Ipsos Public Affairs

RESEARCH METHODS CENTRE UPDATE: NOVEMBER 2018

Foreword

Welcome to the latest edition of the Ipsos Research Methods Centre newsletter. We would like to take this opportunity to share information about our recent methodological work and thinking with researchers and policymakers involved in conducting or commissioning social-policy related survey research.

In this edition we feature articles on a range of key themes - our work developing push to web as a methodology for delivering random probability surveys; survey quality and response rates; special sampling issues for rare or hard-to-reach populations; and the use of 'big data' in evaluations.

In recent years we have seen push to web emerge as a new methodology to replace traditional face-to-face surveys in developed European markets, and their telephone counterparts in the US. **Patten Smith** provides an overview of push to web surveys and Ipsos' latest design thinking. **Andrew Cleary** outlines findings from a recent push to web pilot across the EU28, the first of its kind, and considers whether the method is viable in a cross-European survey. **James Stannard** outlines development work undertaken in the UK for the Office for National Statistics [ONS], as they look to move the flagship Labour Force Survey online.

On survey quality more broadly, **Patten Smith** asks whether it is time to reconsider our fixation with the response rate, presenting a summary of the state of this indicator. **Sam Clemens** and **Scott Jakeways** approach this from a different perspective, describing a recent experiment at refusal conversion by offering an online mode as a follow-up to a face-to-face survey.

We then present two articles on special sampling issues. **Andrew Cleary** evaluates an innovative methodology for sampling rare populations without a sample frame, based on a European survey of minority groups. **Sally Horton** and **Tanja Stojadinovic** describe efforts to survey women in conflict-affected areas in Africa, Asia and eastern Europe.

Finally, **Raquel de Luis Iglesias** gives an overview of several case studies where Ipsos has used 'big data', including social intelligence, bibliometric analysis and text analytics, for evaluations.

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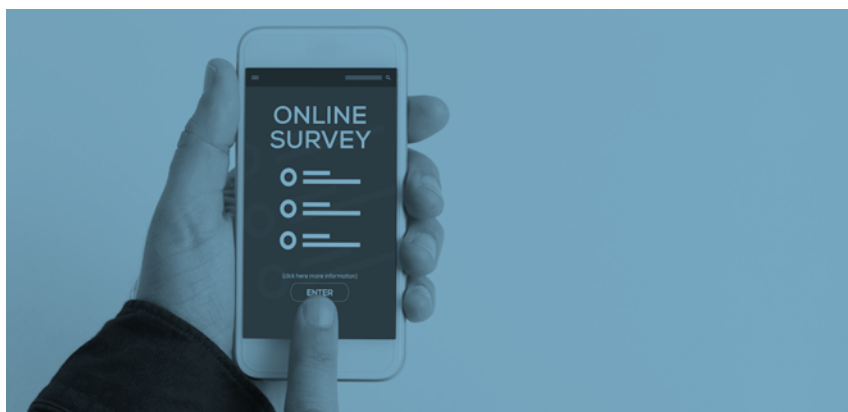
> **In recent years we have seen push to web emerge as a new methodology to replace traditional face-to-face surveys in developed European markets.**

Push to web surveys at Ipsos

Patten Smith

What is push to web? Push to web is the use of offline contact to encourage people to go online and complete a web questionnaire. Web-based data collection is becoming increasingly attractive for many reasons: online survey methods are cheaper and faster than their offline equivalents, the public is now coming to expect online official contact, clients regard online methods as being new, exciting and innovative, and response rates are in decline for the main competing offline methods. Unfortunately, in most countries (including the UK and USA), general population sample frames do not generally include email addresses. This means that if we want a high coverage random probability web survey of the general population, we are forced to contact our sample using offline methods.

How can we maximise value for money in the push to web surveys we undertake? At Ipsos, rather than follow rigidly prescriptive guidelines, our flexible evidence-based approach is summarised in the phrase "learn-and-adapt". Our approach has five central elements, although we are constantly experimenting with possible ways of improving these.

1. We draw our samples from high-coverage sample frames such as population registers in the majority of Nordic countries, or the postcode address file (PAF) in the UK

2. If we are starting with an address sample, we then ask all adults at the sampled address to participate, to a maximum of two or three, depending on the country

3. We sequentially administer requests for online and offline responses; in our largest push to web survey we send up to four mailings to each sampled address - an initial letter with a URL, a first reminder letter with a URL, a second reminder letter with a URL and accompanying mail (paper) questionnaire, and a final reminder letter with just the URL

4. We offer a conditional incentive for participation

5. We use unified mode construction and mobile-first principles in our questionnaire design

We discuss each of these elements in turn.

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Random probability sampling is a necessary requirement for high quality surveys. The method is supported by a full theoretical justification for claims of representativeness and has been repeatedly shown to outperform alternative approaches empirically[1]. And high-coverage sample frames are required to minimise the risk of non-coverage bias[2].

The justification for selecting all adults (to a pre-set maximum) at each address, when trying to get a random sample of adults from a random starting sample of addresses, is less obvious. Recent methodological research has demonstrated that more conventional random adult selection methods used on face-to-face and telephone surveys (e.g. Kish grids and last / next birthday methods) work poorly in online surveys[3]. The obvious alternative, which also delivers a random sample of individuals, is to forgo selection altogether and to ask all adults in the household to take part. However, if conditional incentives are used (as we currently believe they must to maximise response rates - see discussion below], this provides an obvious temptation for fraud: a household completing four questionnaires will receive an incentive four times larger than one completing a single questionnaire, and some may be tempted to invent fictional household members. And there is circumstantial evidence that this does indeed happen.

Our current Ipsos approach lies midway between these two approaches, and, we hope, avoids the worst difficulties of each. In the two-selections variant, we ask in households containing one or two adults for all adults to take part; and in households containing three or more adults, we ask any two to participate. We do not worry about people not following random selection instructions because we do not ask them to do so, and we have considerably reduced the temptation for fraud by limiting the total amount a household can claim in incentives. Furthermore, our removal of any element of random selection cannot have a major impact on overall sample estimates because we select all adults living there at the great majority of addresses. For example, in the UK only 15% of households contain more than two adults and any biases here will be hugely dampened by the data from the other 85% of addresses for which there cannot be any selection bias. In countries with larger average household sizes, to maintain a high proportion of households at which we select all adults, we ask for three instead of two survey participants (for example in Bulgaria where only 60% of households contain one or two adults). However, we fully accept that this approach may not offer the last word on the selection of individuals, and we continue to actively explore different individual selection methods.

We use a sequentially administered mixed-mode design to maximise the number of online responses whilst simultaneously minimising the non-response bias associated with online-only samples. Previous experiments have demonstrated that if a paper questionnaire is received in the first mailing of a mixed online-paper questionnaire survey, the great majority of returns are in practice made using paper questionnaires[4]. Holding back the inclusion of a paper questionnaire increases the number of online returns considerably although it somewhat reduces the overall response rate[5]. For this reason, our first letters to sample members include a URL but no paper questionnaire, and ask for a web response.

Previous experiments have demonstrated that if a paper questionnaire is received in the first mailing of a mixed online-paper questionnaire survey, the great majority of returns are in practice made using paper questionnaires.

