



Mode dilemmas in cross-national survey time series

Roger Jowell
Centre for Comparative Social Surveys
City University London

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Obstacles to cross-national equivalence

Different cultures and languages
Different methodological 'habits'
Different budgetary circumstances
Different sampling frames/procedures
Different levels of literacy, telephone access
and web access
Different response rate expectations
Different survey agencies
Different background variables

PLUS DIFFERENT MODES?



A tale of two surveys: 1. The ISSP

Informal grouping of countries
Add-ons to existing surveys
No geographical limits
No central budget
Limited co-ordination and control
Parsimonious national budgets
No guarantee of a time series

ONE OF TWO MODES ALLOWABLE – face to face & self-completion (NOT telephone)

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A tale of two surveys: 2. The ESS

Learned from experience of ISSP, WVS, etc
Demands – from academia and the EC - for greater rigour in comparative measurement
Substantive, methodological and policy aims
Fear of mode-related sampling, response rate and measurement effects

SINGLE MODE (face to face), WITH METHODS RESEARCH INTO FUTURE ALTERNATIVES

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The case against identical methods

Same methods may play differently in different nations

May clash with national 'best practice'

May infringe cultural norms

May restrict agency choice

IDENTICAL METHODS MAY INHIBIT RATHER THAN PROMOTE FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE

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Special problems for time series – the case of ESS

Should the possibility of mode variations have been built in from the outset?

IF modes are to multiply, can the range and size of their likely effects be effectively estimated, mitigated, and/or corrected for?

Which different modes could cope with the length and complexity of ESS interviews?

SHOULD DIFFERENT MODES BE PERMITTED IN DUE COURSE BETWEEN AND WITHIN ESS NATIONS?

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What future for particular modes?

Costs v benefits of face to face x-national surveys

Are telephone surveys the most obvious short-term alternative (or complement)?

Are solely web-based methods yet contenders for serious x-national mass surveys?

To what extent will (and should) mixed mode surveys become the norm?

Can mode-associated differences in representativeness, response rates and measurement be mitigated?

FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDED!

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