

Survey research in the digital age: Online Nonprobability Surveys and Post-Stratification

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THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



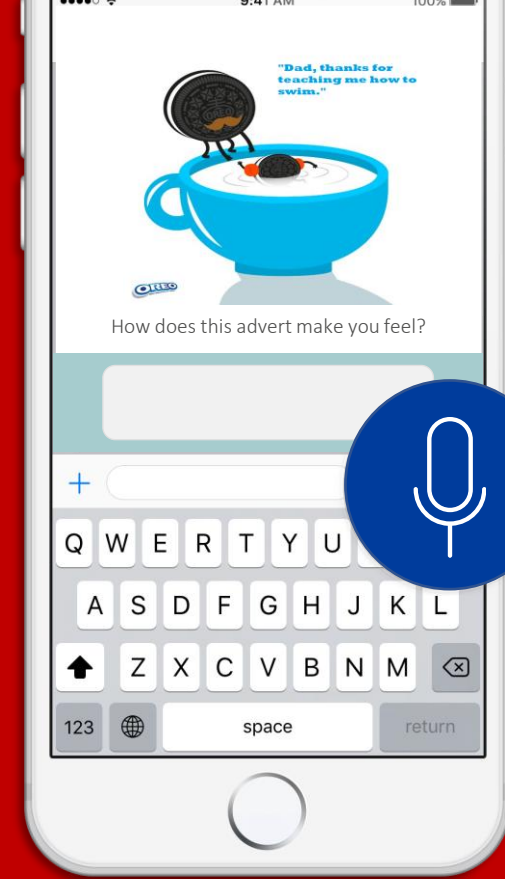
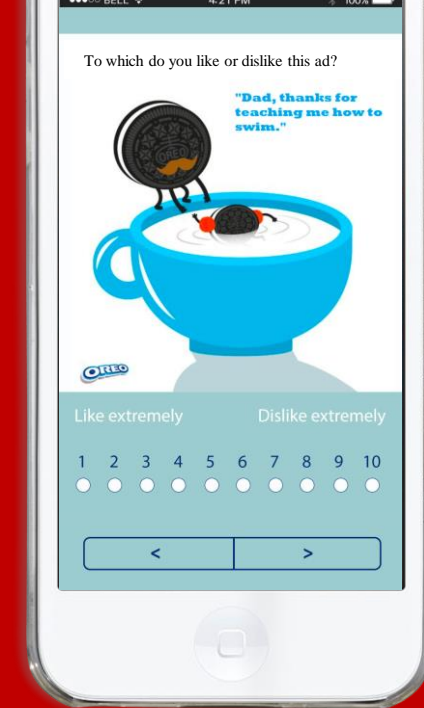
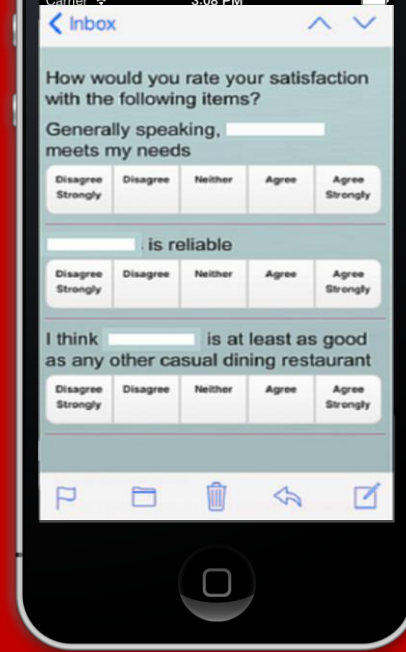
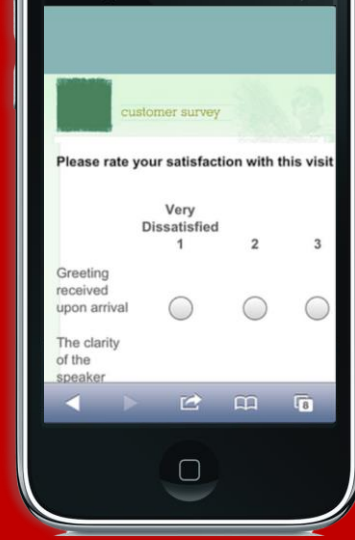
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Barcelona



Funding: This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Unions Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 849165; PI: Melanie Revilla); the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation under the "R+D+i projects" programme (grant number PID2019-106867RB-I00 /AEI/10.13039/501100011033 (2020-2024), PI: Mariano Torcal); and the BBVA foundation under their grant scheme to scientific research teams in economy and digital society, 2019 (PI: Mariano Torcal).

Who am I?

- PhD Candidate at the **Methodology Department, LSE**
- Non-resident research fellow at the **Research and Expertise Centre for Survey Methodology, UPF**
- MSc in Survey Methods for Social Research from the **University of Essex**
- Worked for the **University of Southampton, Institute for Social and Economic Research, ESS and Netquest**
- Consultant for **The Alan Turing Institute, Wellcome Trust, Social Care Institute for Excellence and MoneyHelper**



Surveys in the digital age

Surveys are (still) relevant

- **A highly relevant but ever changing tool**
 1. Surveys are some of the most frequently used method for collecting data

Table 3. Different types of quantitative data by discipline, 2014–2015.

Discipline	Survey	Admin	Census	Big data	n
Sociology	51%	42%	16%	4%	277
Political Sciences	41%	58%	9%	4%	308
Economics	32%	74%	19%	3%	374
Social Psychology	69%	5%	0%	2%	235
Public Opinion	86%	16%	3%	5%	81
TOTAL	49%	47%	11%	3%	1275

Surveys are (still) relevant

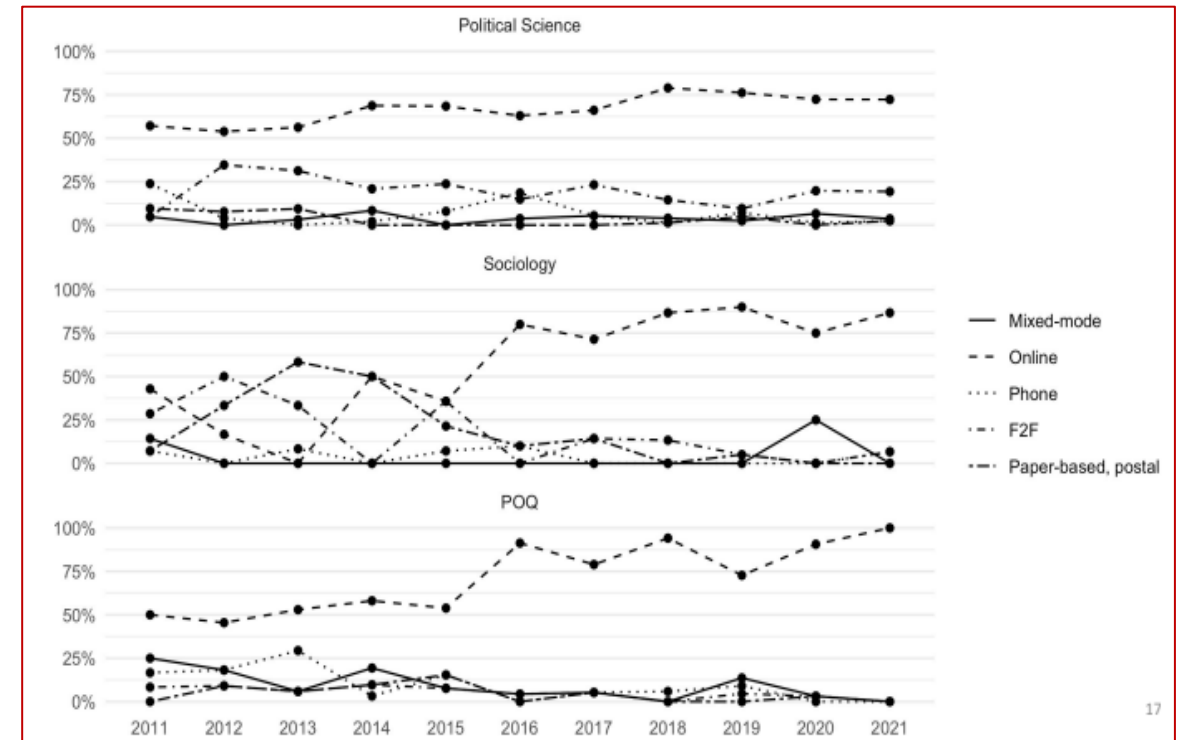
- **A highly relevant but ever changing tool**
 1. Surveys are some of the most frequently used method for collecting data
 2. But they look significantly different than before:

	Sampling	Interviews
1st era	Area probability	Face-to-face
2nd era	Random digital dial probability	Telephone
3rd era	Non-probability	Computer-administered

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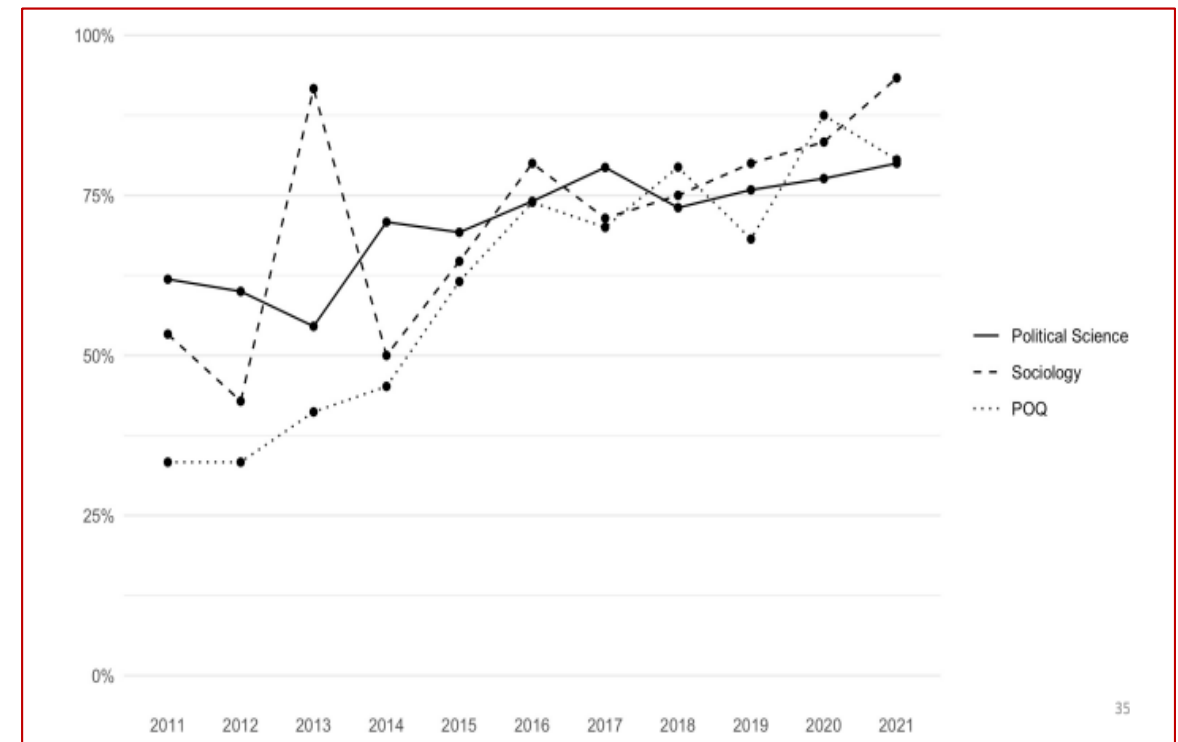
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Online Nonprobability Surveys

Surveys are (still) relevant

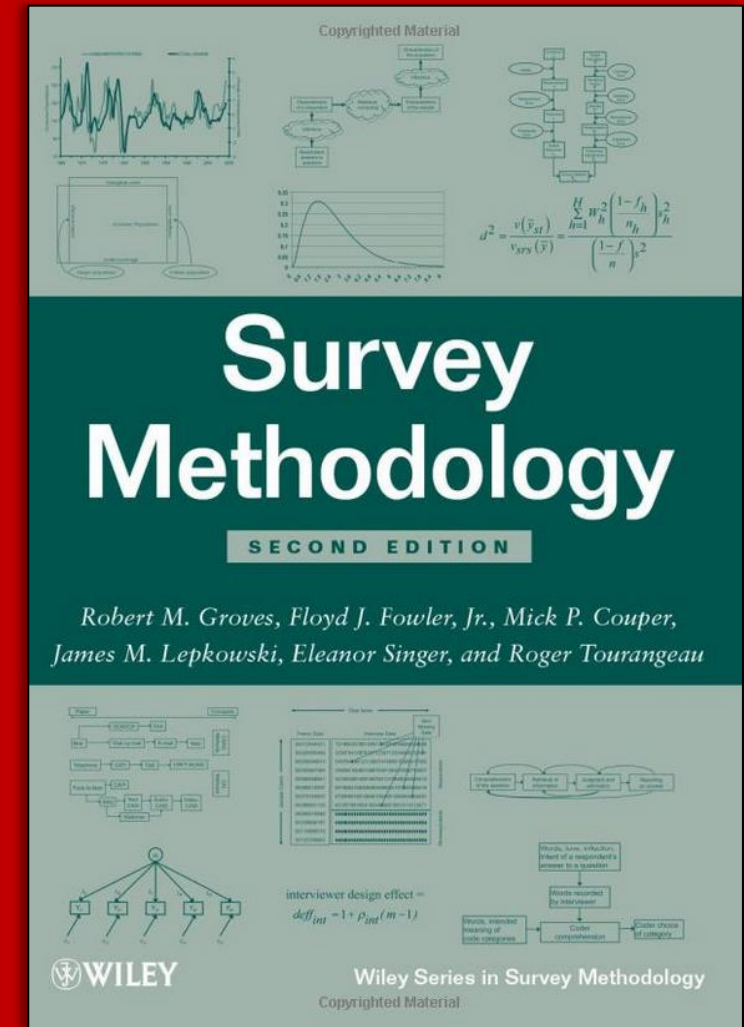
- **A highly relevant but ever changing tool**
 1. Surveys are some of the most frequently used method for collecting data
 2. But they look significantly different than before: **online, nonprobability & linked**

	Sampling	Interviews	Data environment
1st era	Area probability	Face-to-face	Stand-alone
2nd era	Random digital dial probability	Telephone	Stand-alone
3rd era	Non-probability	Computer-administered	Linked