1   For example, see:
    Yeager, D. S., Krosnick , J. A., Chang, L., Javitz, H. S., Levendusky, M. S., Simpser, A., & Wang, R. (2011). Comparing the accuracy of RDD telephone surveys and Internet surveys conducted with probability and non-probability samples. Public Opinion Quarterly, 75, 709-747.
    Pennay, D.W.; Neiger, D.;Lavrakas, P.; Borg, K. (2018). The Online Panels Benchmarking Study: A Total Survey Error comparison of findings from Probability-based surveys and Non-probability online panel surveys in Australia. http://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2018/6/CSRM_MP2_2018_ONLINE_PANELS.pdf
    AAPOR (2010). *Report on online panels.* https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/AAPOROnlinePanelsTFReportFinalRevised1.pdf

2   Groves, R. M., Fowler, F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., Tourangeau, R. (2009). Survey Methodology. Wiley.

3   One experiment showed that compliance rates at addresses where selections were to be made where only around 50%-60%. Villar, A. (2016). *Advantages and disadvantages of mixing modes of data collection in cross-national studies.* Presentation in Lausanne.

4   Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons

5   Dillman et al (2014) op cit.

It is important to acknowledge that in many countries online-responding samples are biased: they contain too many of the middle-aged, the well-educated, high earners, and (unsurprisingly) frequent internet users. These biases are generally reduced by following up web survey non-responders by means of a different mode[6]. The cheapest way is to offer a paper questionnaire in one of the later reminders. The resulting paper questionnaire respondents are typically older, less well-educated, poorer and lower users of the internet than online respondents, and including a paper questionnaire goes some way in compensating for the bias in online samples. However, in some surveys, where achieving a higher final response rate is deemed especially important, web survey non-responders are followed up face-to-face, but this is far more costly.

Response rates are typically lower for push to web surveys than for face-to-face interviewing and mail surveys. Although we acknowledge that the relationship between response rate and estimate error is often extremely weak[7], there are good reasons for trying to maximise both overall response rate and the number of online responses. This investigation is proving to be a rich area of methodological research. For example, at Ipsos we have found there to be benefits in providing client logos on envelopes, in offering clear, simple, graphically supported instructions for how to go online, and for varying the messaging from reminder to reminder. On the other hand, we have found no benefit in varying reminder envelope colours, using pressure sealed envelope reminders, or offering QR codes to access the questionnaire[8].

As with other modes, unconditional monetary incentives have generally been shown to be more effective that conditional ones[9] but there is evidence that using the right unconditional non-monetary incentive can be effective[10]. Given that push to web surveys generally have low response rates (usually in the 7% - 25% range in the UK[11]), there is still uncertainty as to whether it is better to offer low value unconditional incentives as recommended by Dillman or to use an equivalent budget to fund higher value conditional incentives. Currently we take the latter approach, but we continue to experiment on the best approach.

The preceding discussion has focused on how to get an unbiased representative sample. Additionally, however, it is important to ensure that our respondents give accurate answers to the questions we ask. The good news here is that methodological work has shown us that in general online questionnaires deliver high quality data[12]. However, other problems remain. How can we be confident that respondents' answers are not affected by whether they happen to answer online or offline? And how can we ensure that online answers do not differ by device used (desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone)? The former question is relatively easily dealt with in the great majority of cases when we use paper questionnaires for offline data collection by adopting what Dillman[13] terms unified mode construction: use identical wordings and maximise similarities across modes in question and answer code formats, and in visual design[14]. Answering the second question about device effects is the subject of much current methodological work, but the emerging consensus is that we should adopt "mobile-first" design principles which are based on the principle that if we get a questionnaire right for smartphone administration, then tablet / PC administration will look after itself[15]. What this means in practice is that we need to

The emerging consensus is that we should adopt "mobile-first" design principles.

6   For example see: Messer, B. L. and Dillman, D. A. (2011). Surveying the general public over the internet using address-based sampling and mail contact procedures. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 3, pp. 429-457

7   Groves, R. M., & Peytcheva, E. (2008). The impact of nonresponse rates on nonresponse bias: A meta-analysis. Public Opinion Quarterly, 72(2), 167-189

8   Ipsos MORI (2018). *Active Lives Survey 2016/2017 year 2 technical report.* Ipsos MORI.

9   Singer, E. and Ye, C. (2013). The Use and Effects of Incentives in Surveys. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 645(1): 112-141.

10 Ipsos MORI (2018). *Labour Market Survey response rate experiments. Report for test 2, tranche 1: incentives experiment.* Ipsos MORI.

11 Williams, J. (2016) An introduction to address-based online surveying. Social Research Practice, 3, 23-36.

12 For example, see: AAPOR (2010). Op cit; and Tourangeau, R., Conrad, F. G. and Couper, M. P. (2013). *The science of web surveys.* Oxford

13 Dillman et al. (2014) op cit.

14 It is less easily dealt with if our online mode is CAPI or CATI because these use aural question delivery and introduce possible interview effects.

15 de Bruijne, M. and A. Wijnant. 2013. Can mobile web surveys be taken on computers? A discussion on a multi-device survey design. Survey Practice 6(4):1-8. Available at https://www.surveypractice.org/article/2886

keep questions and answer lists short, and to minimise cognitive burden. These principles are hardly new - they have been accepted as good practice canons since the 1950s![16]

We are confident that the use of push to web surveys will grow considerably over the next few years. Currently, the method is still in its infancy, and if it is to deliver to its full potential, it is incumbent on us as an industry to test its methods and share our findings widely. At Ipsos we take these responsibilities seriously, and this is demonstrated by our recent work with our partners in Sport England, the Department for Education (DfE), EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

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16   Payne, S. L. (1951). *The art of asking questions.* Princeton U. Press

The feasibility of a cross-European push to web survey

Andrew Cleary

Ipsos recently completed a push to web design pilot survey across the 28 EU member states. The pilot was commissioned by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), to inform the design of a new random probability general public survey on experiences of discrimination, the Fundamental Rights Survey. FRA was looking to employ an innovative and cost-effective approach for the new survey, using a push to web design, and commissioned Ipsos for the development work and main survey. It is notable that this methodology had not been attempted in the majority of countries and, as such, the results of this pilot provide first insights into its feasibility at this time.

The pilot was based on the following design:

1. The most suitable high quality sample frames were selected in each country, favouring registers of individuals where available (11 countries) or of addresses (10 countries). A challenge with postal contact is that it requires high quality contact details. Hence enumeration (interviewer collection of address contacts in the field) was required in the remaining eight countries, where no suitable registers were accessible. One country (Italy) tested both enumeration and an individual register-based approach.

2. Samples of 500 cases per country were selected for the survey, with an unclustered random probability component (around 400-420 cases) and a clustered component (80-100 cases in two sample points). In the enumeration countries and Italy the full sample was clustered.

3. If the sample was of addresses, we asked two or three adults to participate online (see further discussion below).

4. Up to three letters were sent to each sampled case - an initial letter and two reminders - each requesting participation online. The letters and envelopes were designed following best-practice guidelines (i.e. providing clear instructions on how to participate, varying the content of each letter, printed logos on envelopes, etc.). This was followed up - in the clustered samples of two sample points - with a face-to-face interviewer phase of up to four contact attempts.

