Everything You Need to Know When Utilizing Probability Panels: Best Practices in Planning, Fielding, and Analysis

12:00 - 1:00 pm EDT

Via Zoom and on location
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University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, Room 1070

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Probability-based panel survey research is more widespread than ever, as the continuing decline in survey response rates makes cross-sectional sample surveys less and less accessible both in terms of fit for purpose data quality and cost. The attraction of probability panels for surveys is their ability to attain, dependent upon their recruiting methods, comparable response rates to cross-section polls, but at a lower cost and more expeditious execution. Panels are a unique type of survey research platform: Unlike cross-sections, panels recruit respondents specifically for future participation in surveys. In return, panelists are financially compensated, typically to join the panel in the first place, and then secondarily for each survey in which they participate.

These differences to cross-sectional surveys have a range of potential implications. How does the method and effort of recruiting impact who joins, and as a consequence what is best practice? What do panels do to retain panelists over time and which strategies are more successful than others? How much of a concern is panel conditioning, that is, the impact of persons repetitively taking surveys over time, and what are the implications for how frequently panelists should take surveys? How do panels, which exclusively request that panelists take surveys on the Internet, deal with people who do not have or are not comfortable using the Internet? What is the impact of panelist attrition and what are best efforts to replenish retired panelists? How successful are panels are executing true longitudinal surveys? And, given the additional layers of complexity, how are panel surveys properly weighted and estimated?

This seminar is meant to serve two purposes. First, it will serve as a guide for consumers of probability-based panels to understand what, in short, they are working with: What questions to ask and what features to understand about probability panels in evaluating their use for data collections, and how to best use probability-based panel data. Second, it will serve as an exploration of best practices for the practitioners of surveys: Raising issues of data quality, cost, and execution.

Learning Objectives:

1. For consumers of panel data: Understanding the features of panels with which to be knowledgeable; to know the important questions to ask panel vendors when assessing their fit for purpose of your research.
2. For researchers and practitioners: To understand the many dimensions and decision points in the building, maintenance, deployment, and delivery of multi-client panels and panel data.