Online Nonprobability Surveys

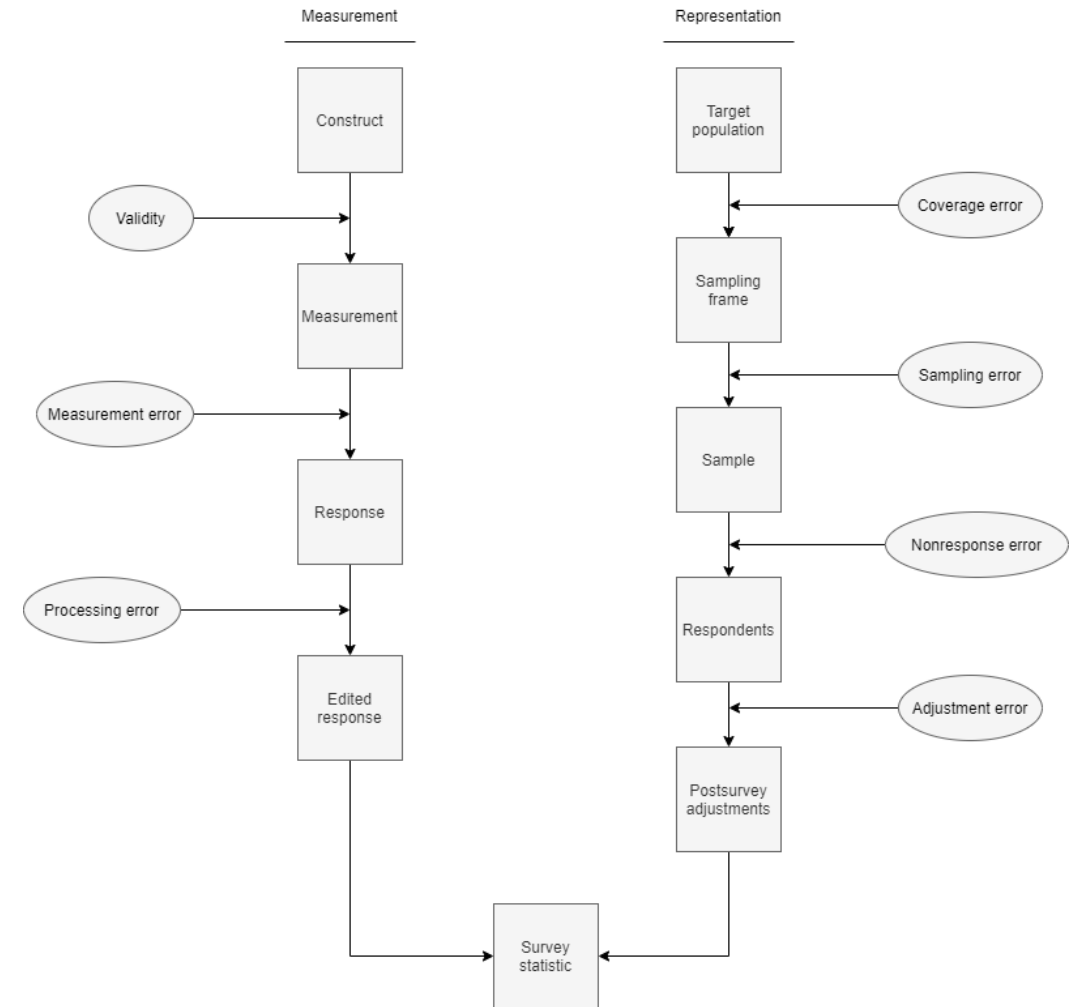
Smart Surveys / Enhanced online surveys

The basics of survey research



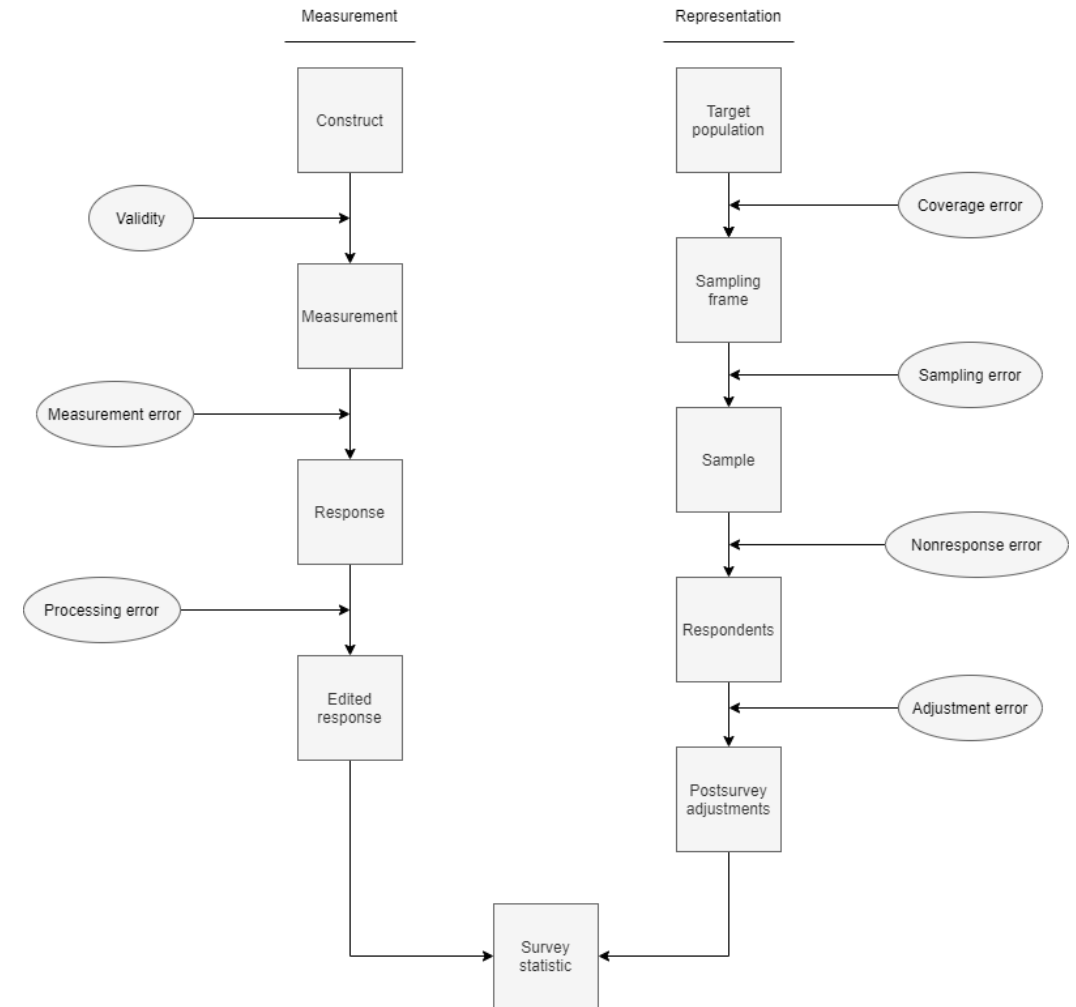
The Total Survey Error (TSE) framework

- In general, surveys are used to **make inferences** about a **concept of interest** for a given **population**



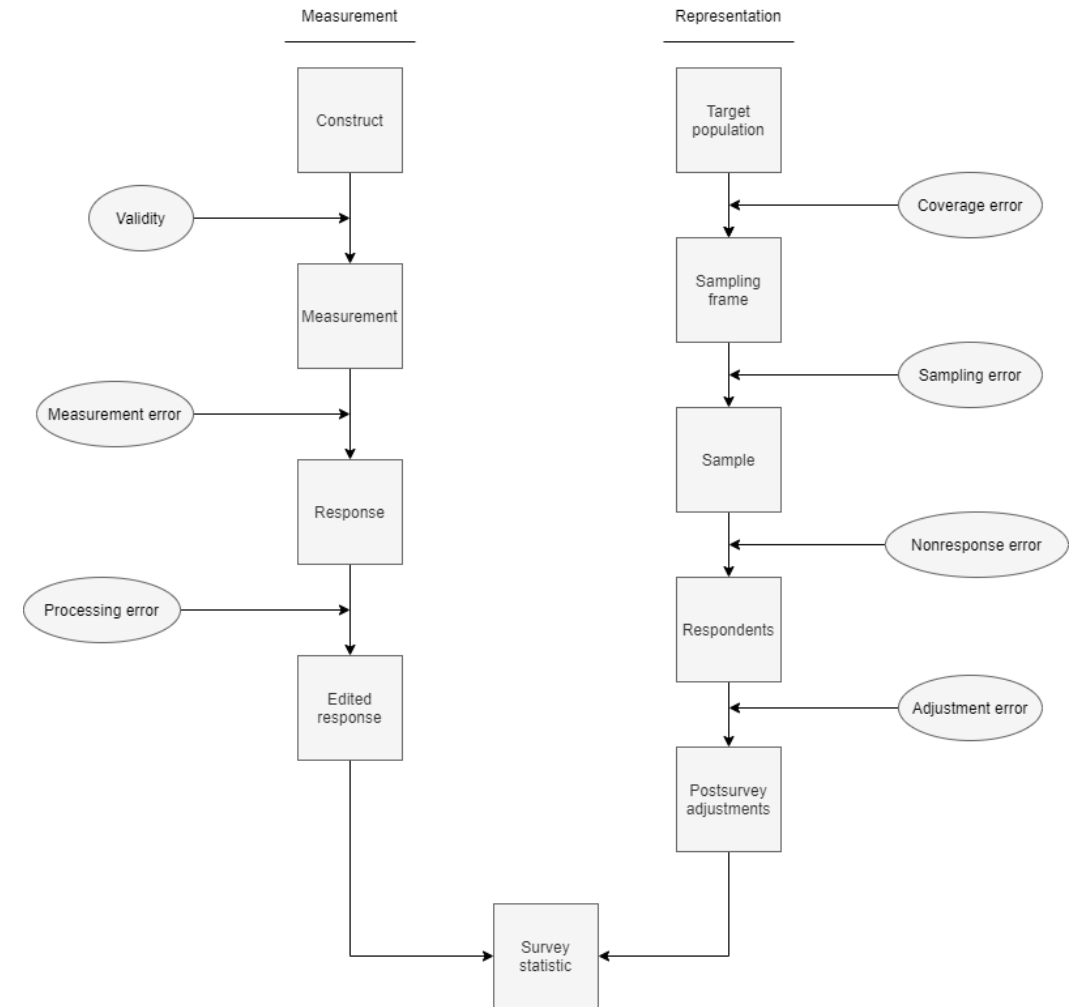
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- Two parallel processes: **measurement** and **representation**



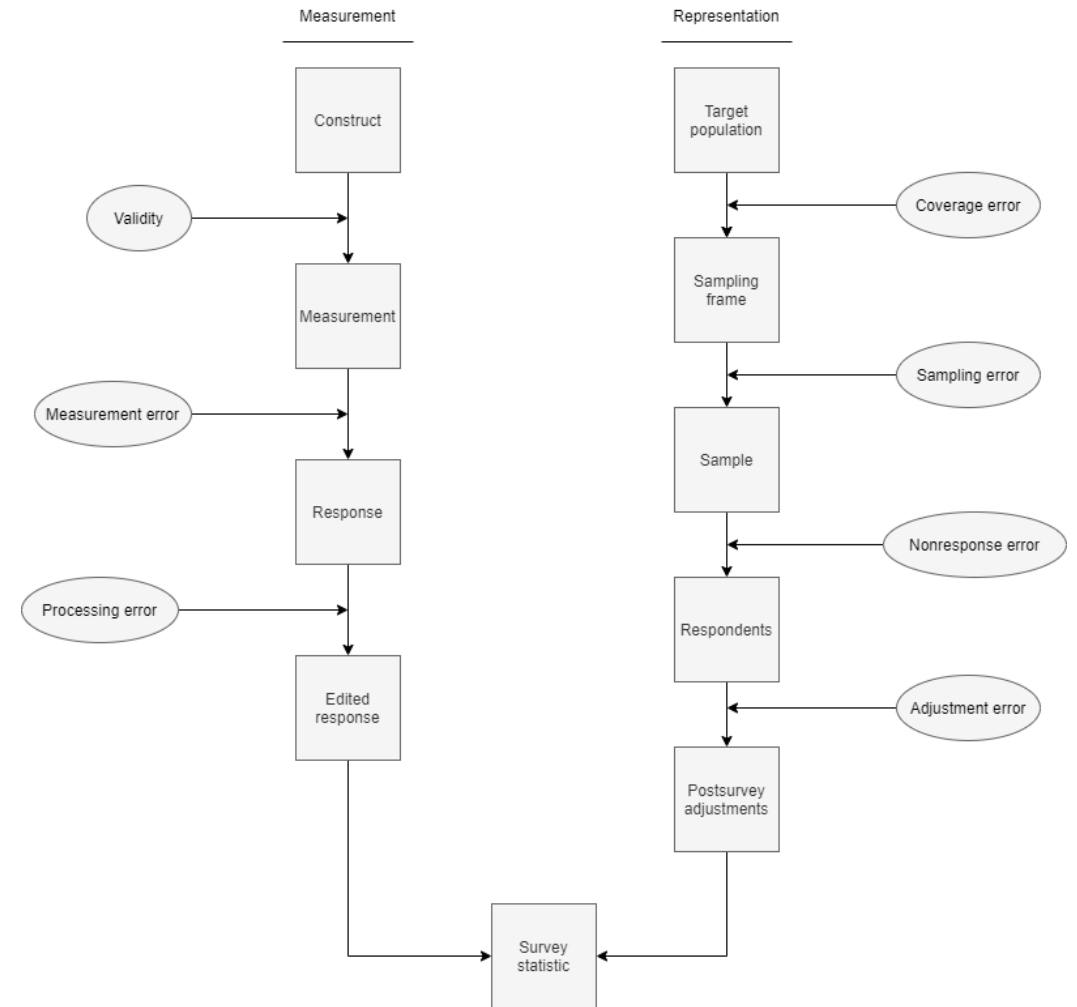
The Total Survey Error (TSE) framework

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The Total Survey Error (TSE) framework

- In general, surveys are used to **make inferences** about a **concept of interest** for a given **population**
- Two parallel processes: **measurement** and **representation**
- Errors can happen in both sides
- The goal is to, within the project's **time** and **budget** constraints, **reduce as much as possible** the errors



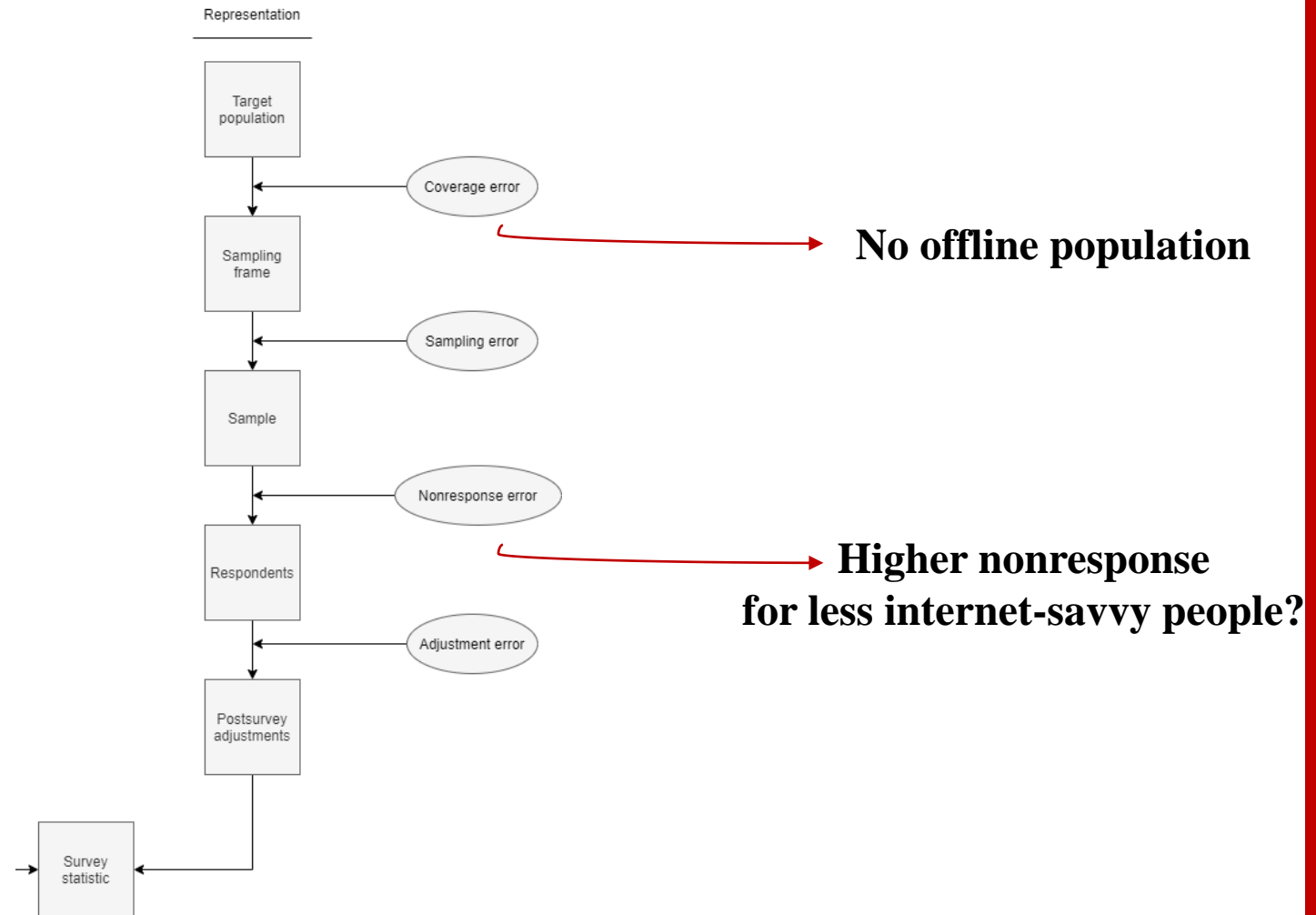
What are online nonprobability surveys?

WHAT ARE ONLINE NONPROBABILITY SURVEYS?

Two main characteristics

Two main characteristics

- First, they are **online surveys**
 - No interviewer
 - Answered through connected devices
 - Visual instead of aural
 - Easier to design and faster to field
 - Etc.



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Our main interest

Probability VS Nonprobability

- **Probability sampling** ➡ Every unit from a frame population has a **known and non-zero probability** of inclusion

Probability VS Nonprobability

- **Probability sampling** ➡ Every unit from a frame population has a **known and non-zero probability** of inclusion
 - ≠ The sample is selected “at random”
 - ≠ The sample is “representative”
 - = we understand the selection process
 - = we know the probability of being in the sample

Probability VS Nonprobability

- Nonprobability sampling ➡ The **selection probabilities are unknown** and, for some people, **zero**.