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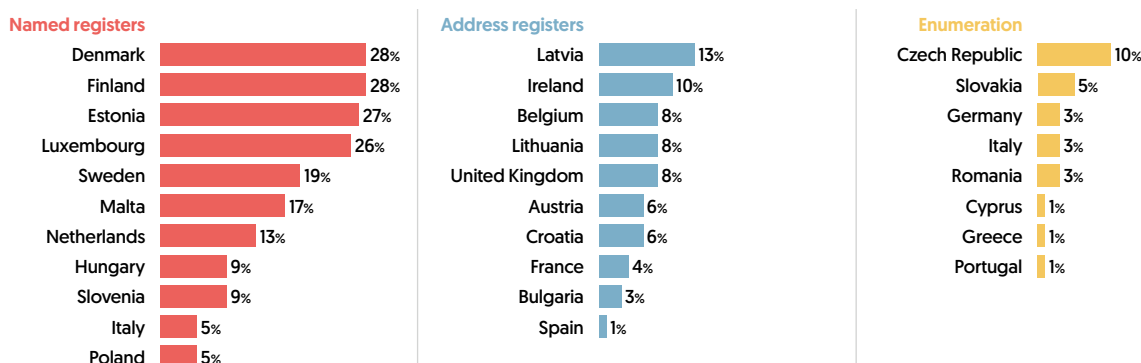
7.

5. A conditional incentive was offered to each participating adult, usually of five euros or equivalent in local currency, but in some countries a non-monetary incentive was used in line with local practices.

6. The online survey interview was a stated duration of 30 minutes and was designed using mobile-first principles (suitable for completion on a smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop). The face-to-face interview was self-administered by participants (computer assisted self-interviewing, or CASI) to minimise mode effects with the online sample, and lasted 50 minutes on average. The online interview was modularised to provide a shorter length.

In the sections that follow we discuss the response rates to the online survey and one of the experiments included in the design.

Online response rates

The response rates to the online component of the survey varied substantially by country and type of sample frame (see below). In general, the highest online response rates were obtained in countries using an individual register, where the letters could be addressed to a named individual. Of these countries, averaging an 18% online response rate, the best rates were seen in northern and western Europe. This is not surprising, given these countries have the highest rates of internet access in Europe. Address sample countries fared worse, with an average response rate of 7%, and similarly tended to obtain higher levels of response in northern and western Europe. The lowest levels of response were obtained in the enumeration countries, of 3% on average[1].

FRS pilot online response rates

Named registers		Address registers		Enumeration	
Denmark	28%	Latvia	13%	Czech Republic	10%
Finland	28%	Ireland	10%	Slovakia	5%
Estonia	27%	Belgium	8%	Germany	3%
Luxembourg	26%	Lithuania	8%	Italy	3%
Sweden	19%	United Kingdom	8%	Romania	3%
Malta	17%	Austria	6%	Cyprus	1%
Netherlands	13%	Croatia	6%	Greece	1%
Hungary	9%	France	4%	Portugal	1%
Slovenia	9%	Bulgaria	3%		
Italy	5%	Spain	1%		
Poland	5%				

In the limited number of countries where comparisons are possible the response rates are in line with other surveys that have used the same design. For example, while push to web surveys in the UK have tended to obtain higher response with an equivalent incentive scheme (e.g. Ipsos MORI's Active Lives gets a 16-19% response rate, varying seasonally), the surveys are heavily reliant on the inclusion of a second interview mode, offered at one of the later contacts (e.g. around half of the Active Lives interviews are completed on paper questionnaires). The European Social Survey used a similar design to the FRS pilot in an experiment conducted in Estonia, and obtained a similar level of overall response, incorporating the face-to-face interviewing stage (64% web + face-to-face, compared with 62% web + face-to-face in the FRS pilot).[2]

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1 It is worth noting that the rates in individual enumeration countries are less reliable given the intentionally imprecise pilot sample designs (i.e. clustered in just two sample points). This means that, for example, the relatively high response rate in the Czech Republic may not be repeated in a survey with national coverage.

2 Villar, A. & Fitzgerald, R. (2017). Using mixed modes in survey research: Evidence from six experiments in the ESS. In M. Breen (ed.), Values and Identities in Europe. Evidence from the European Social Survey. London: Routledge https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/villar_fitzgerald_mixed_modes_in_the_ESS_six_experiments.pdf

The findings suggest that, in the majority of countries with a very low response rate, particularly those in southern and eastern Europe, a single mode push to web design is not feasible at this time. Not only is there a greater risk of non-response bias, the online survey is also not cost-effective given the required size of the issued sample to reach a set number of interviews. The addition of a face-to-face interview mode increased the response rate to more respectable levels, however the dual-mode survey was not as cost-effective as a face-to-face single mode survey when the online response rate was low.

Respondent selection experiment

We also ran several experiments to inform the future survey design, including testing alternative methods for selecting respondents within households. Where lists of addresses are used as a sampling frame it is necessary to provide an instruction in the letters about who at the address should complete the questionnaire. There is evidence from postal surveys as well as push to web surveys showing that a substantial proportion get the selection wrong when asked to apply a procedure such as last / next birthday. To counter this, some studies have instead allowed all adults to complete the survey but this can encourage fraud when coupled with a conditional incentive.

Log in rate by selection method and register type

We see a difference for countries with address registers

Address register:
6.5% for one-step
8.4% for two-step
p=0.02

Address Register n = 1,670
Enumeration n = 1,336
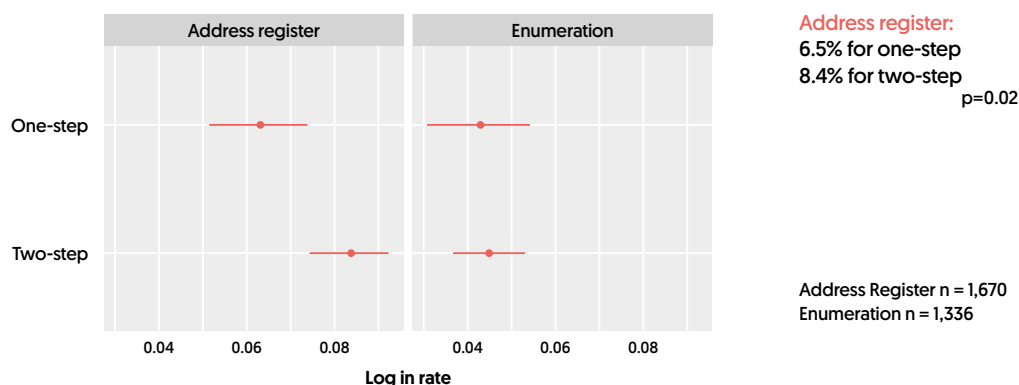
An experiment was conducted in the 18 countries using an address register or enumeration. Households were asked to select up to two or three adults, depending on the average household size in the country. This ensures that the risk of selection bias is minimised given that most households include no more than two or three adults. Two main treatments were tested: [a] the letter provides login details up front for two or three adults [one-step approach]; and [b] the letter requests any adult member to take part and on completion of the questionnaire, an additional one or two adults are asked to take part, only if there are two or more adults in the household [two-step approach]. Within the second treatment, two methods for selecting the additional adult[s] were tested: [b1] household choice; and [b2] online random selection.

