The influence of Forced Answering on response behavior in Online Surveys: A reactance effect?

1. The Forced Answering Option (FA)

The FA (or forced response) option forces the respondent to answer or enter a response to each single item.
- Items cannot be skipped without answering
- Rationale: No missing data

- This question is very important! Please respond to the question.
- How many sexual partners did you have in your life?

3. Psychological Explanation?

Reactance effect
- Reactance appears when an individual's freedom is threatened and cannot be directly restored (Brehm, 1966).
- In case this personal freedom is restricted, individuals feel pressured.
- Reactance defines the motivation to restore this loss of freedom.

5. Study Design

Sample overview
- Students at two German universities (contacted via e-mail)
- N = 914; 54.7% females; Age: M = 26.1 years, SD = 6.6;

Survey design
- Cover story / survey topic: partnership and sexuality; No incentives
- Median response time = 9.4 minutes
- Implementation of a Dropout-Button
- Randomization across two experimental conditions:
  1. FA: “You have to answer each question to reach the next page.”
  2. NFA: “If you do not want to answer a question, you can skip it, without giving an answer.”

8. Results (I): Survival Curves

Log-Rank-Test: χ²=4.3, df=1, p < .05
Cox regression: HR = 1.47; 95% CI [1.02; 2.11]

8. Results (II): Mediation Analysis

Reactance

Condition: FA vs. NFA

Direct effect: -48 [-4.7; 1.44] (1.62)
Total effect: .73 [-0.18; 1.65] (2.08)

Bootstrap results (10,000 samples) for indirect effects (95% CI): .12* (.02; .28)

9. Limitations

- Reactance was measured after dropout
- Correlational test of mediation
- Convenience sample (student population)

10. Summary and Conclusion

- Point-biserial correlations are low, but odds ratios are high
- First support for postulated mediation model: reactance as underlying psychological mechanism
- FA leads to satisfying behavior