, more design options, and less time required for data entry (Fan and Yan, 2010; Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava & John, 2004; Fowler, 2002). Because of these advantages, researchers have increasingly adopted Internet-based surveys for data collection (Ernst, Brand, Lhachimi, & Zeeb, 2018).

Researchers often assume that their subjects will respond in the same manner regardless of the mode of data collection (Denscombe, 2006). However, prior studies suggest that responses collected via Internet are not equivalent to those collected via the traditional data collection methods (Henderson, Evans-Lacko, Flach & Thornicroft, 2012; Weigold, Weigold & Ressel, 2013). For example, participants may answer to the questions differently depending on the data collection methods (McDonald and Adam, 2003). Therefore, it is important to understand why such nonequivalence occurs, since the results of any study hinge on the validity of the responses collected. Additionally, one of the advantages of Internet based surveys is that they allow researchers to collect data from people around the globe. The findings of some previous research (i.e., Dolnicar and Grun, 2007) suggest that respondents from different cultural backgrounds demonstrate different response patterns which may lead to a response bias. This bias, in turn, may lead researchers to draw incorrect conclusions (Paulhus, 1991). It is important to understand how cultural differences may influence participants' responses.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influences of data collection modes (online versus paper surveys) and national culture on socially desirable distortion and confidentiality concerns in data collection, based on a cross-cultural sample of participants from the United States and China.

BACKGROUND

Before developing the hypotheses that will address our research question, we first review relevant literature on data collection modes, espoused national culture, confidentiality concerns and socially desirable reporting.

Data Collection Mode

Traditionally, self-administered paper-based surveys have been the mode of choice among social science researchers (Suchman & Jordan, 1990). As implied by the name, subjects are given a pen, and asked to respond to questions written on a piece of paper. A researcher must collect these answers, and if he/she intends to analyze the data from these surveys statistically, enter the responses into a computer.

Paper-based surveys have several advantages over other traditional data collection modes. For example, they are cheaper, less time consuming and more standardized across subjects than face-to-face

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