We find that household response rates were significantly higher for the two-step approach among the address register countries [condition b], and hypothesise that this was because respondents perceived the survey task to be less burdensome on their household [with one person initially asked to complete versus two or three with the one-step approach], as well as potentially finding this instruction simpler to follow.

We also find that two-step respondents (condition b) were more likely to report additional household members during the interview, contrary to the hypothesis that larger households would be found with the one-step condition (a), given the additional incentives on offer. It would appear that one-step respondents (condition a) suppressed additional household members as a form of proxy refusal. As such, the two-step approach (condition b) appears preferable, both in terms of response rates and data accuracy.

There was no significant difference in the individual-level response rates (i.e. the proportion of 2nd and 3rd respondents completing the interview in responding households) between the conditions, or between the two-step approach with selection by household choice (condition b1) or online random selection (condition b2). We can therefore conclude that condition b2 should be preferred.

This experiment provides new evidence on how to instruct respondent selection when using address-based samples and postal contact for push to web surveys. It builds on prior research that has demonstrated that a substantial proportion of people do not follow instructions provided in letters, such as the commonly used last / next birthday methods. We are currently exploring the feasibility of trialling the approach on a larger sample survey in the UK.

For further information on the respondent selection experiment our slides from the General Online Research Conference 2018 can be downloaded here.

It would appear that one-step respondents (condition a) suppressed additional household members as a form of proxy refusal.

10.

Materials and incentivisation testing for the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

James Stannard

Ipsos MORI has been working with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to inform their Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP). One of its key components is to introduce online data collection to its portfolio. Therefore, ONS commissioned Ipsos MORI to host a series of large-scale experiments to develop an online push-to-web design for a transformed Labour Force Survey (LFS), renamed as the Labour Market Survey (LMS). The current LFS is the largest UK household survey (around 250,000 household interviews per annum).

The LFS is used to produce a range of high-profile cross-sectional and longitudinal labour market and Annual Population Survey datasets that are widely used for analysis and publications in the UK and Europe. This includes the monthly estimates of labour market supply, including estimates of change in the employment and unemployment rates. To date, the LFS sample has been recruited using face-to-face interviewers.

ONS has invested in transforming their respondent materials to a user-centred design. The next step was to quantitatively test the most effective advance documentation and incentive design in order to inform future LFS strategy. The core components of the project were two experimental tests of:

a. Mailing strategy (frequency and timings and mailings material design);

b. Incentive strategy (monetary and non-monetary, conditional and unconditional)

Mailing Strategy

The first test was designed to optimise the contact strategy and materials of a future LMS as a push-to-web survey. For the purpose of this experiment, Ipsos MORI employed a factorial design across England, Scotland and Wales. This design assumes that (within each country) the various factors would act independently on respondent behaviour. Because the sample size was split equally between England, Scotland and Wales, this design maximised the power for testing each factor separately for each country, allowing for differences in the impact of factors across all three countries. An online questionnaire was developed (based on LFS questions) using Mobile First principles.

> **The next step was to quantitatively test the most effective advance documentation and incentive design in order to inform future LFS strategy.**

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In total, 60 test groups were constructed (12 in England, 24 in Scotland and 24 in Wales). The different combinations of conditions were chosen as the most promising response maximisation methods that have emerged to date for a survey of this nature:

- Envelope colour (white vs. brown);

- A pre-notification letter, an invite letter and first reminder vs. an invite letter and first reminder vs. an invite letter and both a first and second reminder;

- Day of the week that the first mailing was dispatched (Wednesday vs. Friday);

- Regionalised material - Scotland and Wales only (branded envelopes vs. no branding)[1].

Ipsos MORI then mailed to 38,000 households in order to answer two key questions: 'what proportion of households would take part online?' and 'what mailing strategies and materials would help maximise response?'.

Overall around 20% took part online (with no monetary incentive). The most effective combination of strategies was to send the pre-notification, invite and single reminder, with invites sent on a Wednesday, using a brown envelope (rather than white), using this combination of factors increased response to 23%

Incentive Strategy

After establishing the most effective mailing and materials strategy, the second test was designed to explore the impact of different methods of incentivising participation in the survey. All groups received the preferred strategy from the first test. Based on the survey literature, we know that unconditional incentives (i.e. paid irrespective of survey participation) are more effective than conditional ones (i.e. paid for participation) at maximising response. However, this approach is expensive - with a response rate of 25%, four incentives are required per participating household. Additionally, it has been shown that monetary incentives are the best form although non-monetary ones can also be effective. And finally, as the LFS collects data about every member of each participating household (either directly or by proxy), the incentive strategy should also aim to maximise full household response. Therefore, four test groups were constructed:

- Group A: No incentive

- Group B: A £5 gift voucher (unconditional) with a £10 gift voucher if the whole household completed the survey (conditional)

- Group C: A £5 gift voucher (unconditional)

- Group D: A reusable shopping bag (tote bag) (unconditional)

Ipsos MORI mailed 40,000 households to answer the next set of key questions 'what happens if we introduce an incentive?', 'what is the most effective incentive strategy for maximising response'? and finally, 'what is the most cost-effective strategy?'.

This test demonstrated that a heavily incentivised online survey could achieve around 30% response (Group B), but (against expectations) sending a non-monetary incentive in the form of a tote bag in advance (Group D) was the most cost-effective incentive (with a response rate of around 26%). By comparison, the condition with an unconditional £5 gift voucher (Group C) had a response rate 1.4 percentage points higher than this, however the mailing cost per item (including incentive) was around four times higher for Group C.

We know that unconditional incentives are more effective than conditional ones at maximising response.

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1   The design of the envelopes sent in England was identical. They all carried the Royal Coat of Arms, 'On Her Majesty's Service' and a slogan at the bottom-right hand corner saying 'Play your part in shaping the future of the UK'. For addresses in Wales, the envelopes also included Welsh translations of 'On Her Majesty's Service'. However, half the envelopes sent to each address in Wales and Scotland also featured a different slogan and a logo (a dragon or a map of Scotland respectively). In Wales, the slogan was 'Wales, make sure you are counted' (in English and in Welsh) and in Scotland it said 'Scotland, make sure you are counted'

	A: No incentive (%)	B: £5 gift voucher (unconditional) with a £10 gift voucher on the whole household completing (conditional) (%)	C: A £5 gift voucher (unconditional) (%)	D: A tote bag (unconditional) (%)
Complete whole households	17.6	25.4	23.4	21.9
Partially complete households	1.8	1.5	1.9	2.0
Complete and partially complete households	19.4	27.0	25.3	23.9
Partial response	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.4
Accessed but did not complete the household grid	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.8
Accessed but did not answer any questions in the household grid	0.05	0.1	0.1	0.05
All accessed	21.2	29.0	27.5	26.1
Total issued sample	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000

By testing a wide range of materials, mailing and incentive strategies, Ipsos MORI provided ONS with a clear picture of how to maximise online response to the LFS, and how to cost effectively use incentives. This will be vital learning as ONS moves towards moving its face-to-face data collection online.

More detailed results of both experiments can be found here.

Sending a non-monetary incentive in the form of a tote bag in advance (Group D) was the most cost-effective incentive.

Maximising response rates. A futile quest?

