

SOEP Survey Maintenance

Motivation:

To prevent non-response and panel attrition

Problems in Germany:

- Rising number of surveys
- Increasing numbers of low quality surveys and marketing misuse
- Decreasing response rates

Challenges and Chances:

- Complex SOEP questionnaire
- Longitudinal household survey
- New features like biomarkers
- (Behavioral) Experiments like trust games and grip strength test showed positive motivational effect

SOEP goals

- *Maintain stability* / high response rates
- *Provide good data quality* and minimize survey error
- *Avoid attrition*: use incentives to avoid drop-out of least co-operative sample members
- *Avoid bias*: use incentives to reduce potential bias for certain sample groups to avoid cumulative effects due to longitudinal approach

Effectiveness → tailor-made incentives for difficult target groups in the SOEP

Some results from other longitudinal surveys

"The form of the incentive, gift or money, and the way in which the incentive is delivered to the respondent has a measurable impact on response rates."

Laurie H. and P. Lynn (2009): The Use of Respondent Incentives on Longitudinal Surveys. In: Lynn, P. (Ed.): Methodology of Longitudinal Surveys. Wiley Series in Survey Methodology. pp. 205-233.

- Unconditional incentives increase response more than conditional incentives (social reciprocity)
- Response increases with the value of the incentive
- Incentives have larger effects in studies with low response rates
- No generic lessons to guide survey practice
- "Respondent incentives are an effective means of maintaining sample size of a panel and ensuring its value in terms of efficiency of estimation and feasibility of subgroup analyses."

Jäckle, A. and P. Lynn (2008): Respondent Incentives in a Multi-Mode Panel Survey: Cumulative Effects on Nonresponse and Bias.

Current Practice in SOEP

SOEP maintenance

comprises different activities over the whole year

Major streams (permanent):

- (1) Announcement letter + lottery ticket for individual respondents
- (2) Contact with interviewer
- (3) Letter of thanks to the household with postage stamp "portocard" incentive after participation
- (4) Address check

Implementation:

- Highly qualified interviewer pool
- Extensive follow-ups, for example telephone follow-up by a small group of specially trained interviewers

Multi-pillar incentive concept: key features

- Charity-based lottery ticket for all respondents (five euro value) *unconditional* incentive provided in advance since '08 (previously: *conditional incentive* provided after the interview), special incentives for kids in the household (balloons)
- Small presents for:
 - subsamples with higher response burden (mothers, first-time 17-year-old respondents)
 - difficult target groups (potential refusers, hard-to-locate households, new/special respondents and target groups)
- Information materials
 - Homepage for respondents: "Leben in Deutschland" (LiD) <http://www.leben-in-deutschland.info/> (Living in Germany)
 - Project information folder (since '08; contains information material, ball-point pen and writing pad)
 - Information brochure
 - "Datenreport," a social report for Germany (on request)
- Portocard (contains a special postage stamp, value: 55 cents)
- Announcement letter for the interview
- Letter of thanks (address check)
- "LiD mouse" logo



Field name of the survey	Leben in Deutschland "Living in Germany (LiD)"
	
TNS Infratest Sozialforschung does the fieldwork for SOEP Landsberger Str. 338, 80687 Munich Germany Phone: +49 89 5600-1756, Fax: +49 89 5600-1441, http://www.tns-infratest-sofo.com/ Certified under international quality standards ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 20252, member of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).	

Experience & Future

Positive experience with concept of combining small presents, information, and participation as volunteer work

Change to unconditional five euro lottery ticket was successful

First results:

- Positive acknowledgement of respondents
- Very few complaints concerning omission of giveaway
- No known drop-outs in consequence of omission of previous gift
- Stabilization of high response rate

Positive side effect: lottery tickets support charity



Lottery ticket given to all SOEP respondents

Increasing problems to motivate respondents, especially for new samples, new households, new respondents, potential refusers

- Special Pretest on incentives in 2009
- Intensify maintenance with the focus on special target groups
- Intensify appropriate mix of essential information (letters, brochures, website, data report, etc.) and small gift
- Intensify training of field-interviewers;
 - stabilize commitment of old and
 - encourage commitment of new interviewers
- Systematic analyses of SOEP incentive effects in collaboration with TNS Infratest Sozialforschung



Folder with information material
Photo: Dirk Geuer