Probability VS Nonprobability

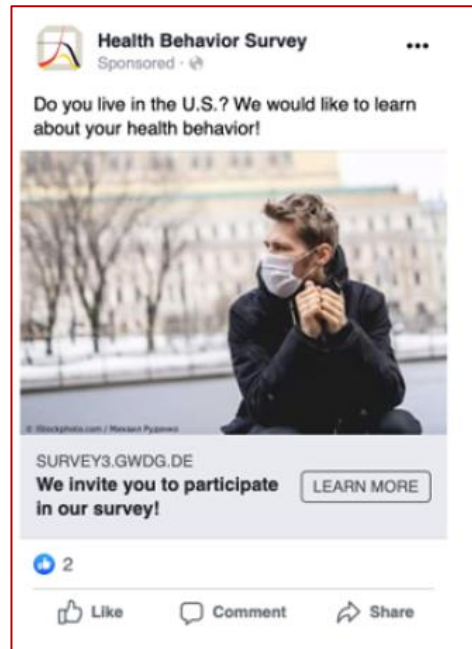
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Probability VS Nonprobability

- Nonprobability sampling ➡ The **selection probabilities are unknown** and, for some people, **zero**.
- With online surveys, this is mostly due to two reasons:
 1. There is no **frame** to use



Users of a platform
are prompted with a
link

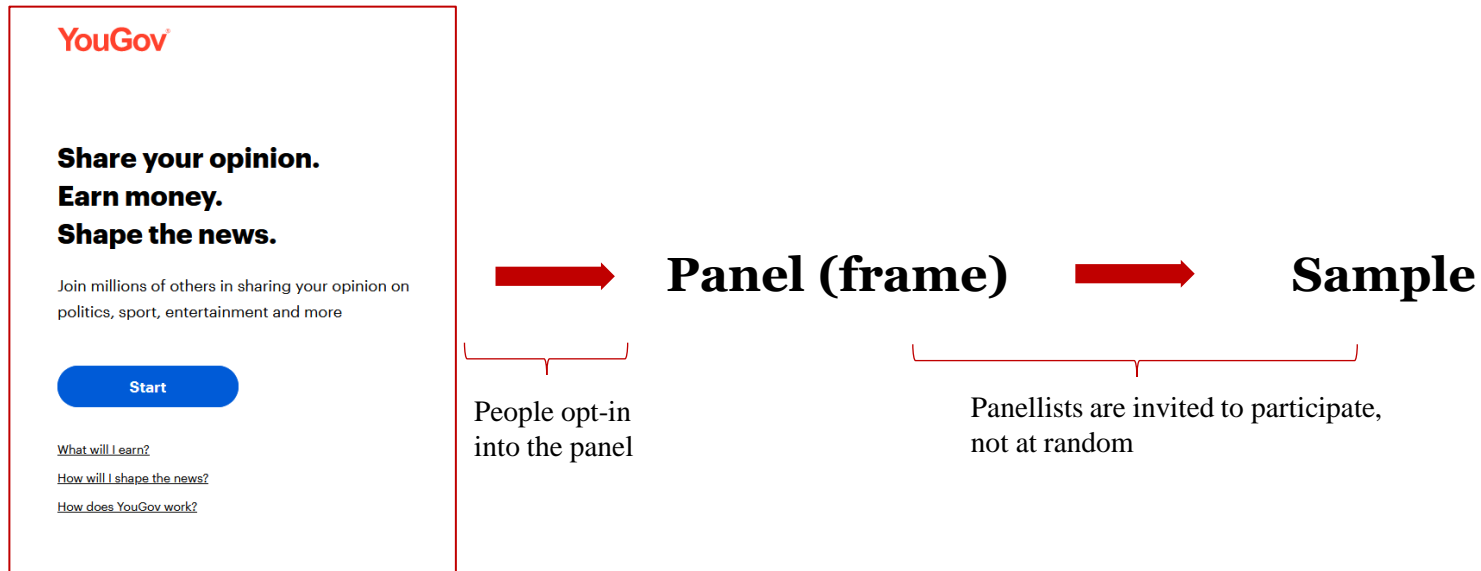


Sample

Those who click and
answer are the sample

Probability VS Nonprobability

- Nonprobability sampling ➡ The **selection probabilities are unknown** and, for some people, **zero**.
- With online surveys, this is mostly due to two reasons:
 1. There is no **frame** to use
 2. There is a “**frame**”, but it is **unclear how people have been selected** to be part of it (not in a prob. way)



How can we run online nonprobability surveys?

The 3 key steps

1. Identify **from where you will obtain participants**
2. Prepare the **sampling design**
3. Create an **adjustment approach**

First step: Obtaining participants

Without a proper frame, we need other sources of participants:

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Without a proper frame, we need other sources of participants:

1. Social media

→ More on this later!

Perrotta et al. *EPJ Data Science* (2021) 10:17
<https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-021-00270-1>



EPJ Data Science
a SpringerOpen Journal

REGULAR ARTICLE

Open Access

Behaviours and attitudes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: insights from a cross-national Facebook survey

Daniela Perrotta^{1†}, André Grow^{1†}, Francesco Rampazzo², Jorge Cimentada¹, Emanuele Del Fava¹, Sofia Gil-Clavel¹ and Emilio Zagheni¹

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Abstract

Background: In the absence of medical treatment and vaccination, individual behaviours are key to curbing the spread of COVID-19. Here we describe efforts to collect attitudinal and behavioural data and disseminate insights to increase situational awareness and inform interventions.

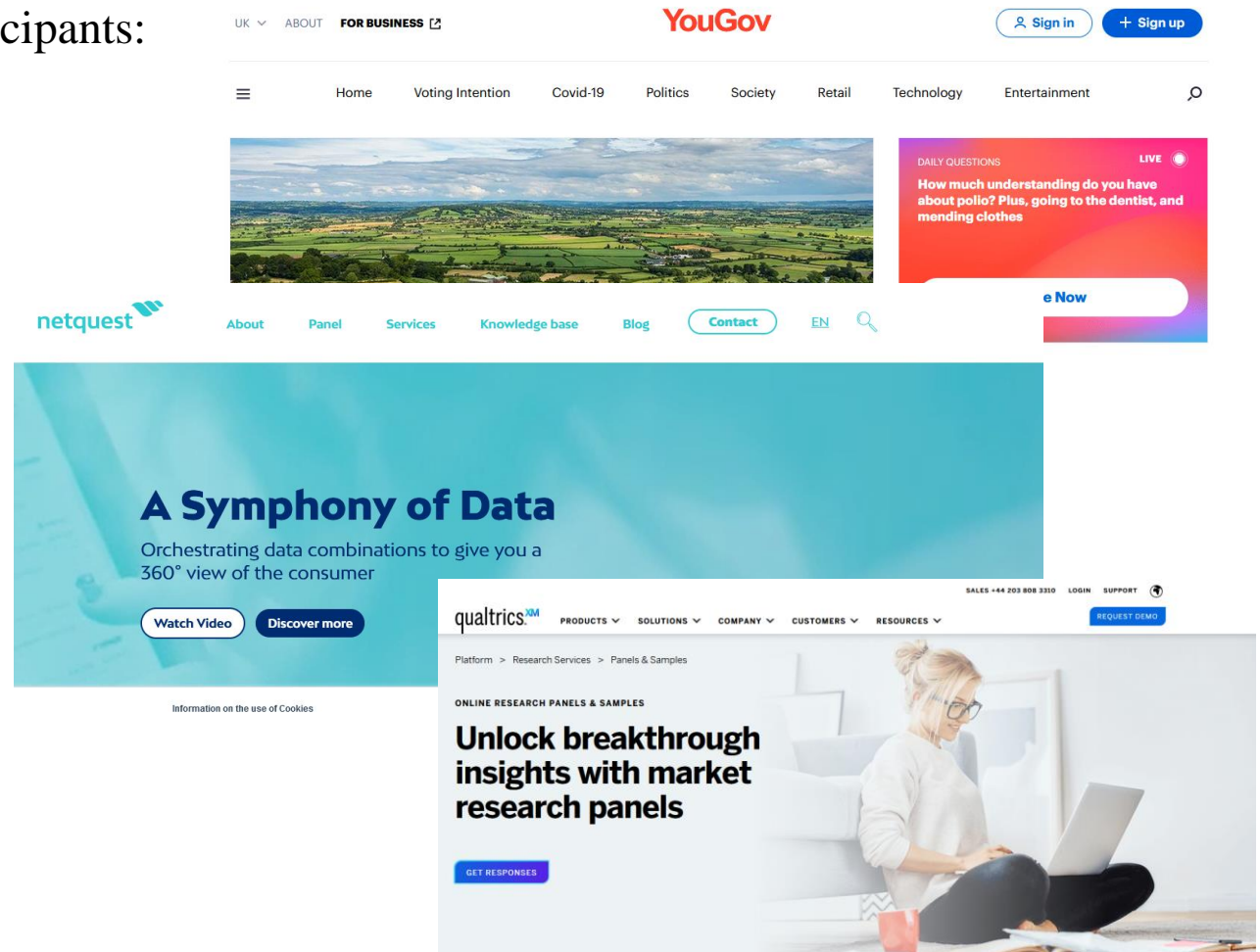
Methods: We developed a rapid data collection and monitoring system based on a cross-national online survey, the "COVID-19 Health Behavior Survey". Respondent recruitment occurred via targeted Facebook advertisements in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We investigated how the threat perceptions of COVID-19, the confidence in the preparedness of organisations to deal with the pandemic, and the adoption of preventive and social distancing behaviours are associated with respondents' demographic characteristics.

Results: We analysed 71,612 questionnaires collected between March 13–April 19, 2020. We found substantial spatio-temporal heterogeneity across countries at different stages of the pandemic and with different control strategies in place. Respondents rapidly adopted the use of face masks when they were not yet mandatory. We observed a clear pattern in threat perceptions, sharply increasing from a personal level to national and global levels. Although personal threat perceptions were comparatively low, all respondents significantly increased hand hygiene. We found gender-specific patterns: women showed higher threat perceptions, lower confidence in the healthcare system, and were more likely to adopt preventive

First step: Obtaining participants

Without a proper frame, we need other sources of participants:

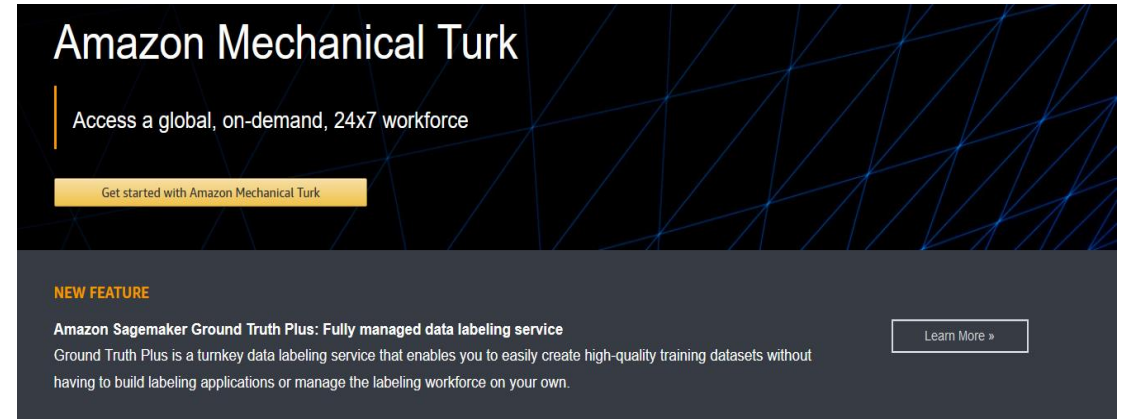
1. Social media
2. Opt-in online panels



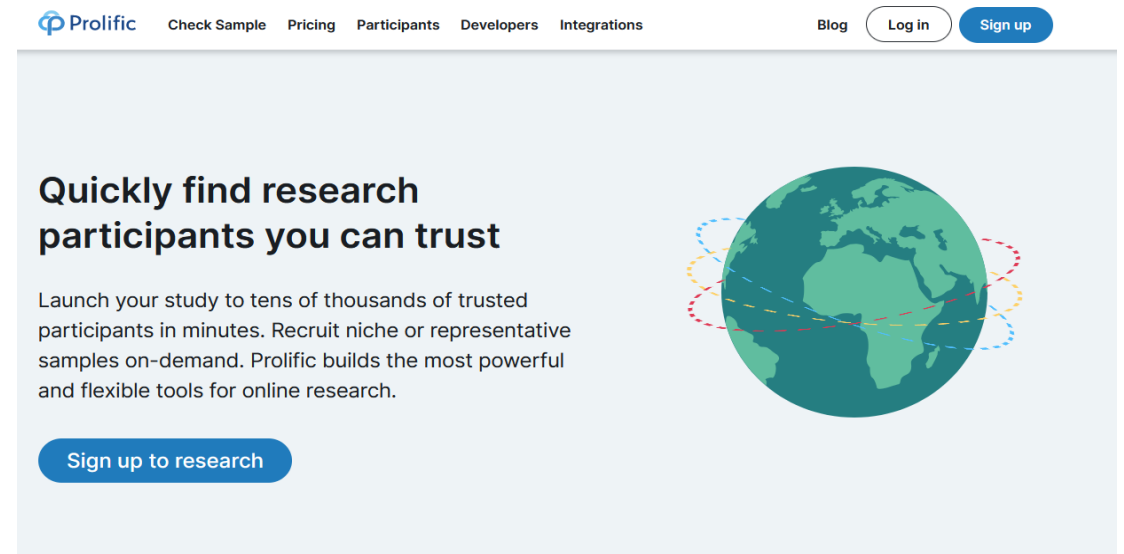
First step: Obtaining participants

Without a proper frame, we need other sources of participants:

1. **Social media**
2. **Opt-in online panels**
3. **Crowdsourcing / participants market places**



The screenshot shows the Amazon Mechanical Turk homepage. At the top, the title "Amazon Mechanical Turk" is displayed in white on a dark background. Below it, a subtitle reads "Access a global, on-demand, 24x7 workforce". A yellow button with the text "Get started with Amazon Mechanical Turk" is positioned below the subtitle. Further down, a section titled "NEW FEATURE" in orange text introduces "Amazon Sagemaker Ground Truth Plus: Fully managed data labeling service". A brief description follows: "Ground Truth Plus is a turnkey data labeling service that enables you to easily create high-quality training datasets without having to build labeling applications or manage the labeling workforce on your own." A "Learn More »" button is located to the right of this text.

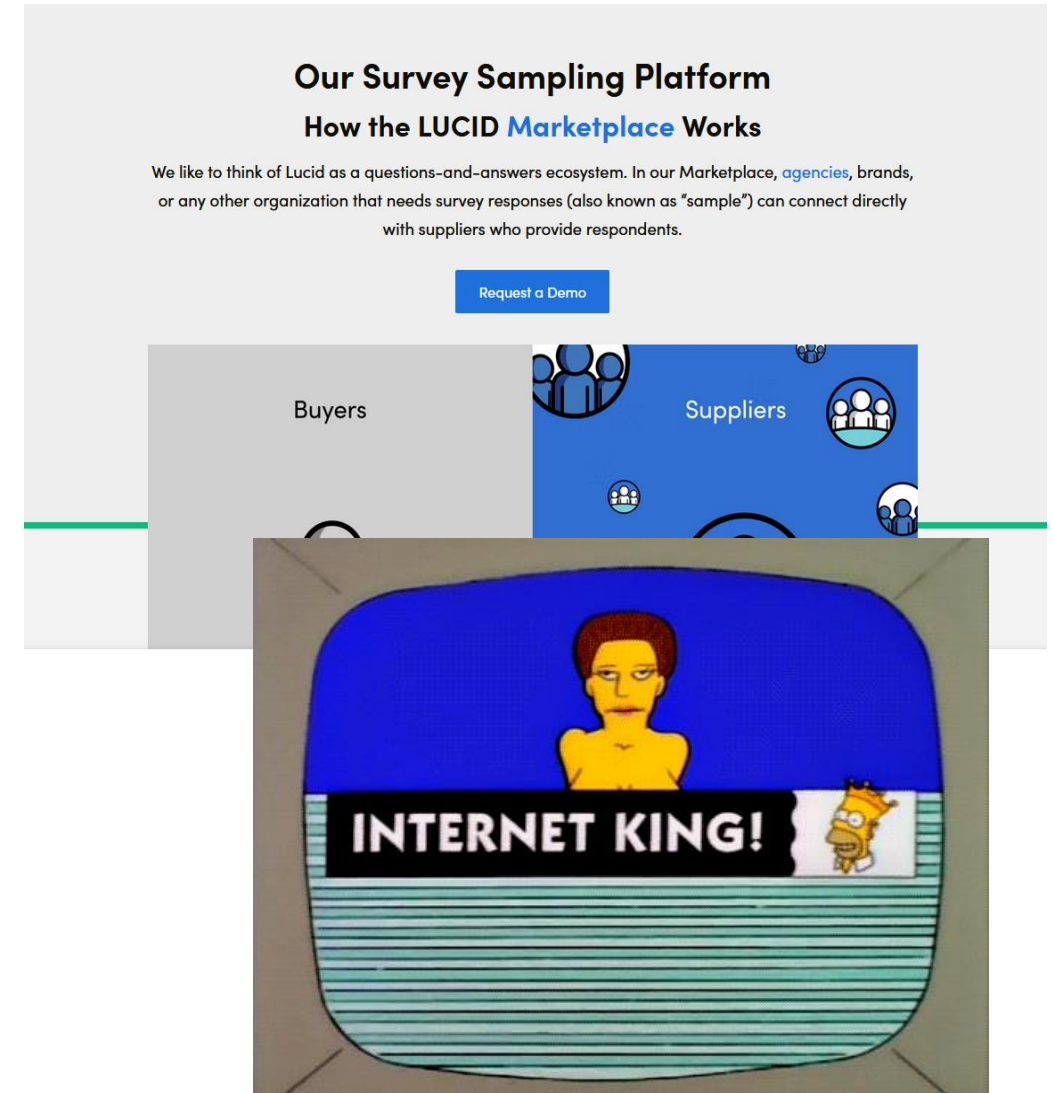


The screenshot displays the Prolific website. The top navigation bar includes the Prolific logo, links for "Check Sample", "Pricing", "Participants", "Developers", and "Integrations", along with "Blog", "Log in", and "Sign up" buttons. The main content area features the heading "Quickly find research participants you can trust". Below this, a paragraph states: "Launch your study to tens of thousands of trusted participants in minutes. Recruit niche or representative samples on-demand. Prolific builds the most powerful and flexible tools for online research." A blue button labeled "Sign up to research" is located at the bottom left of this section. To the right, there is a graphic of a globe with several colorful, dashed orbital lines circling it.