Patten Smith

In recent years, random probability surveys have suffered a slow but inexorable decline in response rates. For example, a UK Market Research Society (MRS) cross-industry group recently estimated that the mean response rate for eight continuous surveys conducted by four organisations had declined by nine percentage points in the 14 years between 2001 and 2015. Furthermore, this decline has occurred despite fieldwork agencies working harder (and clients spending more money) recruiting respondents. The same cross-industry group found that, for three large continuous surveys they examined, the mean number of calls made to each issued sample case had increased by between 11% and 27% between 2008 and 2017.

Why has there been a response rate decline? It is due to an increase in refusals rather than in non-contacts, and we believe that this has been generated primarily by broad social changes such as declining levels of available time, declining trust in statistics and in official bodies, increasing levels of survey fatigue and increasing concerns about uses of data.

Survey practitioners and sponsors have always regarded the response rate as a central survey quality measure and therefore worry a great deal about this trend. But it is not altogether obvious that they should, because non-response is not a direct measure of the accuracy of survey estimates at all. Rather, non-response can influence the quality of survey estimates only indirectly, and in two ways, of which only one is important. The less important mechanism is through reduced achieved sample sizes, which widen confidence intervals for survey estimates. This is very easily addressed by making compensatory increases to issued sample sizes. Much more importantly, however, is that increasing non-response can lead to increasing, and usually unmeasurable, non-response bias in survey estimates. Importantly, it will do this for variables which are correlated with likelihood of responding, but not for variables not so correlated. This means that the impact of non-response on data quality is potentially important but is also variable-specific: a single survey (with a single response rate) can include variables that have high levels of non-response bias but also ones that have none-at-all.

In light of this combination of importance and uncertainty, should survey practitioners worry about non-response bias in their surveys? This is a purely empirical question, and the data we can use to answer it come in two forms.

First, for some studies, we have measures of "true" population values because, for example, relevant data are held on the sample frame or in records that can be linked to the sample

> ## Survey practitioners and sponsors have always regarded the response rate as a central survey quality measure.

frame. With such data we can compare estimates for the whole sample with those for the responding portion of the sample, and the difference between the two gives us an absolute estimate of non-response bias. The best-known study of absolute non-response bias is a 2006 meta-analysis of 59 methodological studies with response rates ranging between 28% and 86% conducted by Groves and Peytcheva[1]. They demonstrated that, whilst large nonresponse biases can exist in surveys, these biases varied very widely across estimates within surveys, and the response rate predicted only a very small part of observed variation in non-response bias (with a correlation of around 0.2 between response rate and non-response bias).

Second, even without knowing true population values, studies can say something useful about relative levels of non-response bias by looking at how survey estimates change as we increase our efforts to improve response rates. These kinds of study have generally been conducted on face-to-face interviewer surveys, and use number of contact attempts or extent of reissuing[2] as the measure of effort. Although they offer no insight about absolute levels of non-response bias, they do give us vital information about whether our (frequently expensive) fieldwork efforts change our estimates in any way. If increased fieldwork effort does not change our estimates, then as a matter of logic, neither does it affect non-response bias. One recent example of this kind of study compared 541 estimates from six UK interviewer surveys[3] and found that on average estimates obtained after a single interviewer call when response rates were in the range 7% to 22% differed by only 1.1 percentage points from estimates obtained at the end of fieldwork when response rates had increased to 55%-76%. On the face of it, making the effort to increase response rates substantially had little impact on non-response bias.

But before we use these results to conveniently justify making less effort to maximise response rates, we need to consider two things. First, the weak relationship between response rate / field effort and non-response bias has been found in studies in which substantial effort has been made to obtain good response rates, and we cannot extrapolate this result to studies in which less effort is made to maximise response. And second, although response rate was generally a poor predictor of non-response bias, for some variables it was not. This is demonstrated in work we carried out[4] in a large interviewer survey where we compared estimates before and after unproductive cases were reissued to a second interviewer. Reissuing increased the overall response rate by only six percentage points; this had a negligible impact on estimates for most variables. However, for estimates of volunteering and civic engagement, many estimates changed significantly and meaningfully. This work adds to a body of evidence showing that although estimates for many variables vary little by response rate, this is not true for measures of volunteering and civic engagement[5].

So where does this take us? We have moved from a simple clear-cut rule, "high response-rates-good; low response-rates-bad", to the far less intuitively gratifying "it's complicated and all depends". But, if we care about survey quality we must accept that what appears to be simple is actually simplistic, and embrace the complexity. And what does this mean in practice? It means that, before we set response rate targets and spend a lot of money trying to meet them, we should carefully scrutinise what we want to measure and why we want to measure it. What evidence is there that what we want to measure will be susceptible to non-response bias? And even if it is, how much does it matter? For example, stable levels of bias in point estimates matter little if we are primarily interested in measuring change over time.

Only after such scrutiny can we make a rational decision about how much money we should spend on achieving those final few interviews.

Reissuing increased the overall response rate by only six percentage points; this had a negligible impact on estimates for most variables.

1   Groves, R. and Peytcheva, E. (2008), The impact of nonresponse rates on nonresponse bias: a meta-analysis. Public Opinion Quarterly 72, 167-189

2   A procedure in which a second (often more experienced) interviewer attempts to obtain an interview with initially unproductive issued sample members. These attempts are typically successful in 20-25% of cases.

3   Williams, J., Sturgis, P., Brunton-Smith, I. and Moore, J. Fieldwork effort. Reponse rate and the distribution of survey outcomes: a multi-level meta-analysis.
http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3771/1/NCRM%20working%20paper%201%2016.pdf

4   D'Souza, J., Smith, P., Pickering, K., Gallop, K., and Thompson, A. (2017). Does reissuing unproductive cases in a face-to-face survey reduce non-response bias. *Social Research Practice*, 4, 30-49

5   Pew Research Center (2012). Assessing the representativeness of public opinion surveys.
http://www.people-press.org/2012/05/15/assessing-the-representativeness-of-public-opinion-surveys/

Face-to-face with online follow up - does this work?

Sam Clemens and Scott Jakeways

The Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) is the organisation responsible for producing the official viewing figures for UK TV audiences. The BARB establishment survey, conducted by Ipsos MORI, involves over 50,000 face-to-face interviews a year, to ensure that there is accurate, up-to-date information about the profile of homes across the UK, and to capture changes in demographics and TV technology.

Given that consumption of TV is strongly related to time spent at home, it is vital that we do all we can to make sure that those people who are particularly mobile and hard to reach are properly represented in the data. To do this, our face-to-face interviewers make many visits to each address to try to include people who are not at home much. However, the productivity of these later visits is low, making the cost of each of these later interviews much higher. Due to the long tail of interviewer activity, over 15% of interviewer visits result in just 3% of the total number of interviews.

Is there a way to get more of these hard-to-reach people to respond without having to make increasingly costly interviewer visits?

To test this, we decided to try an "online second" approach - sending out a letter asking non-responders to go online to do the survey. An online version of the questionnaire was developed, designed to be completed on any device, including smartphones.

The response rate for the BARB establishment survey is 65%; the residual sample after the face-to-face work has been completed consists of about 30% of the starting addresses (after excluding ineligible addresses). For the "online second" test we selected a random sample of 4,000 non-productive addresses. As part of the test we experimented with using an incentive. Half the sample got no incentive, and the other half were offered £15 conditional on completion. To minimise the cost of the test, we limited the contacts to two - an initial invitation letter and a single reminder.

