

Chapter XXVI

Web Survey Methodology (WebSM) Portal

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ABSTRACT

The chapter describes a Web portal, dedicated to survey research, using modern information-communication technologies, especially the WWW. Although supported by EU since 2002, it provides worldwide visitors information on events (e.g., scientific meetings, calls for papers, projects), software, and literature on the methodology and implementation of Web surveys. The most valuable databases are the bibliography (including over 2,000 entries) and software/services databases (including over 500 entries).

INTRODUCTION

The “WebSM portal” (<http://www.websm.org>) is dedicated to the use of new technologies in survey data collection. Initially (since 1998), it was concentrated on the methodological issues of Web surveys, and the title WebSM (Web survey methodology) originates from this initial orientation. Now it covers a broader area of interaction between modern technologies (Internet, mobile phones, digital TV, etc.) and survey data collection. It presents a global reference point for survey data collection using modern information-communication technologies (ICTs), especially the WWW.

The work on WebSM portal started in 1998 at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. It was internationally oriented already from the beginning by presenting content in English. The researchers involved had been studying Web surveys since 1996, when they performed one of the first Web questionnaire design experiments (Vehovar & Batagelj, 1996). A similar Web site existed also at ZUMA, Germany as part of the activities of the German Online Research Association; however, its content was in German. The authors of both sites, together with other partners (Linköping University in Sweden and University of Bergamo in Italy) in 2002 joined in a thematic network

formed within the EU fifth framework program (Contract HPSE CT 2002 50031, acronym: WebSMSite). The involved researchers have published on Web survey methodology in several international scientific journals, in monographs by established international publishers, have had several invited talks at international scientific conferences, and have taken active role in organizing sessions on Internet surveys at international scientific meetings.

The basic mission of this academic portal is to:

- provide all target groups (students, professionals, users from academic, public, and business sector) information related to Web survey methodology and to the impact of other new technologies on survey process,
- stimulate the communication and interaction between them,
- integrate and increase the research cooperation, and
- enforce more efficient implementation of ICTs in the practice of survey research organizations.

Over the last few years, the portal has been presented at some of the largest international conferences on survey methodology and/or statistical analysis. Response from visitors has been positive, particularly owing to the extensive bibliographic references constituting the largest source of references in this field.

PORTAL STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The portal individual Web pages consist of a variable central part and upper menu. Behind, there are several databases (bibliography, authors, software/services, sources, events) with information that displays on individual Web pages.

Central part. The central part of the introductory Web page (homepage) offers latest information on several issues:

1. *News* on the use of new ICTs for survey research, but also other research methods (online qualitative research, automated electronic measurement, etc.). They include calls for papers, information on paper competitions, and other related information.
2. *Events* relates to the database of events, such as scientific meetings (workshops, conferences), tutorials, courses where Web surveys or other survey modes using new ICTs are the main or one of the topics.
3. *Forum* is a platform for communication among the portal visitors. Recently, topics such as problems of unsolicited e-mails, standards for online panels, discussion on particular software products, size of the Internet survey industry, representativeness and reliability of online surveys, and so forth, have gained interest.
4. *Bibliography* relates to the database of bibliographic references dedicated to Web surveys and other uses of new ICTs in social science research.
5. *Software* relates to the database of software products that are used for conducting Web surveys.
6. *Guides, standards, and best practices* relates to the list of guides and standards on how to conduct Web surveys (and Internet research on general) prepared by professional organizations and academics.

The posts in the above categories are ordered in chronological order, with the latest on the top. Few entries for each category are listed on the homepage, and others are accessed by clicking dedicated links.

Upper menu and databases. The upper menu is fixed for all portal Web pages. It links to several

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