First step: Obtaining participants

Without a proper frame, we need other sources of participants:

1. **Social media**
2. **Opt-in online panels**
3. **Crowdsourcing / participants market places**
4. **Respondent aggregators**

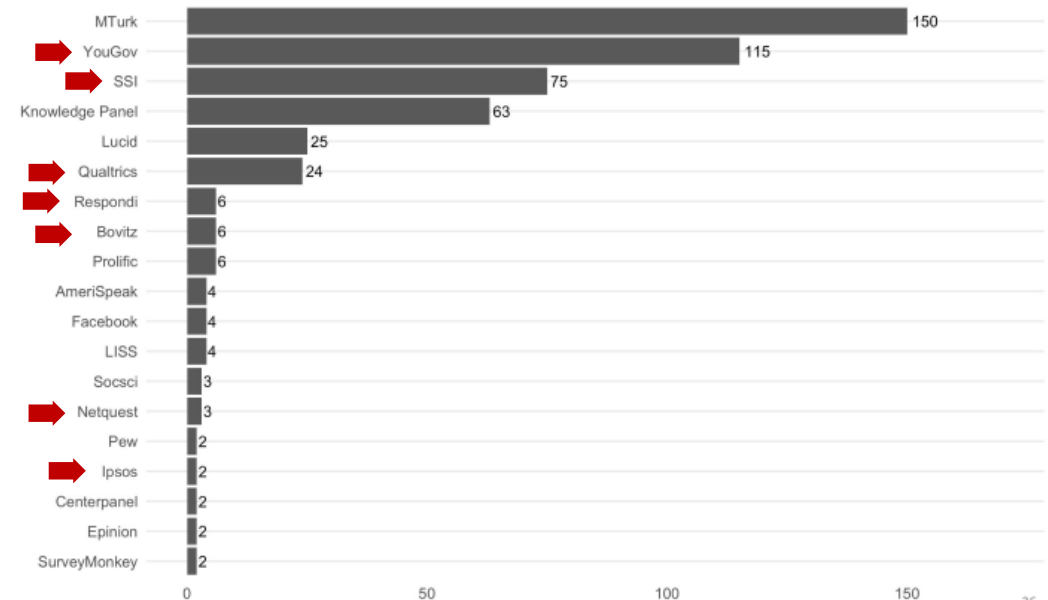


First step: Obtaining participants

Without a proper frame, we need other sources of participants:

1. Social media → Main focus today
2. Opt-in online panels
3. Crowdsourcing / participants market places
4. Respondent aggregators

N° of surveys for platform

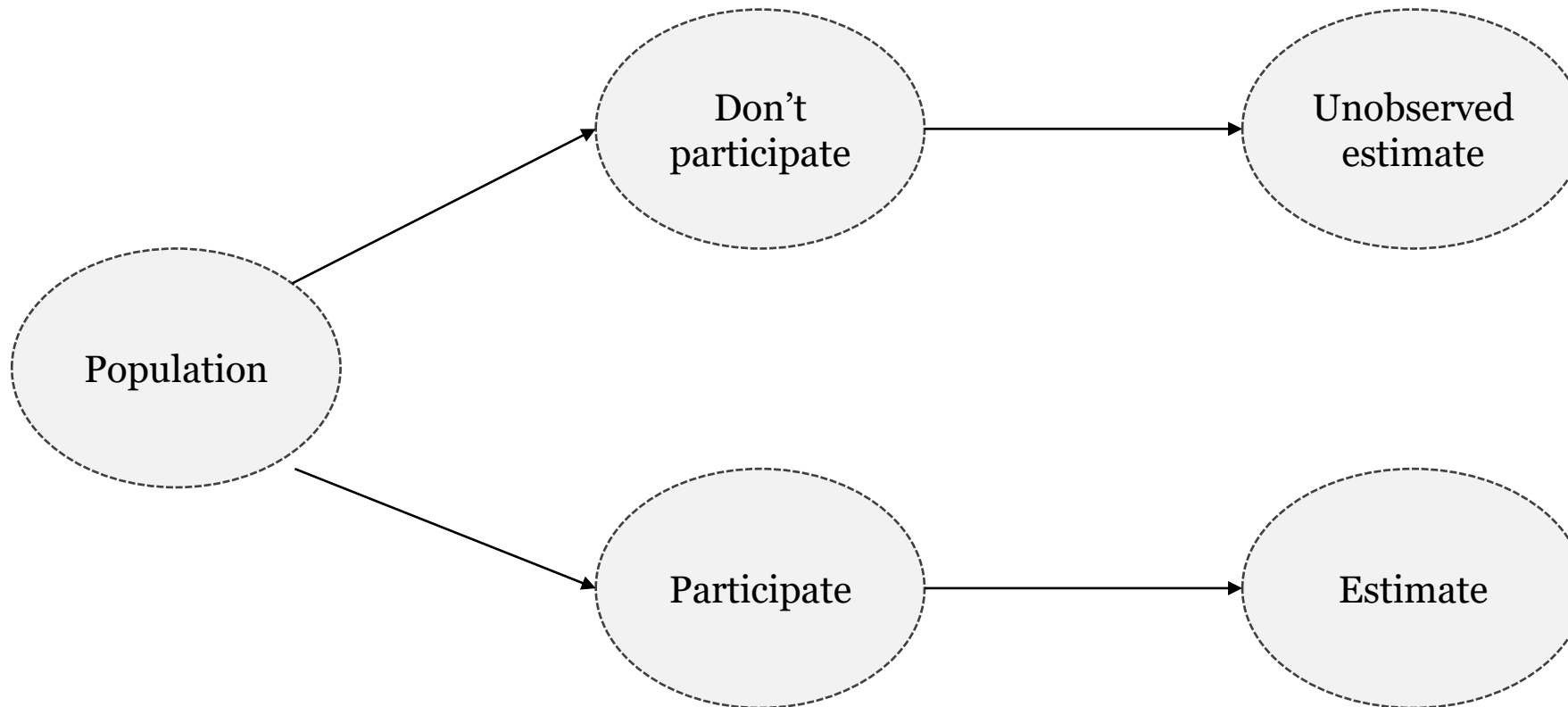


Second Step: Sampling designs

We **cannot** rely on **randomization** techniques anymore

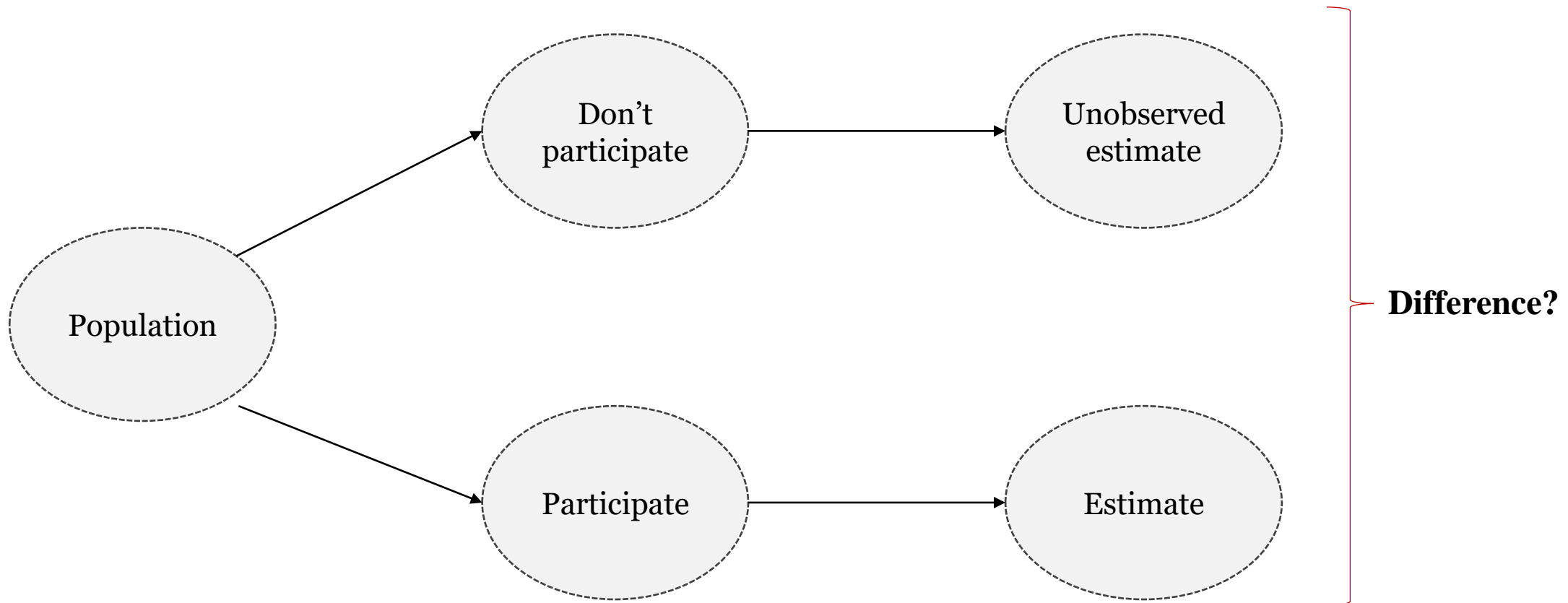
Second Step: Sampling designs

Change of paradigm: **sampling design through the lenses of causal inference**



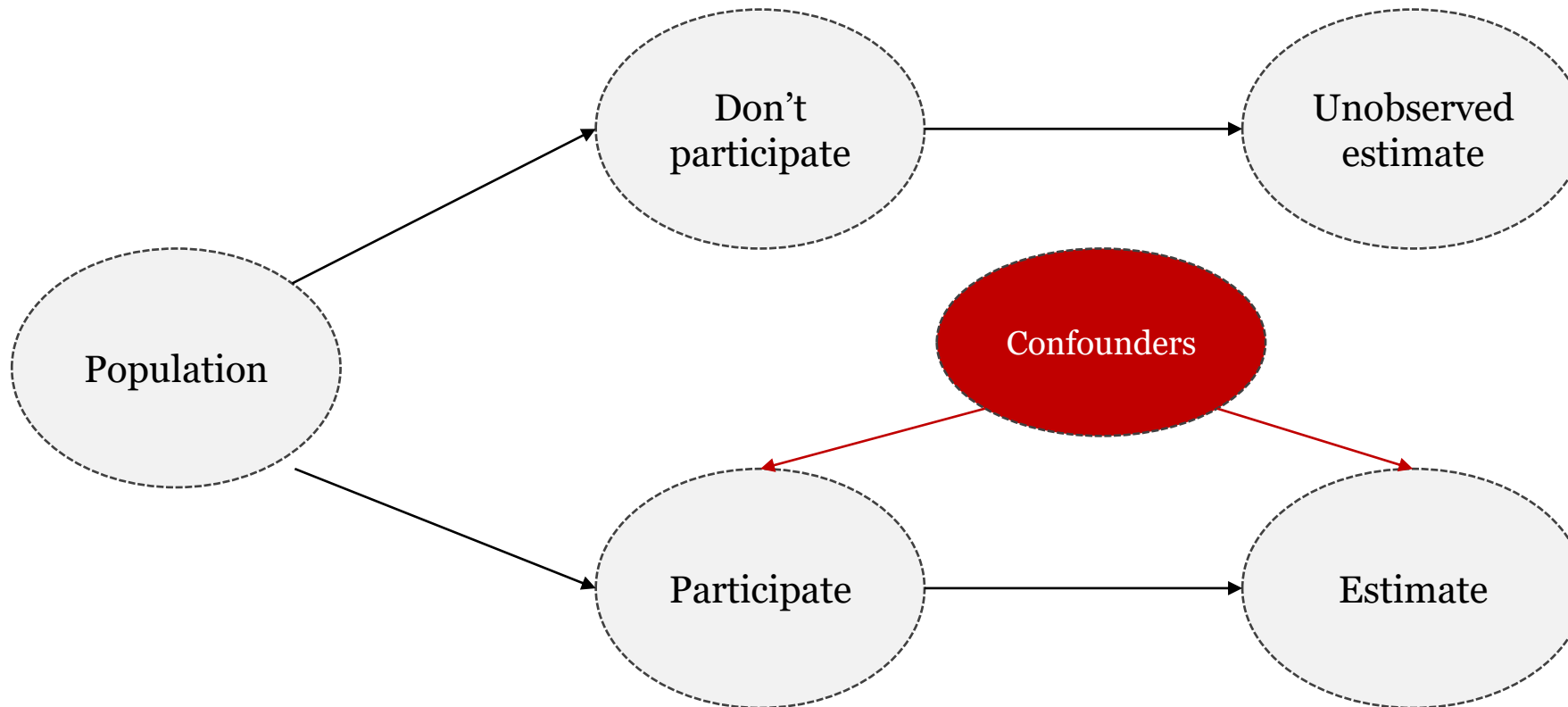
Second Step: Sampling designs

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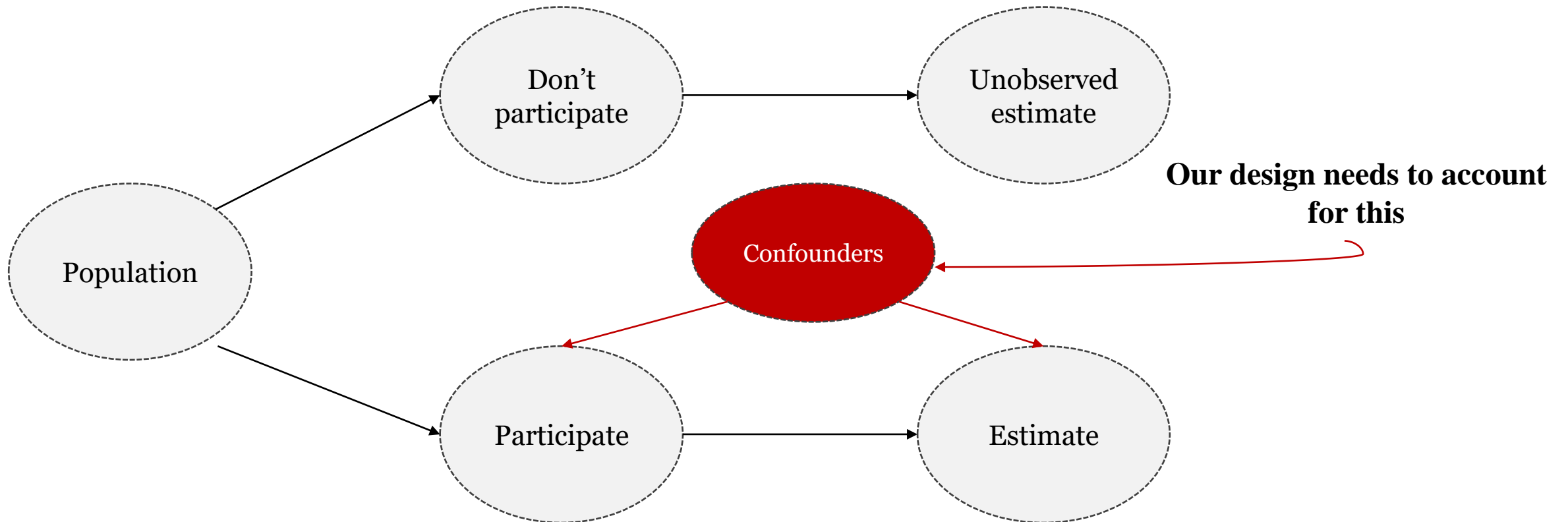
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Fit for purpose design

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- The sampling design **does not need to produce a snapshot** of the population
- It only needs to **mitigate any bias that the confounders** might introduce

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Fit for purpose design

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Most common approach: **Quota sampling**

Second Step: Sampling designs

Quota sampling → Sampling approach that **matches the distribution of a given variable in the sample** with the actual **population distribution**

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Desired sample size: 1,000

Distribution of gender in population: 50% male, 48% female, 2% other

Gender in the sample: 500 males, 480 females, 20 others

Second Step: Sampling designs

Cross quota sampling ➡ This can get more complex when quotas are crossed



	Male	Female
White	350 (35%)	300 (30%)
Non-white	200 (20%)	150 (15%)



Not only about marginal distributions, but also about how the individuals in the subgroups represents the population subgroups

Third Step: Adjustment approach

Even the **best design might not be able to correct** for **all** the biases: we need some modelling

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The general logic: statistical models to correct the estimates through weights that re-balance the estimates towards the population (in terms of the confounders).

Third Step: Adjustment approach

Example: **Raking**

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- Choose a set of variables where **the population distribution is known**

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- Choose a set of variables where **the population distribution is known**
- Iteratively **adjust the weight for each case** until the **sample distribution aligns with the population** for those variables

Third Step: Adjustment approach

Example: **Raking**

- Choose a set of variables where **the population distribution is known**
- Iteratively **adjust the weight for each case** until the **sample distribution aligns with the population** for those variables



- **Sample should be:** 48% male and 52% female, and 40% with a high school education or less, 31% who have completed some college, and 29% college graduates
- **First step:** adjust the weights so that gender ratio for the weighted survey sample matches the desired population distribution
- **Second step:** weights are adjusted so that the education groups are in the correct proportion
- **Third step:** If the adjustment for education pushes the sex distribution out of alignment, then the weights are adjusted
- **Etc** until the weighted distribution of all of the **weighting variables matches their specified targets**.

Third Step: Adjustment approach

- Many more complex methods exist, like **propensity weighting and matching**, which can even be **combined**!