The response rate to our online second approach was 5.2%. The incentive did, as expected, improve the response rate from 3.1% (for the no incentive group) to 7.3%. Given that this was a sample that had already been worked extensively by the face-to-face interviewers, this is a decent level of response.

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Initial findings show that the households responding to the online survey were different to those who had taken part face-to-face, and reflected our understanding of those more likely to take part in online surveys generally (i.e. the better educated, higher income groups), and those homes that feature in the tail end of any face-to-face fieldwork (i.e. the busy, harder to contact groups). Those responding online:

- Lived in smaller households (2.14 people per household compared with 2.46 for the face-to-face);

- Had fewer children (17% had a child aged 0-15 compared with 27% for face-to-face);

- Were more likely to be "pre-family" (i.e. without children and aged under 45) (24% compared with 14%);

- Were from higher social grades (49% were AB households compared with 26% from face-to-face).

And in terms of characteristics relevant to BARB, they had more computers in the home and were more likely to use those to watch TV. They also were far more likely to have Amazon Prime (32% compared with 17%), which may reflect increased engagement with digital methods for personal business (such as online shopping).

One interesting feature of the data was the number of responses received in the middle of the working day. Given the large number of younger, professional / office workers in the response group it would appear that a number of people were opting to complete the survey in their lunch break - convenient for them, but difficult for a face-to-face interviewer to manage!

We are mindful that this is just one test with a relatively small number of respondents. However, the "online second" approach has shown some promise in:

- Achieving a reasonable response from a second mode done online;

- Getting responses from the types of households that we usually have to spend a lot of time and effort to interview.

Findings show that the households responding to the online survey were different to those who had taken part face-to-face.

Sampling migrants without a sample frame: experiences with location sampling

Andrew Cleary

Obtaining high quality samples of hard-to-reach groups such as migrants is challenging but vitally important in the current context as European policymakers look to measure progress with integration. To this end, Ipsos recently completed the second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II), on behalf of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which aimed to deliver random probability samples of the main migrant or minority groups in all 28 EU Member States.

The samples were designed by selecting the most suitable approach for each country / group, out of a number of tried-and-tested methods for sampling rare populations. Specifically, wherever feasible, population registers that allowed direct identification of eligible members of the population were favoured for sampling. Alternatively, statistics that permitted estimation of target group concentrations at a local level were used in a two-stage selection process in conjunction with screening by interviewers in the field. In some of these samples this was supplemented by methods to boost fieldwork efficiency: focused enumeration and adaptive cluster sampling. However, there were a number of countries where these options were not available to us, or the target groups were so rare in the population that screening was inefficient. In these instances, a location sampling approach was used (in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden), see below.

We recently presented our experiences of using location sampling in this study at the European Survey Research Association (ESRA) 7th Biennial Conference.

Country	Target group by country of birth	Estimated target group size (% of total country population)
Austria	Sub-Saharan Africa (first and second generation)	19,000 (0.3%)
Cyprus	South Asia (first and second generation)	24,000 (3%)
Denmark	Sub-Saharan Africa (first and second generation)	26,500 (0.6%)
Malta	Sub-Saharan Africa (first and second generation)	5,700 (1%)
Netherlands	North Africa (first and second generation)	291,000 (2%)
Netherlands	Turkey (first and second generation)	302,500 (2%)
Poland	Recent immigrants (those born outside the EU and resident in the EU since 2005 only)	121,000 (0.3%)
Sweden	Sub-Saharan Africa (first and second generation)	111,500 (1%)
Sweden	Turkey (first and second generation)	44,500 (0.5%)

Source: official country statistics

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We recently presented our experiences of using location sampling in this study at the European Survey Research Association (ESRA) 7th Biennial Conference, held in July 2017 in Lisbon. In this paper, we considered three key questions: 'does the method produce unbiased samples?', 'do the weighting procedures reduce bias, for which variables?' and 'where does it work well / less well?' In the following sections we first give a brief explanation of location sampling, before discussing our findings.

A primer on location sampling

The approach was based on a Journal of Official Statistics paper by Gianluca Baio et al[1]. To implement the sampling, the researcher first identifies an extensive set of locations that between them will be visited by the great majority of the target population. Survey coverage is typically first restricted to a manageable number of the main target population regions. Target numbers of interviews are then set per region and for each location, in proportion to their expected importance (loosely defined as the proportion of the target group who visit each location). Field teams then visit the locations and conduct interviews with target group members, varying the days of the week and times of day they visit, and taking a random selection at the location to limit bias in the selection process (e.g. to approach every 'nth' person).

At this point, although the sample has sensible restrictions on where interviewers can go and how they select participants, the sample is not probabilistic. This enhancement comes at the weighting stage, where probability-based adjustments are calculated that work in a similar way to "capture-recapture". By establishing the extent of overlap between locations, by asking each participant which of the other locations in the sample they have visited, we can derive a measure of the importance of each location relative to a 'baseline' location (chosen up front as the location expected to be most important). In simplified terms, a weight is then calculated for each participant as the inverse of (sum of) the importance of the locations they visited. This means that a participant who visited an under-represented (relative to baseline) location only would get a larger weight than a participant who visited only the baseline - which makes intuitive sense as this participant had a smaller chance of being included in the sample. Additionally, the weighting adjusts the overall sample in each region to be in proportion to the relative importance of the locations, so more of the weighted sample comes from the more important locations.

For the weighting to be effective, therefore, a decent amount of overlap between locations is required to generate reliable estimates of their importance. The approach works best for target groups that are well connected and visit similar locations, typically found if the groups are homogeneous.

Analysis and findings

To consider the first question (does the method produce unbiased samples?) we compared sample estimates with those from reliable external sources. A small number of population demographic variables were available for all countries except Malta and Poland. A weakness with these comparisons is that the population data were at the national level, whereas the survey covered typically 40-60% of the population in terms of the selected regions. This means that, where differences are observed, they may be because the populations are, to an extent, different. Additionally, in three of the countries, location sampling was used in conjunction with one of the other sampling approaches to compare estimates from the two samples[2].

Differences were observed between the weighted location sample estimates and external data on a number of the variables while others were more in line. Of the former, the location samples were skewed towards males in Denmark; younger age groups in the Netherlands; first generation immigrants in Demark and Sweden; second generation in the Netherlands; and the predominant target group country of birth in Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and

Differences were observed between the weighted location sample estimates and external data on a number of the variables while others were more in line.

1   Gianluca Baio, Gian Carlo Blangiardo, Marta Blangiardo, 2011. Centre Sampling Technique in Foreign Migration Surveys: A Methodological Note. Journal of Official Statistics, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2011, pp. 451-465

2   In these instances the "standard" part of the sample - that is, sample collected by methods other than location sampling, such as a two-stage sample with screening - is treated as the 'baseline location' and the weights estimated in the same way (via suitable questionnaire items to capture overlap).

Poland. Conversely, the profiles were similar on gender in Cyprus and the Netherlands; age in Cyprus; generation in Cyprus; and the distribution of countries of birth in Cyprus and Sweden. We can expect that the differences are generally related to the choice of locations, despite the considerable efforts made to select a sufficient number of diverse locations. Positively, the method has brought in some groups who are more difficult to survey in-home (younger, male).

