

Comparison of Internet Participation in Mixed-Mode Surveys over Time

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Abstract

Worldwide, Internet connection has increased dramatically in the past 20 years. Estimates show it was less than 1% in 1995 and now is estimated around 40%. In 2014, nearly 87% of the population use the Internet in the United States. Survey researchers are enthusiastic to take advantage of this high percent of Internet use in the population as a method to obtain opinions from surveys. However, there are drawbacks to use the Internet solely for data collection, particularly for surveys of the general population. Although a high percent of the population use the Internet, the ability to select a random sample of all Internet users is not feasible. Since there are no complete frames of all Internet users, individuals must be contacted by other modes and asked to complete a survey online. However, the demographics of individuals in the general population using the Internet have different characteristics than those individuals that do not use the Internet. A series of experiments were conducted in probability-based surveys of the general population of Oregon households from 2006 through 2014. Demographics of the individuals that completed the survey by the Internet, mail and telephone are compared to the general population demographics. Our interest was to determine whether or not participation in surveys by the Internet is increasing. In addition, it is of interest to compare whether or not the demographics of the completed sample by different modes has changed over time. We also discuss whether or not any additional features we examined in these experiments, such as the use of color in the paper questionnaires, size of envelope used in the mailings, and content of the cover letter improved response rates by Internet.

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