Forced answering in online surveys: Do higher item response rates come at the expense of participation and answer quality?

18th General Online Research Conference 2016, 02.-04.03

Online Research Methodology Track A6: Unit and Item Nonresponse
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?

[Input field]
Effects of FA on different quality parameters

- Less item-nonresponse (Albaum et al., 2010, 2011; Roster et al., 2014)

- Inconclusive results for FA on dropouts
  - No effects on dropouts (Albaum et al., 2010, 2011; Roster et al., 2014)
  - Higher dropouts (Décieux et al., 2015a, O’Neil, Penrod & Bornstein 2003; Stieger et al. 2007)
  - Earlier dropouts (Décieux et al., 2015b; Mergener et al., 2015)

- Decrease of validity of answers (Décieux et al., 2015a)
Reactance effect

- Reactance appears when an individual's freedom is threatened and cannot be directly restored (Brehm, 1966).
- The respondent is denied the choice to let a question unanswered resulting in an internal pressure to disclose information that (s)he actually does not want to offer.
- FA could be experienced as a loss of freedom.
- This may be felt strongly especially when sensitive or personal topics are concerned.
Theoretical model

Condition: FA vs. NFA

Reactance

H2

H1a/b

H3a/b

Dropout/ Faking
Sample overview
- Students at two German universities (contacted via e-mail)
- Effective sample: $N = 812$
- Age: $M = 25.9$ years, $SD = 6.1$
- Sex: 55% females ($n = 448$)

Survey design
- Randomization across two experimental conditions (NFA vs. FA)
- Cover story / survey topic: partnership and sexuality
- 70 items with different types of response formats (Likert-items, open-end questions, etc.)
- no incentives
Survey design (I)

**FA condition**

- „You have to answer each question to reach the next page.“

**NFA condition**

- „If you do not want to answer a question, you can skip it, without giving an answer.“
Survey design (II)

Wie lange leben Sie schon in dieser Partnerschaft?

- Weniger als 1 Jahr
- 1 bis unter 2 Jahre
- 2 bis unter 5 Jahre
- 5 bis unter 10 Jahre
- 10 und mehr Jahre

Quit Participation-Button
Measures

- Reactance:
  - 4 item scale ($\alpha = .70$)
  - Sample item: "The questionnaire made me angry".
  - Answer categories from 1 ("Totally disagree") to 5 ("Totally agree")

- Self-reported faking:
  - "How many questions did you not answer honestly?"

- Manipulation check
Questionnaire structure

- Introduction
- Demography
- Manipulation
- 70 questions about partnership and sexuality
- Dropout-Button
- Debriefing
- Manipulation check
  Reactance
  Self-reported faking
  …
Results (I): Descriptives & intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>alpha</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Condition(^a)</td>
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<td>(2) Reactance</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.09*</td>
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<td>.70</td>
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<td>(3) Dropout(^a)</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.23**</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>(4) Faking(^a)</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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* *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01; \(^a\) higher values depict FA, dropout, faking respectively.*
Results (II): Survival analysis

Log-Rank-Test:
\[ \chi^2 = 6.4, \quad df = 1, \quad p < .05 \]
Results (III): Mediation analysis

Bootstrap results for indirect effects (95 % CI): 0.14 (0.03-0.30)
0.03 (0.00-0.09)
Limitations

- Reactance was measured after dropout
- Correlational test of mediation

Summary & conclusion

- Zero-order effects are low
- First support for postulated mediation model: reactance as underlying psychological mechanism
Thank you for your attention!

Email: philipp.sischka@uni.lu


Table 2: Mediation analysis: Effect of Condition (NFA vs. FA) on Dropout mediated through reactance

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<td>b</td>
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Note. BCa 95% CI = bias corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals.
### Table 2: Mediation analysis: Effect of Condition (NFA vs. FA) on Faking mediated through reactance

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