To consider the second question (do the weighting procedures reduce bias, for which variables?) we compared weighted and unweighted sample estimates with the external data to consider the impact the adjustments make to out-of-line unweighted samples. We found promising movements, after weighting, towards the external data on some of the variables, although where there were substantial gaps between the unweighted samples and population estimates these were not fully closed. However, most of the adjustments were fairly modest (one or two percentage points), and there were also a handful of observations where the weighting moved the estimate further away from the external data (again, modestly). This demonstrates that the weighting adjustments were not sufficient to correct the samples if there were substantial biases from the sampling process, at least for this limited set of variables and these target groups. Positively, we found the weighting to be very effective for combining samples from alternative sources. In Cyprus this demonstrated that the samples achieved from locations were as important (i.e. on the contribution they make to population coverage) as those from the in-home sample (obtained through a two-stage process as described earlier). Conversely, in Poland the register-based sample was more important and the location-based sample was heavily down-weighted.

Finally, to consider the third question (where does it work well / less well?) we can attempt to draw conclusions based on how well the method performed in each of the samples, and in light of our knowledge of the underlying populations. We might expect better Turkish samples, given target group members are from a single country and so the group should be more homogeneous. However, in both Sweden and the Netherlands the samples appear to be biased on generation (over-representing first generation in Sweden and second generation in the Netherlands). This most likely indicates that the connections across generations were weak. Moreover, two of the most successful implementations cover the most heterogeneous target groups, in terms of numbers of countries of origin. These were Cyprus (South Asians), where the samples matched the external data on all available variables, and Sweden (Sub Saharan Africans), a match on country of birth. A possible explanation is that, in both of these countries, the groups are considered to be well connected (particularly in Cyprus), and further, the sample in Sweden may have benefited from the relatively large numbers of locations that could be identified (which covered different parts of the target group). Conversely, in Austria and Denmark the survey has over-sampled the predominant Sub Saharan African population by country of birth, which we believe relates to challenges with identifying locations that cover very rare parts of the target groups (the total Sub Saharan African share of the population is around 0.5% in these countries).

In conclusion, as with any sampling application, ensuring adequate coverage of the population is vital - in this case identifying a diverse set of locations that maximise the potential of reaching most members of the target group. This is especially important if the target group is diverse, and target group members tend to visit only specific locations (limiting overlap between them), as the weighting is less effective in this situation. Here, inclusion of a sample recruited via alternative probabilistic means becomes highly desirable. That is not to say that these strategies did not receive a high level of attention in this survey. Rather, our work highlights that location sampling is best suited to connected populations, and challenges increase (and require a requisite increase in effort) if this is not the case.

For more information about the survey:

EU-MIDIS II Technical report
EU-MIDIS II Main results report

As with any sampling application, ensuring adequate coverage of the population is vital - in this case identifying a diverse set of locations that maximise the potential of reaching most members of the target group.

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Conducting survey research in conflict-affected areas: challenges and solutions

Sally Horton and Tanja Stojadinovic

Conducting random probability surveys in conflict-affected areas presents a unique set of methodological, logistical and ethical challenges.

In two recent general population surveys, researchers from Ipsos have, together with experienced local partners, undertaken face-to-face interviews with women on sensitive topics including violence, well-being and safety. The first survey was conducted for the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) and funded by the UK Department for International Development as part of the What Works Programme. We interviewed almost 7,000 women in South Sudan, Pakistan and Ghana enabling NUIG to assess the economic costs of violence against women. The second survey is currently being conducted for and funded by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), with fieldwork taking place in seven OSCE participating States (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine) and in Kosovo[1]. The aim is to investigate experiences of violence and measure perceptions of well-being and safety.

Both surveys required high quality random probability samples to be delivered to provide accurate population estimates. In delivering these surveys we faced several methodological challenges such as accessing accurate population data and maps for sampling, as well as logistical problems created by the unstable security situations in South Sudan and eastern Ukraine. In the remainder of this article, we highlight some of the challenges faced during the design and implementation of the surveys as well as the measures taken to overcome these.

Safe and inaccessible areas

For both surveys, several areas within specific countries were deemed 'unsafe' by the local partner agencies. These areas in eastern Ukraine[2] and in South Sudan were considered too dangerous to send interviewers due to conflict, and were therefore excluded before the sample was selected. Once the sample had been selected, the lists were reviewed to ensure that no new areas of conflict had been inadvertently selected. For South Sudan, the

> **Both surveys required high quality random probability samples to be delivered to provide accurate population estimates.**

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1   All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

2   The survey could not be conducted in non-government controlled areas.

review was carried out by the fieldwork agency and similarly, for Ukraine, the OSCE local mission conducted the review and recommended that a small number be replaced prior to fieldwork starting.

In addition to excluding unsafe areas, inaccessible areas in South Sudan were also excluded prior to sample selection. This included areas in very remote locations or those where access was limited to unsafe roads not to be travelled by field teams to reach the sampled communities. In South Sudan, scoping visits were also made to areas where this was identified as necessary, to contact local Government leaders and chiefs to seek permission for the fieldwork to take place and to assure interviewer safety during the fieldwork.

Sampling conflict-affected women

To better understand the experiences of women who have lived in situations of active armed conflict, the survey for OSCE also aimed to sample at least 300 such women in each of the participating States with a conflict situation in their recent past or on-going. As the conflict in Ukraine affected only certain parts of the country, the general population sample required supplementation with a boost sample to reach the target. Therefore, we over-sampled 'safe' areas that neighboured conflict regions, on the assumption that a greater proportion of such women would live in these areas.

Random walk and maps

For both surveys, a random walk methodology was employed - whereby interviewers followed a route through each sample point adhering to the instructions we provided to them. To assist interviewers in finding the sampled areas on the ground and in staying within the boundaries of each area, we tried to source maps. This was not a problem in Ukraine - the agency had previously carried out random walks and had acquired detailed maps showing boundaries, streets and start-point addresses. However, in South Sudan, only a small number of area maps were available from the National Statistical Office. Furthermore, the maps were old and did not accurately reflect the situation on the ground due to years of civil war - boundaries were no longer clearly defined, and landmarks and street names were missing. To overcome this, as part of initial scoping work, local chiefs in the affected areas helped to identify the boundaries. Landmarks were identified by supervisors to serve as starting-points for the interviewers undertaking the random walks.

Interview protocols

When conducting studies of populations in conflict areas, we plan ahead as far as possible but we are also flexible - adapting approaches and procedures to reflect what is practically and ethically possible. We have a strong track record of delivering high quality surveys on sensitive topics and of undertaking research in conflict-affected areas. We follow World Health Organisation (WHO) protocols assuring both the privacy of respondents and the safety of interviewers working in potentially dangerous, unstable areas. For example - only female interviewers work on these surveys to try and build rapport and trust with respondents. All interviews are conducted in quiet, private locations and the names of local support services are provided to respondents verbally if not in written form. When introducing the survey topic, 'violence' is not disclosed to avoid putting respondents at risk. For both surveys, funding was available for extensive interviewer training on gender-based violence and safety - including input from a gender-based violence expert and role plays. In addition, for the NUIG survey, a psycho-social counsellor was available to speak to respondents.