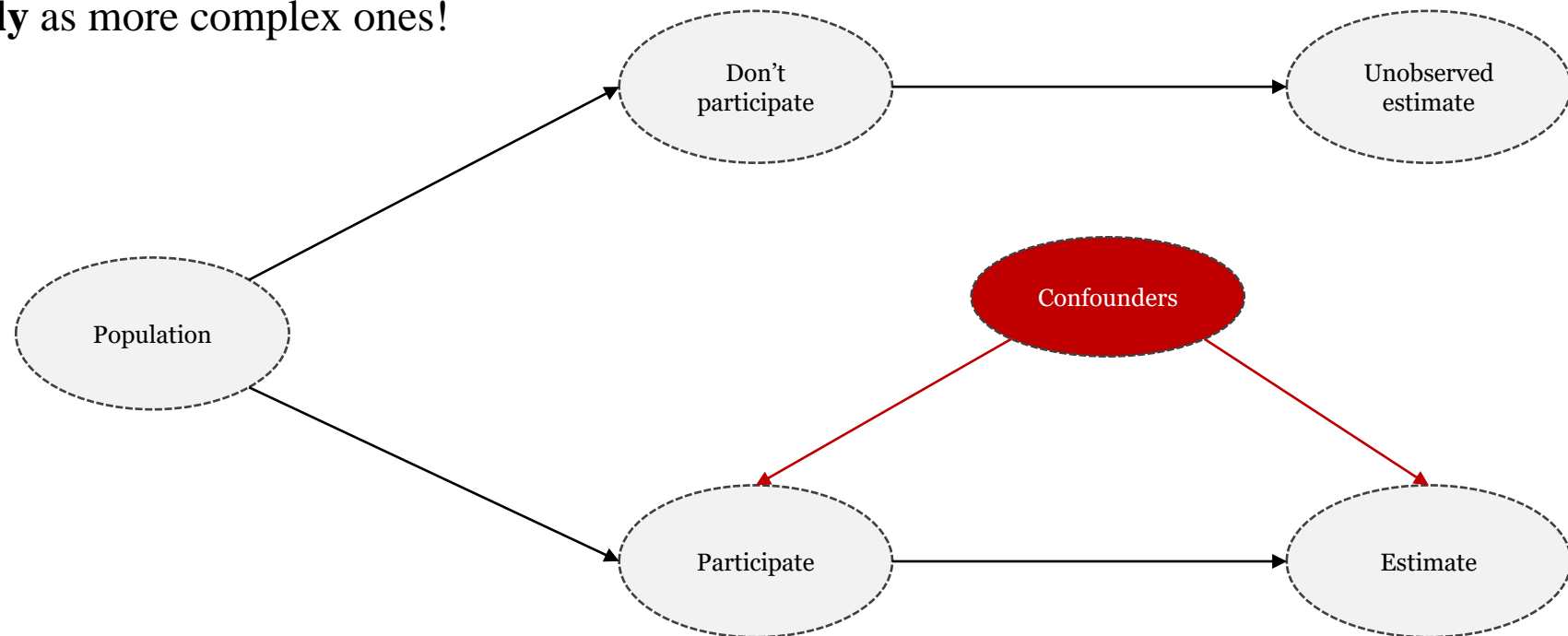
Third Step: Adjustment approach

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- But the evidence seems to suggest that the **key part is to choose the right variables**, with **simple models performing similarly** as more complex ones!



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Third Step: Adjustment approach

- Many more complex methods exist, like **propensity weighting and matching**, which can even be **combined**!
- But the evidence seems to suggest that the **key part is to choose the right variables**, with **simple models performing similarly** as more complex ones!

However, new advancements are proposed every year...maybe more complex methods will make a difference eventually

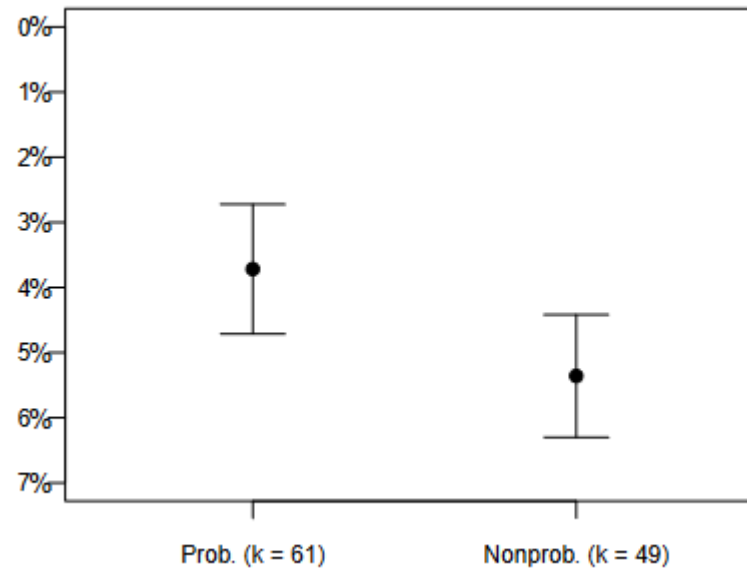


Food for thought: combining small probability samples with big nonprobability ones

So are online nonprobability surveys any good?

Online nonprobability surveys are generally less representative

Most research has found that **probability-based online surveys are more representative**



Mean absolute bias subgroup comparison results by probability versus nonprobability surveys as moderator

Online nonprobability surveys are generally less representative

Most research has found that **probability-based online surveys are more representative**

And that weighting does not solve this

A REVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON PROBABILITY AND NONPROBABILITY SAMPLE SURVEY RESEARCH

CARINA CORNESSE*
ANNELIES G. BLOM
DAVID DUTWIN
JON A. KROSNICK
EDITH D. DE LEEUW
STÉPHANE LEGLEYE
JOSH PASEK
DARREN PENNAY
BENJAMIN PHILLIPS
JOSEPH W. SAKSHAUG
BELLA STRUMINSKAYA
ALEXANDER WENZ

Online nonprobability surveys are generally less representative

But results **vary** a lot **depending on the type of survey** (source + sampling + weighting)

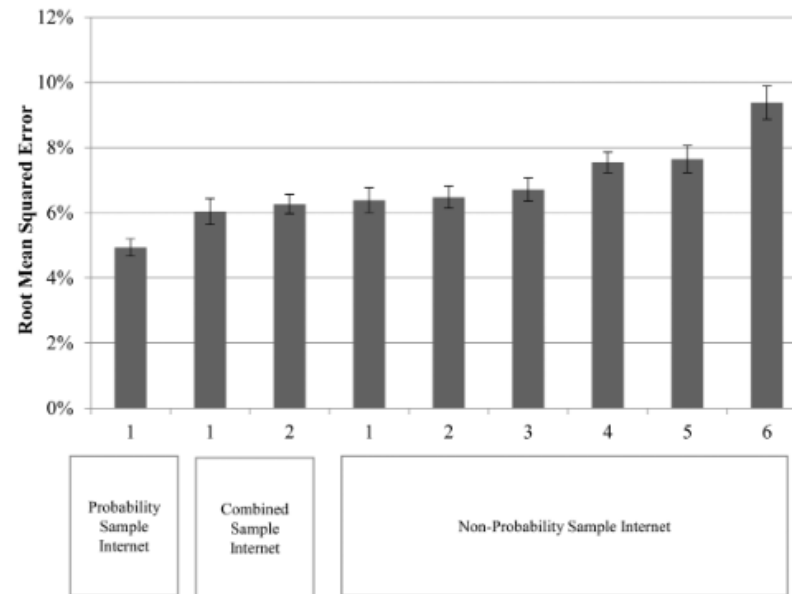
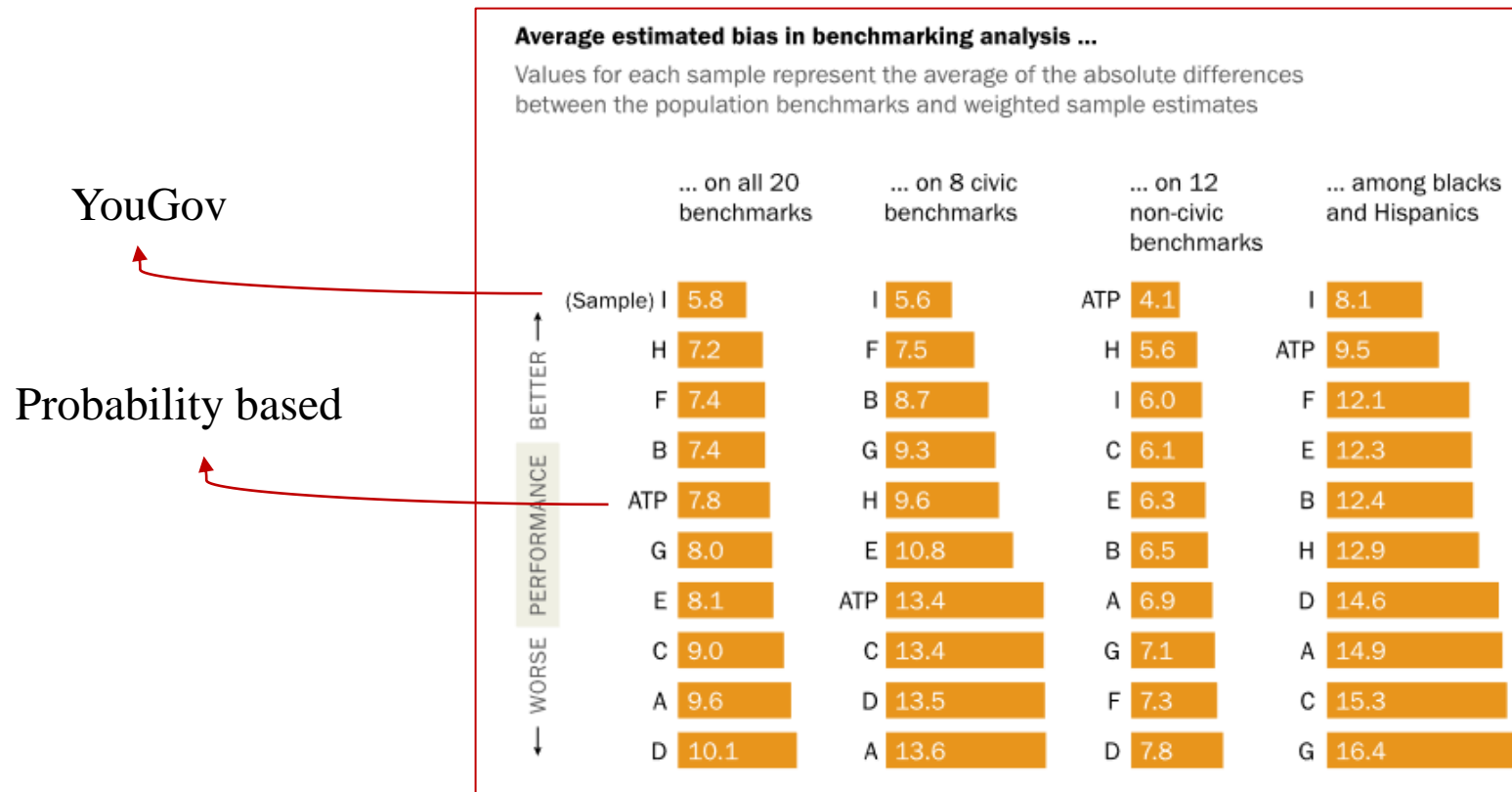


Figure 1. Root mean squared errors for the probability internet sample, the probability plus nonprobability combined samples, and the nonprobability samples across secondary demographics and nondemographics, with our poststratification.

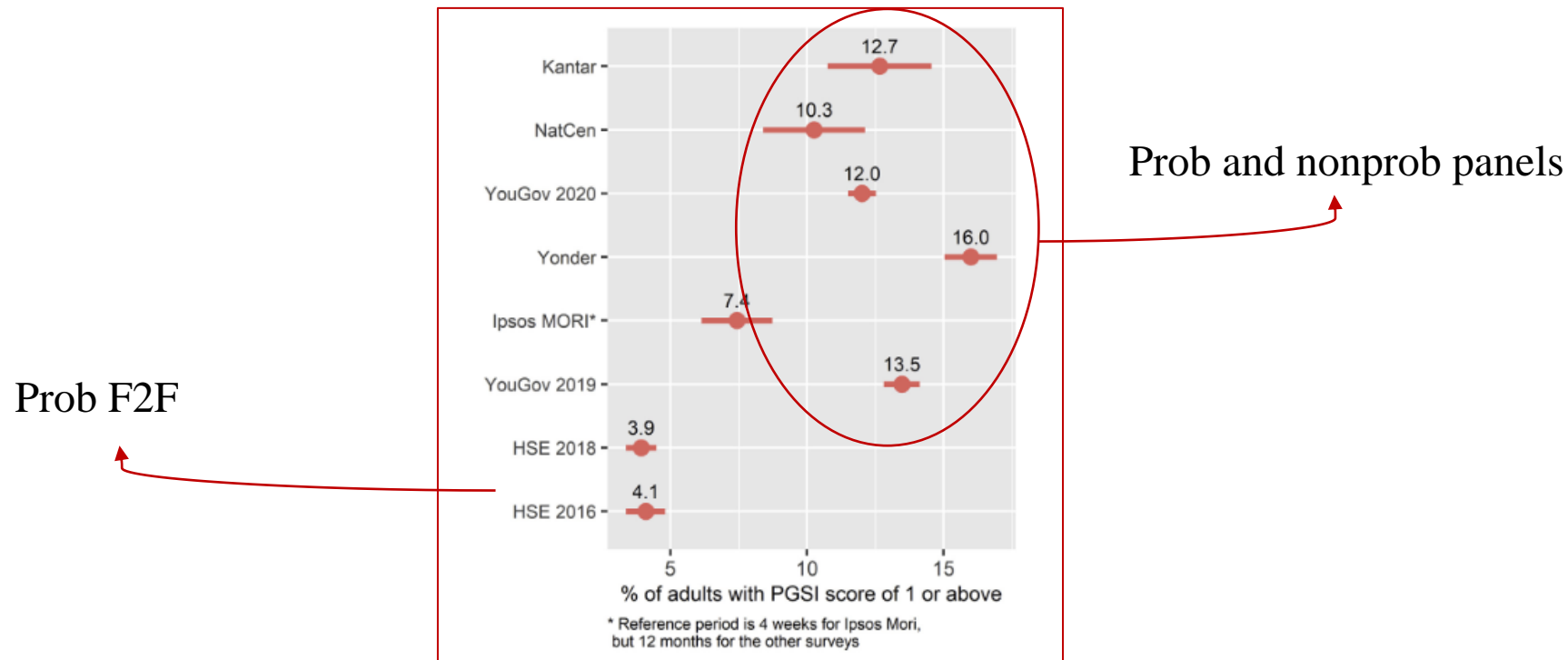
Online nonprobability surveys are generally less representative

Even sometimes being **better than probability-based online panels!**



Online nonprobability surveys are generally less representative

Sometimes the problem will simply be that...**they are online**, not non-probability!



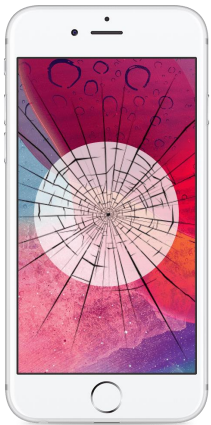
Enhancing nonprobability online surveys

(my research area!)

HOW COULD WE ENHANCE?

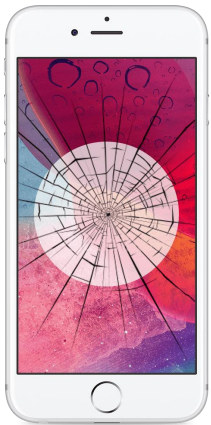
Online surveys bring new opportunities

- Online surveys are essentially **multi-device**



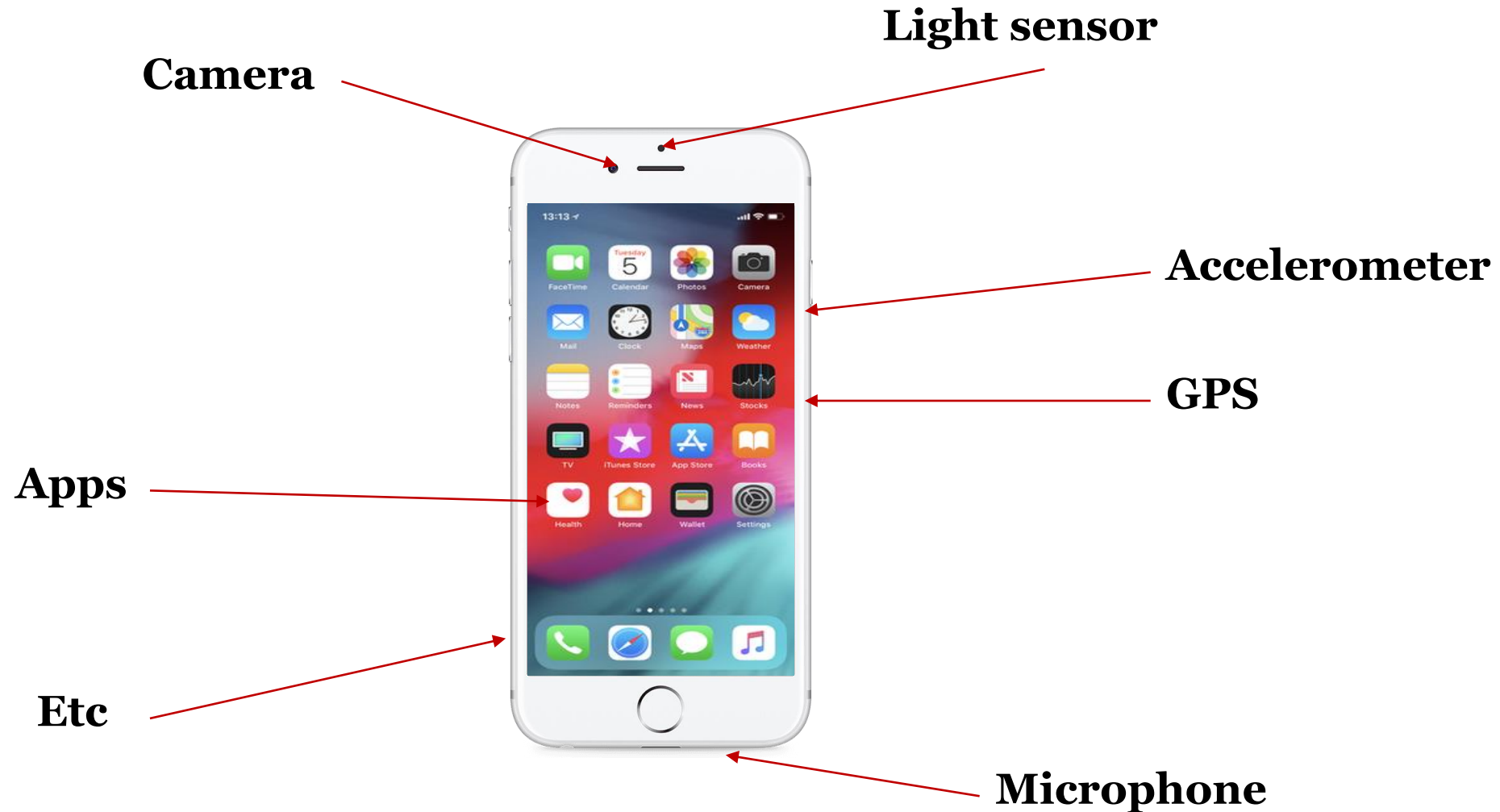
Online surveys bring new opportunities

- Online surveys are essentially **multi-device**
- Smartphone usage to answer web surveys:
 - Millennials: 78.8%
 - Boomers: 36.2 %



HOW COULD WE ENHANCE?

