

PAPOR 2010 Plenary

**The Future of
Internet Research**

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The Future of Internet Research

- AAPOR's Task Force on Online Panels
 - Chaired by Reg Baker, AAPOR's current Standards Committee chair
 - 20 member Task Force
 - Including Mike Brick, Mick Couper, Mike Dennis, Don Dillman, Marty Frankel, Bob Groves, Courtney Kennedy, Jon Krosnick, Michael Link, Linda Piekarski, and Doug Rivers
 - Condensed version of the TF's report appeared in *POQ*, 74 (Winter 2010), pp. 711-781

Types of Online Panels

- Most online panels are built using nonprobability sampling methods
 - Various means are used to broadly place offers/invitations to recruit prospective panels members to join such panels
- Some online panels are recruited from an initially designated sample that was formed via a probability sampling method
 - Random-Digit Dialing (landline only; landline and cell phone)
 - Addressed Based Sampling (mail and phone recruitment)
- Occasionally online panels are built from so-called *river sampling* as part of recruiting a respondent for a specific survey while s/he is online
 - This is done mostly via nonprobability sampling methods, but it could be done via a probability sampling method if the researchers chose to do so

Total Survey Error Perspective

- Approximately one-third of U.S. adults currently do not use the Internet on a regular basis
 - Nonprobability online samples will have significant noncoverage (and likely noncoverage bias) due to missing a nonrandom subset of the general adult population
- Nonresponse also is a non-ignorable problem across the many stages of building an online panel, and in particular with nonprobability samples
- The majority of studies comparing the findings from nonprobability samples and probability samples show non-ignorable differences between the two
 - Whether this is due to Errors of Representation and/or to Errors of Measurement remains unclear
 - However, some nonprobability samples used for pre-election polling have been as accurate (or even more accurate) than some surveys using probability sampling

Adjustments to Try to Reduce Effects of Nonrepresentation

- Approaches to Compensate for Nonrepresentation in Nonprobability Panels
 - Standard Demographic Weighting
 - Targeted Sampling to select Demographically-Balanced Samples
 - Propensity Modeling augmenting demographics with other variables thought to be related to the mechanisms that cause noncoverage and nonresponse
 - Use of a so-called “Reference Survey” formed via probability sampling methods to help determine the weights

Panel Data Quality

- Professional Panel Members and the Problem of False Positives
- Panel Fatigue and Satisficing
- Ameliorative Strategies
 - Creation of Guidelines and Standards by Professional Research Organizations
 - Utilization of Greater Care in Validating Eligibility of Panel Members
 - Conduct More Research on Better Understanding Motivations to Join Panels

Conclusions

1. Avoid nonprobability online panels when trying to estimate population parameters
2. It is not fully understood why nonprobability online panels often appear less accurate than otherwise comparable probability samples
3. In many instances nonprobability online panels are quite appropriate for a researcher's (and client's) needs
 - Whenever study findings do not need to be generalized with a knowable degree of confidence to a larger target population

Conclusions

4. More research is needed to understand how to make reliable and valid inferences from nonprobability samples, and when such inferences can be made with confidence
5. There are non-ignorable differences between the composition and methods of various online panels – so “let the buyer beware”
6. Online panel companies should fully disclose their methods, including the details of recruitment
7. There are currently no widely acceptable metrics for calculating response rates, and AAPOR’s should try to remedy this via its *Standard Definitions* manual