For further information on the survey that was conducted in South Sudan, please refer to our presentation from the European Survey Research Association Conference (2017), available here.

> ## As the conflict in Ukraine affected only certain parts of the country, the general population sample required supplementation with a boost sample to reach the target.

The advantages of big data in evaluations and research studies

Raquel de Luis Iglesias

Ipsos participated in the 13th European Evaluation Society biennial conference (EES 2018) held in Thessaloniki, Greece, where we delivered a presentation on the use of big data in evaluations and other research studies. We presented examples of projects, in which we have used social intelligence and other big data sources, to show how, combined with traditional methods, they can help improve the evidence base for evaluations.

The huge potential for use of innovative methods, based on 'big' or 'passive' data, is increasingly recognised. Digital data provides access to information in previously hard-to-reach locations, and generates real-time information on topics relevant for an evaluation, such as the cost of food, availability of jobs, gender equality, access to health care or quality of education. Applied in the right context, it also has the potential to overcome some of the constraints of traditional survey methods such as cost, global reach and low participation rates.

However, evaluators' use of 'big data' is still very limited. This is partly because data scientists are not normally evaluators, and most evaluators are not yet fully aware of the potential of emerging technologies, or do not know how to access, extract and process data for inclusion in their evaluations.

The examples we presented at the EES conference illustrate the potential of innovative methods in evaluation and how some of the technical barriers can be overcome. The methods explored in these evaluations include social intelligence, bibliometric analysis and text analytics.

Cases studies

We demonstrated our use of social intelligence to measure the outcomes of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, produced by the GEM Report team, based in UNESCO. The client wanted to evaluate how well they were disseminating the Report on social media; who the main influencers were; and whether they were effectively combining social media with other communication activities. Analysis of social media through the platform Synthesio helped the evaluation team explore the volume of conversation and its location, both in terms of channels and geography, who the influencers were and the sentiment of those commenting on the report. We were also able to compare the volume of conversation on the GEM Report with that of the World Development Report, produced by the World Bank.

Our clients wanted to understand whether activity to engage and communicate with stakeholders were effective at raising awareness on key topics.

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In this evaluation, bibliometrics and text analytics were also used to provide information on the elements of the report that were most valuable to academics and policy-makers. Our findings helped the client reach out to their intended audiences via social media and combine social media activity with other communication tools in a more effective and efficient way.

At the conference, we also presented the stakeholder mapping that we produced for one of our clients based on conversations on Twitter. Our clients wanted to understand whether activity to engage and communicate with stakeholders were effective at raising awareness on key topics. We produced a stakeholder mapping to explore the networks the client has developed on the platform to find out which groups of stakeholders they reached successfully via social media; which topics users were talking about; and who the main influencers were within and outside of the network.

Users' connections were visible through their tweets, the group structures they form and whether they mention, reply to, or follow one another. Our analysis detected several hundred users grouped in 23 clusters. It is important to note that 'users' differ from followers, as the users in our network had interacted with the search term in some form, whereas Twitter followers may follow an account but have no direct interaction with the account beyond this point. We could identify how users were connected to each other, who the centres within each group were (and hence, main influencers within the groups), what users in each group were talking about and in which language they were communicating (see image below).
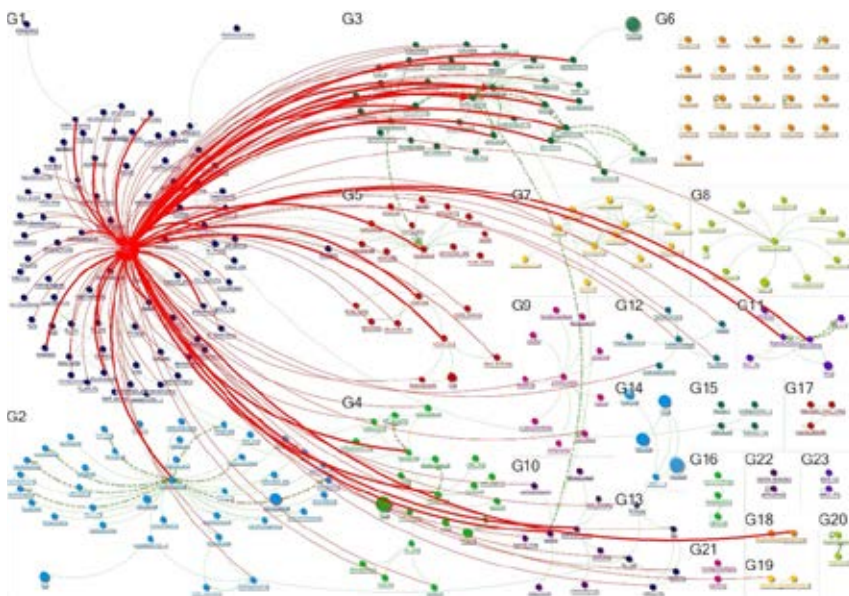
The stakeholder mapping, together with an analysis of mentions using Synthesio, provided sufficient evidence to make recommendations to our client on how to improve their social media activity. For example, we identified the main influencers on the topics of interest to the client, and whether they were present in the network or not, as targets for further engagement. We also provided insights on how to generate additional conversation among key audiences; identified groups of stakeholders not yet reached on social media; and helped our client define a strategy to improve engagement with their intended audiences.

Other examples presented at the EES conference included a project for the UK Food Standards Agency, in which we analysed consumer interactions with Food Business Operators over Twitter with the Method52 tool, developed by the University of Sussex, and the evaluation of an academy programme in the British healthcare system to improve quality of care and patient outcomes, in which we used text analytics with IBM Modeller software to assess a series of impact stories collected by the programme.

Analysis of social media through the platform Synthesio helped the evaluation team explore the volume of conversation and its location, both in terms of channels and geography who the influencers were and the sentiment of those commenting on the report.

Given the great potential of big data, at Ipsos we are exploring new tools to exploit these data and combine findings with those from traditional research methods. Innovative tools can provide access to information that would otherwise be unavailable - or available only at a high cost - and tools that help triangulate findings from surveys and interviews that might be subject to measurement biases. The use of big data, however, also poses ethical issues that must be acknowledged and built in to any evaluation design and the data storage and treatment. For example, we do not disclose information on personal users' profiles.

For more information, our conference slides are available here.

Given the great potential of big data, at Ipsos we are exploring new tools to exploit these data and combine findings with those from traditional research methods.

Ipsos Research Methods Centre

The Ipsos Research Methods Centre (RMC) is a specialist unit that provides expertise on a wide range of survey methodological matters to researchers across the company, and to clients. This methodological work includes developing practical sample designs and adjustment procedures for Ipsos surveys, and developing survey approaches and materials designed to maximise participant engagement and reduce survey error. The RMC is a widely respected methodological unit with a mission to disseminate quantitative methodological knowledge and expertise across the company and across the social research industry more widely.

The RMC actively maintains links with survey methodologist academics and regularly publishes papers in academic journals and at academic conferences. The RMC also conducts a range of methodological studies, including feasibility studies for Government surveys, experiments designed to improve the implementation of ongoing studies, and more academically inspired methodological research. The team comprises a core group of statistical and methodological experts, based in the UK and Belgium, with links to experts based across the Ipsos global network.

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GAME CHANGERS