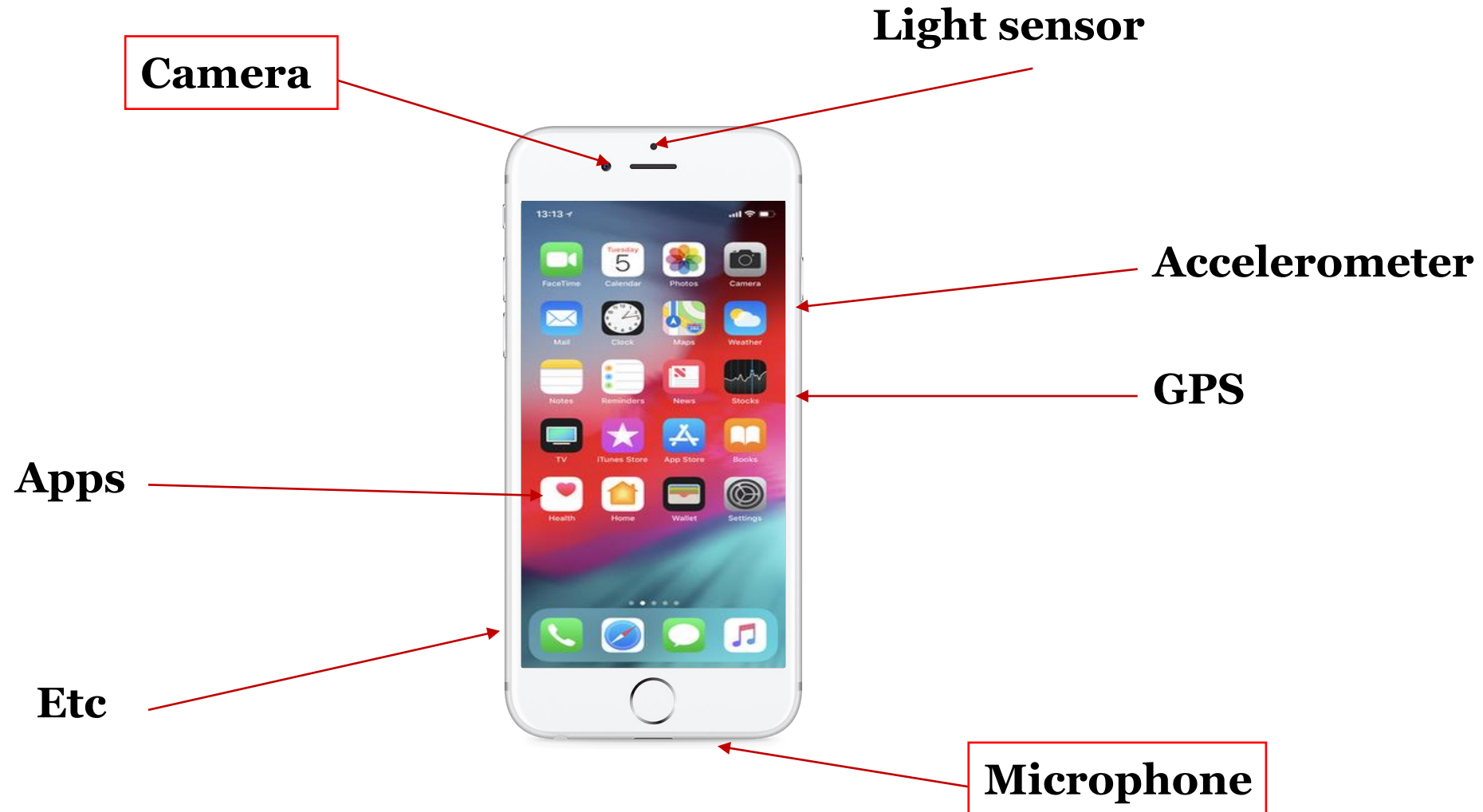
Modern devices are packed with technology that we can use



HOW COULD WE ENHANCE?

Modern devices are packed with technology that we can use

We can ask participants to perform new tasks...



HOW COULD WE ENHANCE?

Modern devices are packed with technology that

We can ask participants to perform new tasks...

Camera

Light sensor

Microphone

Article

Answering Mobile Surveys With Images: An Exploration Using a Computer Vision API

Oriol J. Bosch¹, Melanie Revilla¹, and Ezequiel Paura²

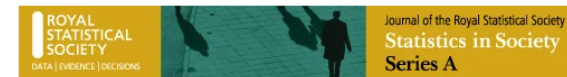
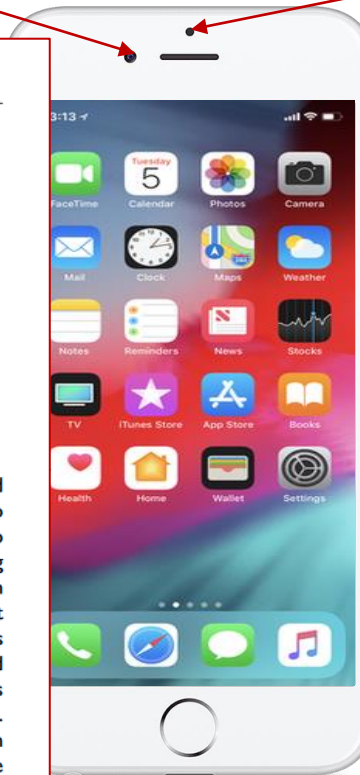
Abstract

Most mobile devices nowadays have a camera. Besides, posting and sharing images have been found as one of the most frequent and engaging Internet activities. However, to our knowledge, no research has explored the feasibility of asking respondents of online surveys to upload images to answer survey questions. The main goal of this article is to investigate the viability of asking respondents of an online opt-in panel to upload during a mobile web survey: First, a photo taken in the moment, and second, an image already saved on their smartphone. In addition, we want to test to what extent the Google Vision application programming interface (API), which can label images into categories, produces similar tags than a human coder. Overall, results from a survey conducted among millennials in Spain and Mexico ($N = 1,614$) show that more than half of the respondents uploaded an image. Of those, 77.3% and 83.4%, respectively, complied with what the question asked. Moreover, respectively, 52.4% and 65.0% of the images were similarly codified by the Google Vision API and the human coder. In addition, the API codified 1,818 images in less than 5 min, whereas the human coder spent nearly 35 hours to complete the same task.

Keywords

mobile web survey, image recognition, computer vision, API, smartphone, new data types

Social Science Computer Review
2019, Vol. 37(5) 669-683
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A new experiment on the use of images to answer web survey questions

Oriol J. Bosch [✉](#) Melanie Revilla, Danish Daniel Qureshi, Jan Karem Höhne

First published: 20 May 2022 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/rssa.12856>

Funding information: German Science Foundation, through the Collaborative Research Center 884 "Political Economy of Reforms", 139943784; European Research Council (ERC) under the European Unions Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, 849165

SECTIONS

PDF TOOLS SHARE

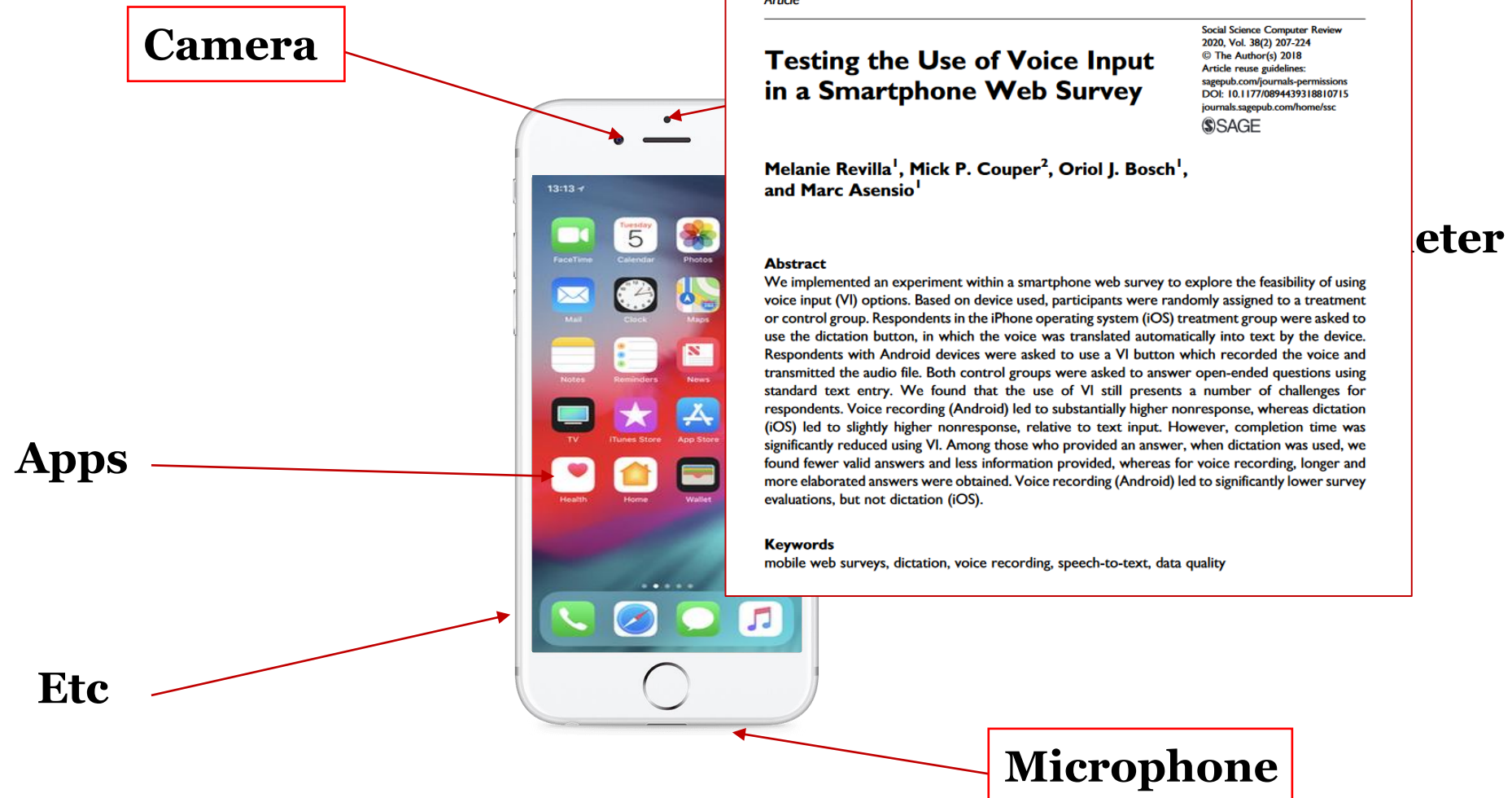
Abstract

Images might provide richer and more objective information than text answers to open-ended survey questions. Little is known, nonetheless, about the consequences for data quality of asking participants to answer open-ended questions with images. Therefore, this paper addresses three research questions: (1) What is the effect of answering web survey questions with images instead of text on breakoff, noncompliance with the task, completion time and question evaluation? (2) What is the effect of including a motivational message on these four aspects? (3) Does the impact of asking to answer with images instead of text vary across device types? To answer these questions, we implemented a 2×3 between-subject web survey experiment ($N = 3043$) in Germany. Half of the sample was required to answer using PCs and the other half with smartphones. Within each device group, respondents were randomly assigned to (1) a control group answering open-ended questions with text; (2) a treatment group answering open-ended questions with images; and (3) another treatment group answering open-ended questions with images but prompted with a motivational

HOW COULD WE ENHANCE?

Modern devices are packed with technology that we can use

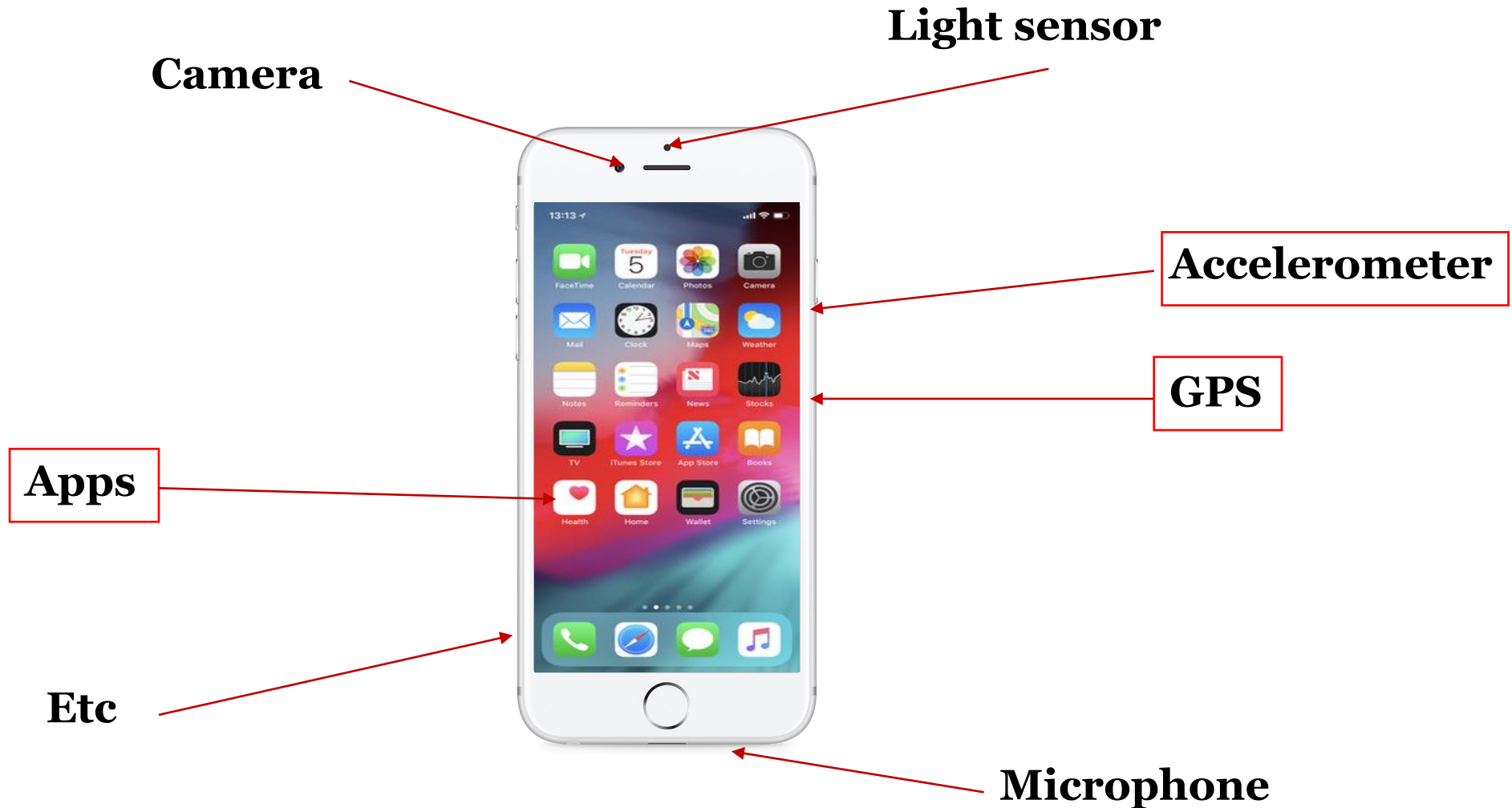
We can ask participants to perform new tasks...



HOW COULD WE ENHANCE?

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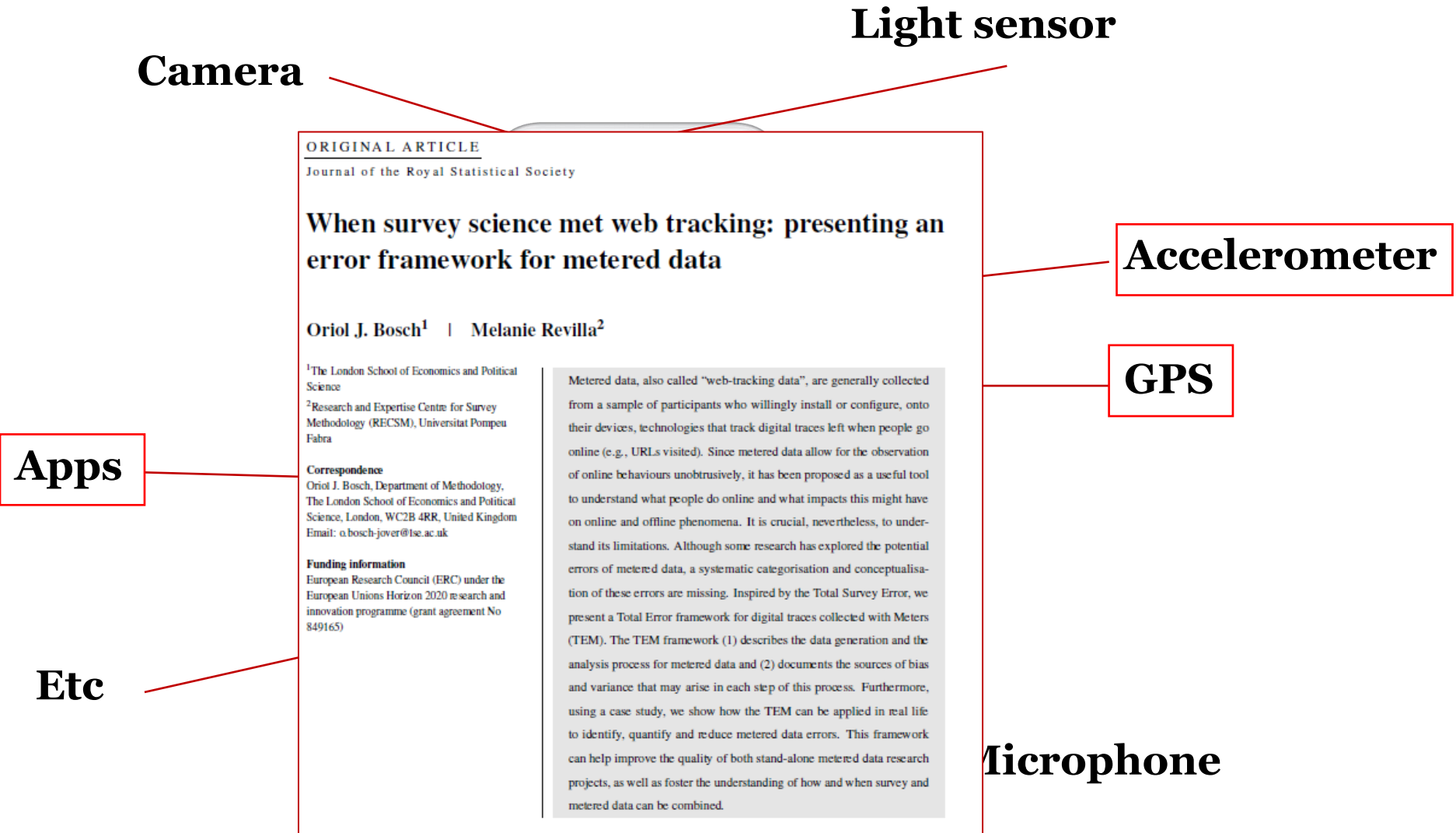
...or passively track them



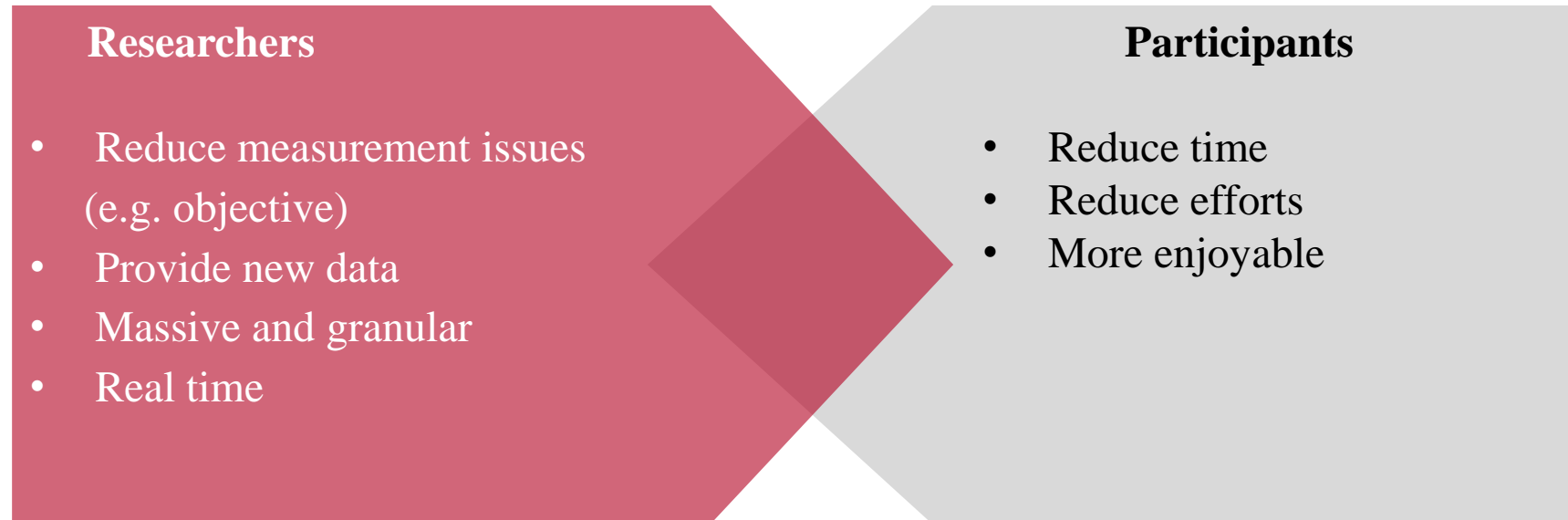
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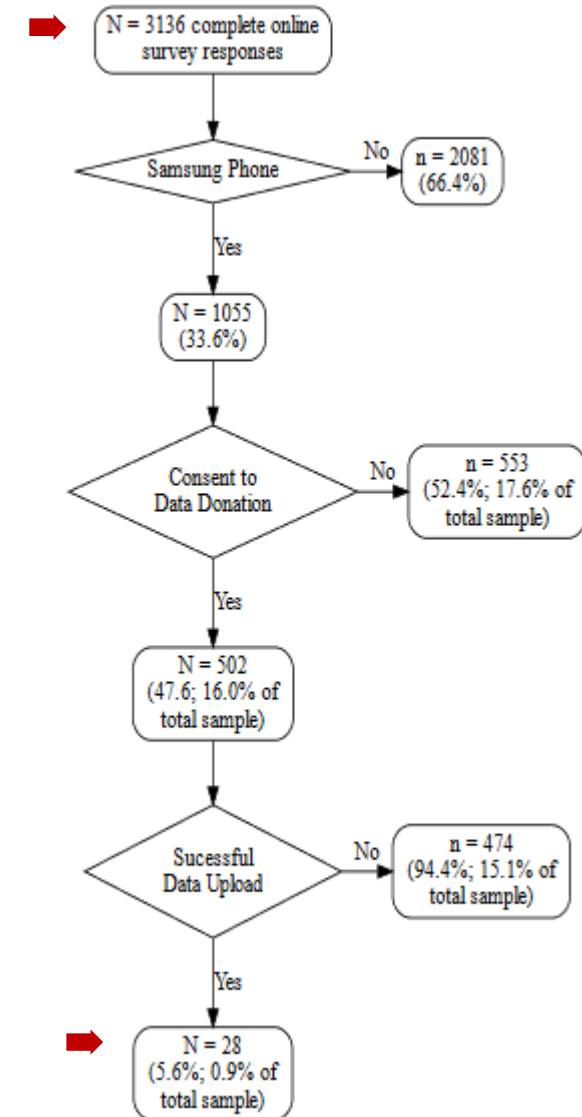
Why using apps and sensors for survey research?



But expected disadvantages as well

Selection bias in who participates

- Privacy issues
- Technical limitations
- Lack of skills



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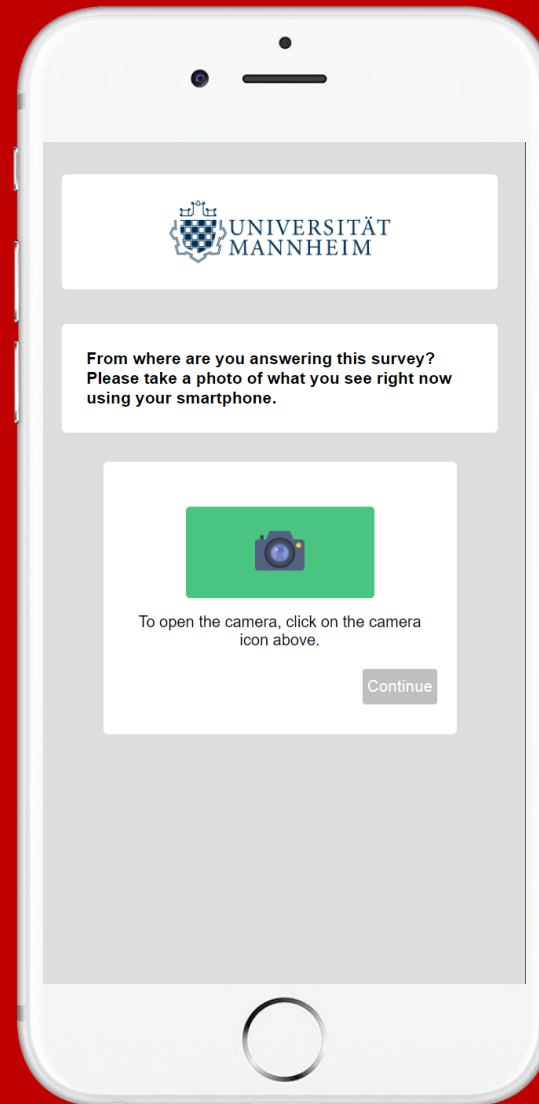
New types of errors of measurement

- Technology errors
- Coding and processing errors
- Device-related errors

Error components	Specific error causes
Specification errors	- Defining what qualifies as valid information - Measuring concepts with by-design missing data - Inferring attitudes and opinions from behaviours
Measurement errors	- Tracking undercoverage - Technology limitations - Technology errors - Hidden behaviours - Social desirability - Extraction errors - Misclassifying non-observations - Shared devices
Processing errors	- Coding error - Aggregation at the domain level - Data anonymisation
Coverage errors	- Non-trackable individuals
Sampling errors	- Same error causes as for surveys
Missing data error	- Non-contact - Non-consent - Tracking undercoverage - Technology limitations - Technology errors - Hidden behaviours - Social desirability - Extraction errors - Misclassifying non-observations
Adjustment errors	- Same error causes as for surveys

TABLE 1 Specific Error Causes for Metered Data by Error Component

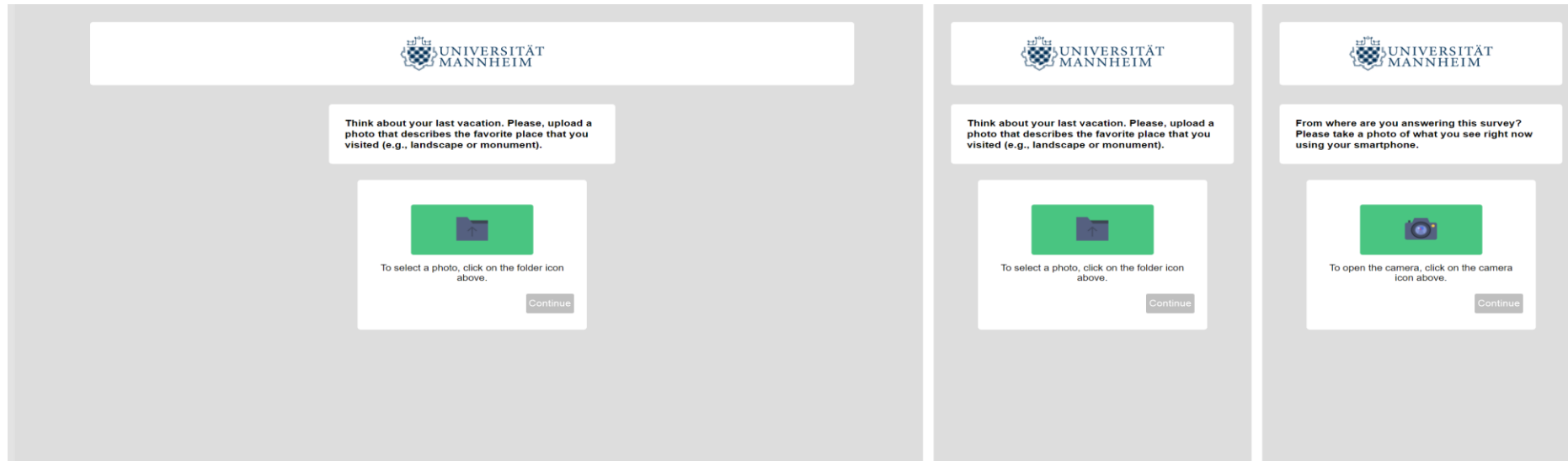
VISUAL DATA



Bosch, Revilla, Qureshi and Hohne (2022)

Compare

- 1) Asking to type an answer
- 2) Asking to send an image
- 3) Asking to send an image + motivational message

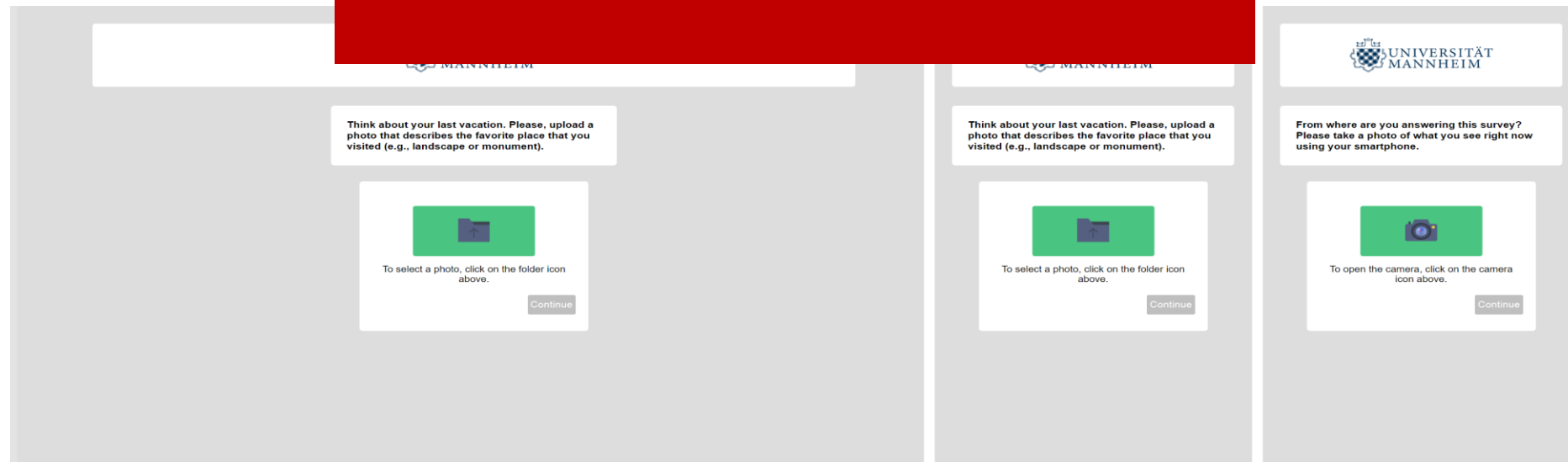


Visual data

Bosch, Revilla, Qureshi and Hohne (2022)

Compare

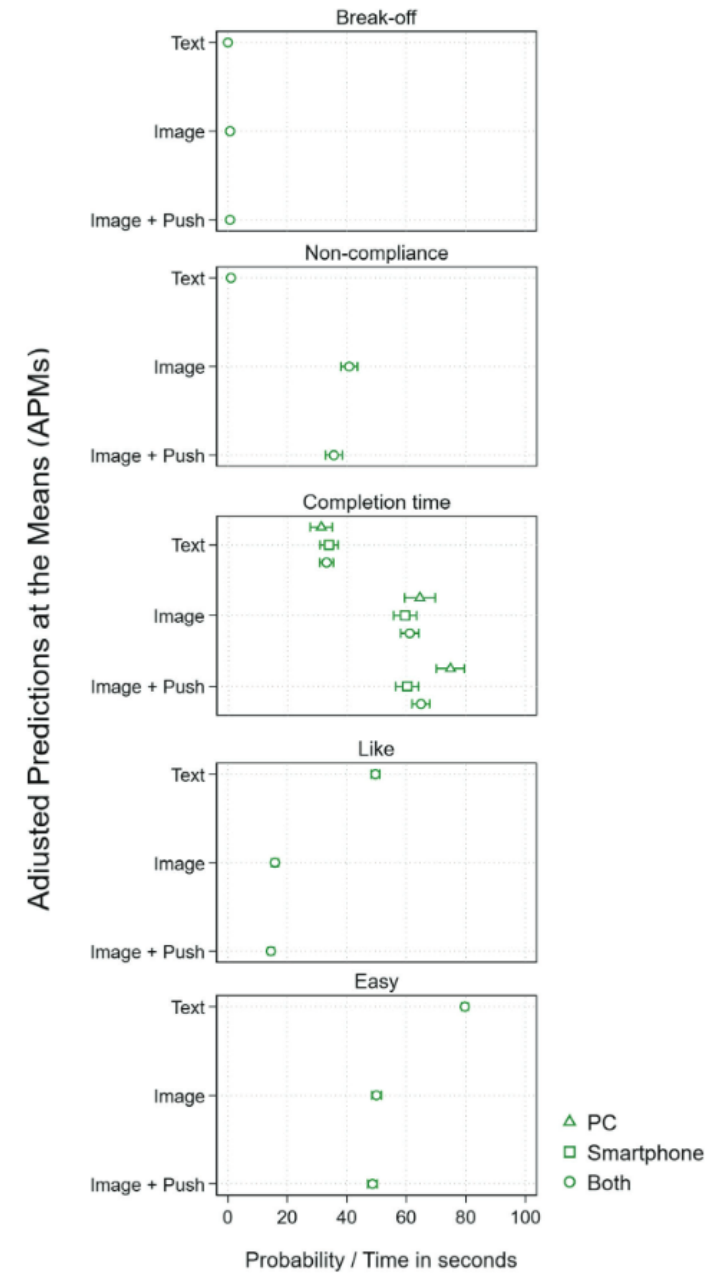
- 1) Asking to type an answer
 - 2) Asking to send an image
 - 3) Asking to send an image
- What is the impact of asking for images on:
- response rates,
 - completion time,
 - and question evaluation?



RESULTS

Visual data

Bosch, Revilla, Qureshi and Hohne (2022)



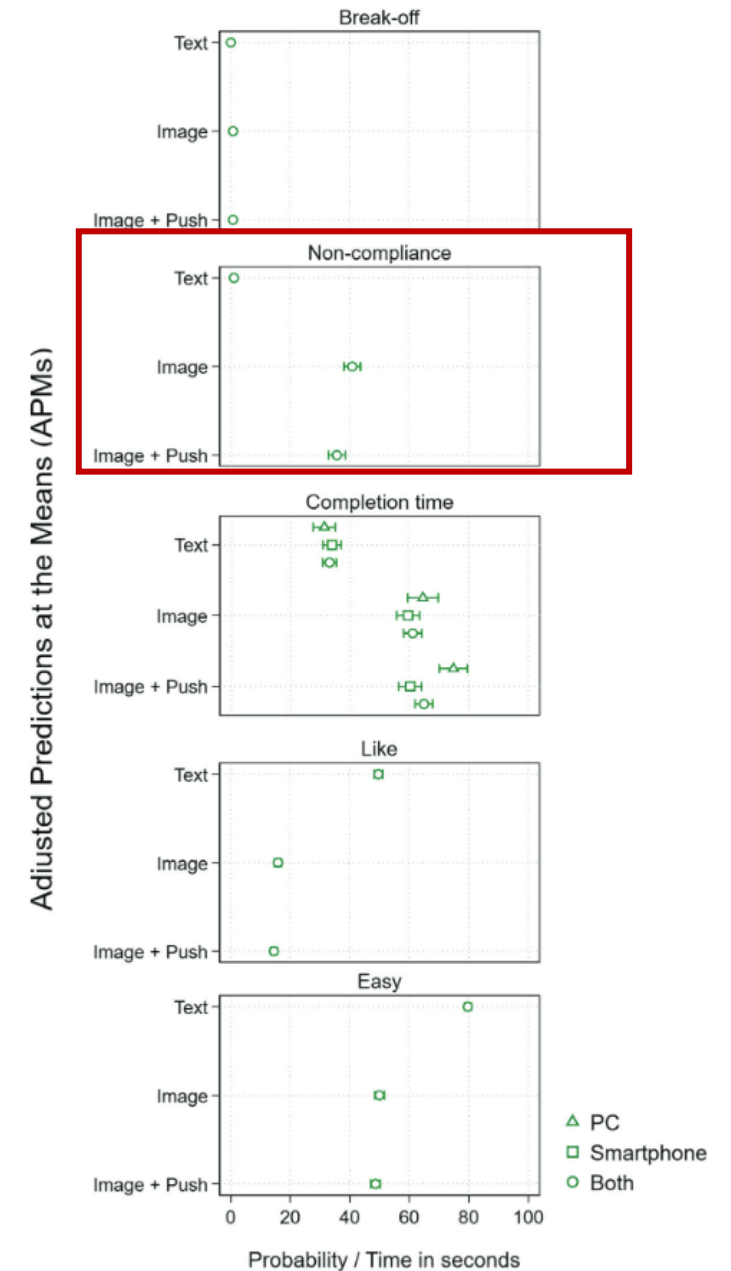
RESULTS

Visual data

Bosch, Revilla, Qureshi and Hohne (2022)

Asking for images:

- **Increases the probability of item nonresponse**
(34-39 p.points higher probability)



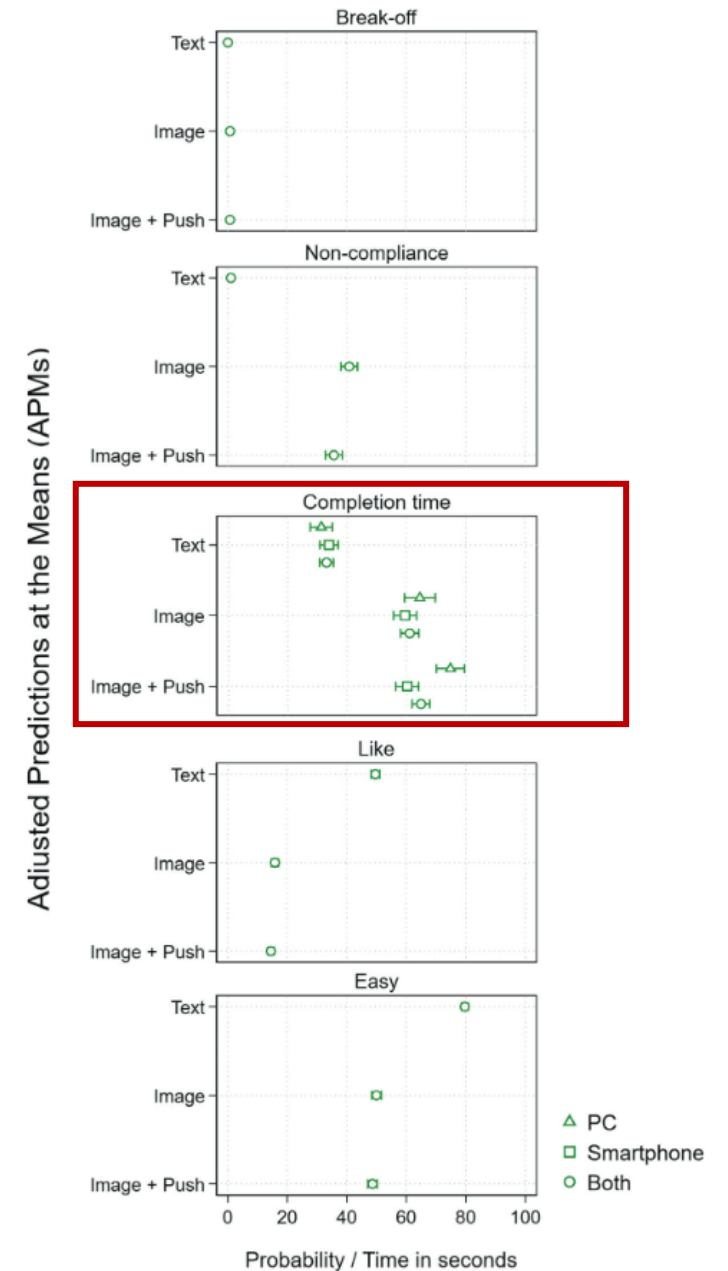
RESULTS

Visual data

Bosch, Revilla, Qureshi and Hohne (2022)

Asking for images:

- **Increases the probability of item nonresponse** (34-39 p.points higher probability)
- **Increases completion times** (25.6 to 43.52 seconds more)



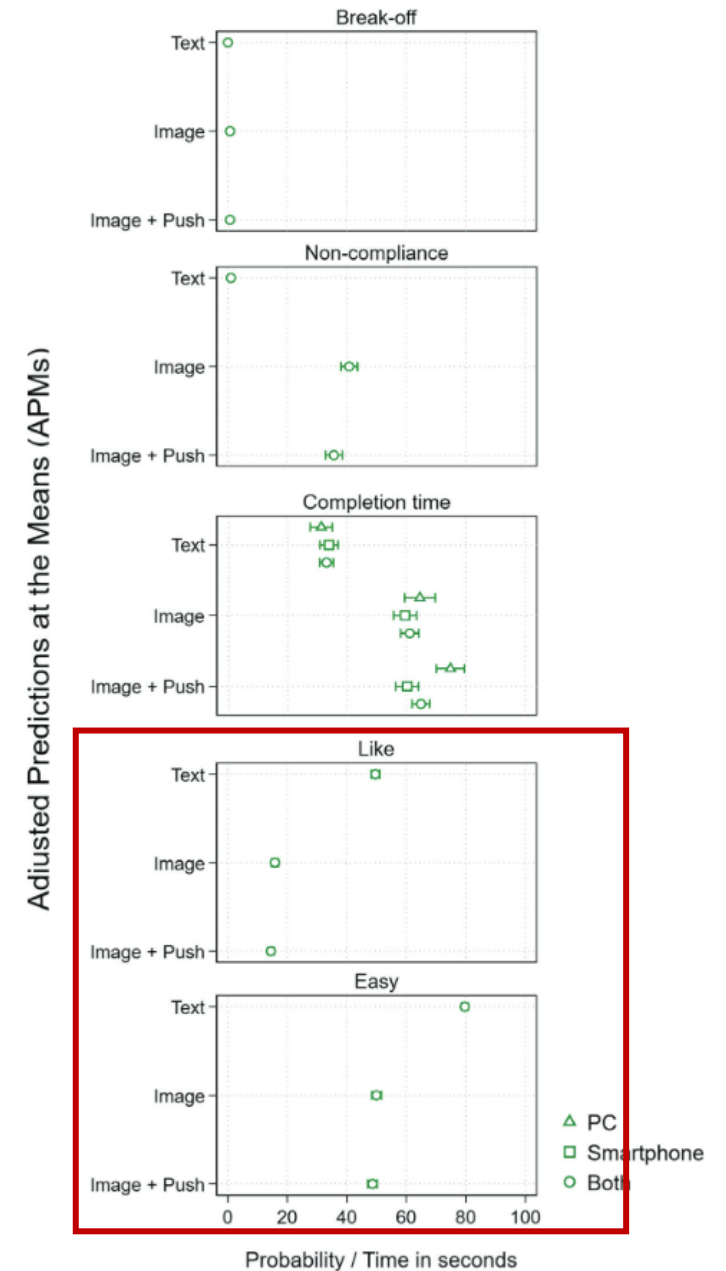
RESULTS

Visual data

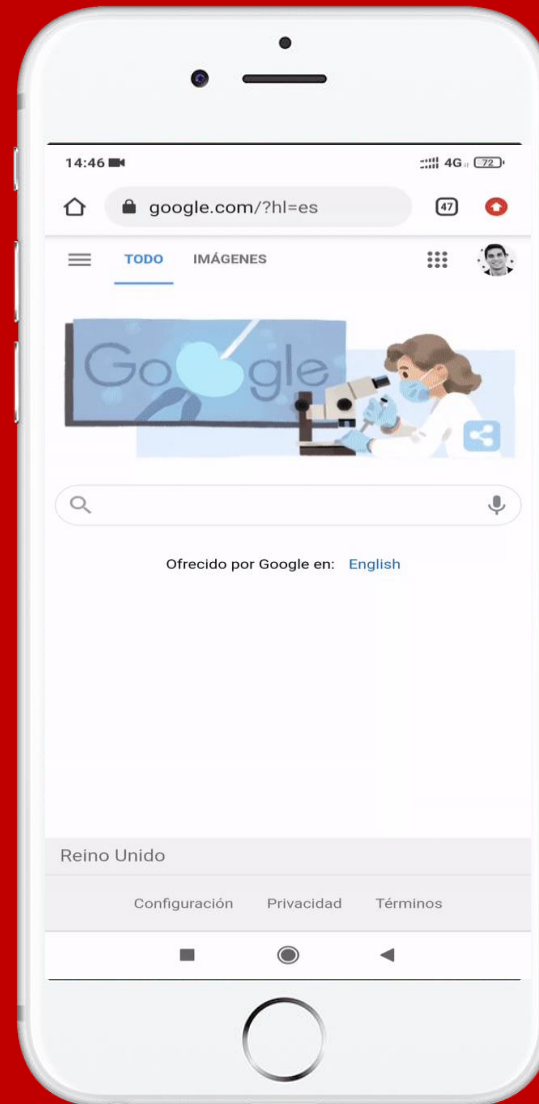
Bosch, Revilla, Qureshi and Hohne (2022)

Asking for images:

- **Increases the probability of item nonresponse** (34-39 p.points higher probability)
- **Increases completion times** (25.6 to 43.52 seconds more)
- **Decreases the probability of enjoying and finding questions easy** (~30 p.p lower probability of liking and finding the questions easy)



METERED DATA



Metered data

- It is becoming vital to better understand what people do online and what impact this has on online and offline phenomena.
- Self-reports might not be best suited for this



- Alternative: directly observe what people do online using digital tracking solutions, or *meters*.
 - **Group of tracking technologies**
 - **Installed on participants devices.**
 - **Collect traces left by participants when interacting with their devices online: e.g. URLs or apps visited**
- We call the resulting data: **metered data**.

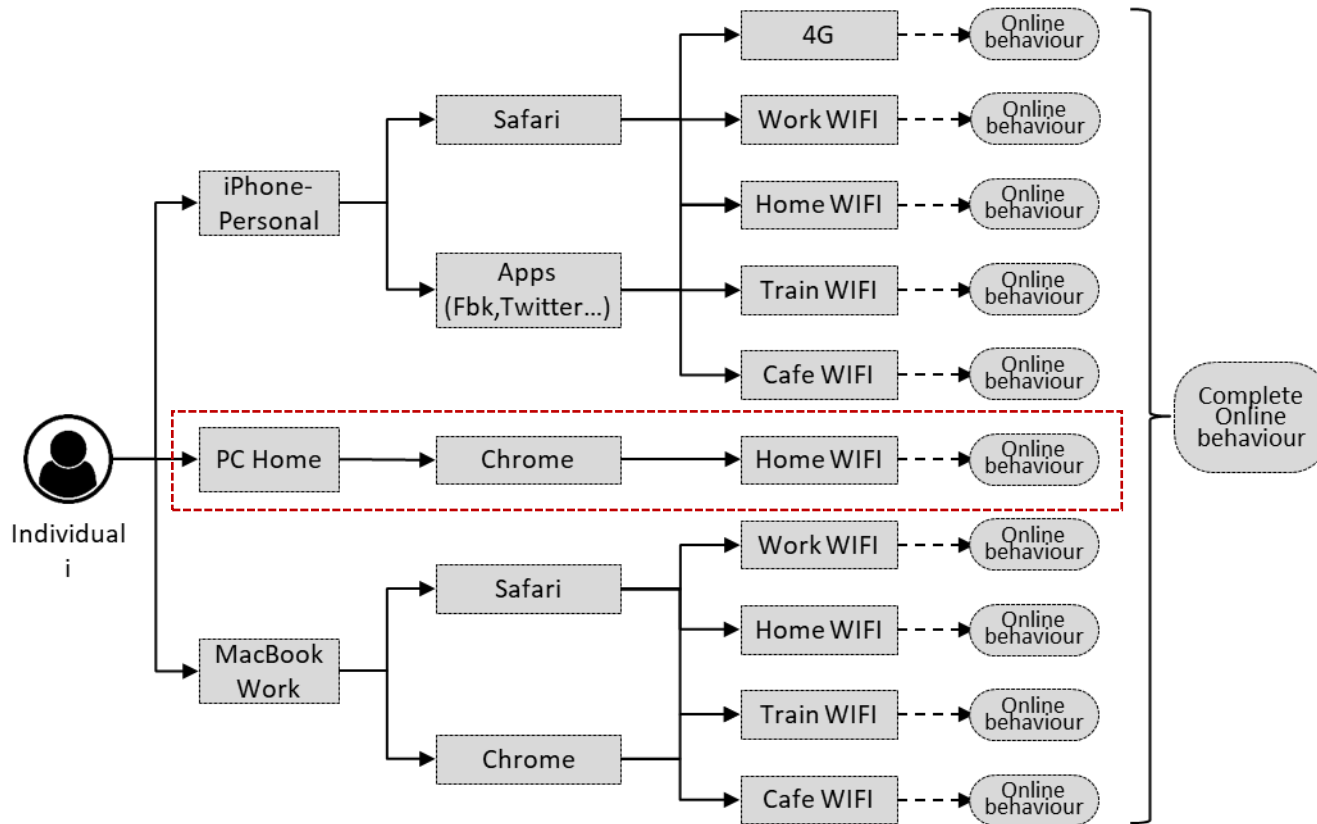
Metered data

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Is metered data actually unbiased?

- Alternative: directly observe what people do online using digital tracking solutions, or *meters*.
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Biases of metered data: tracking undercoverage

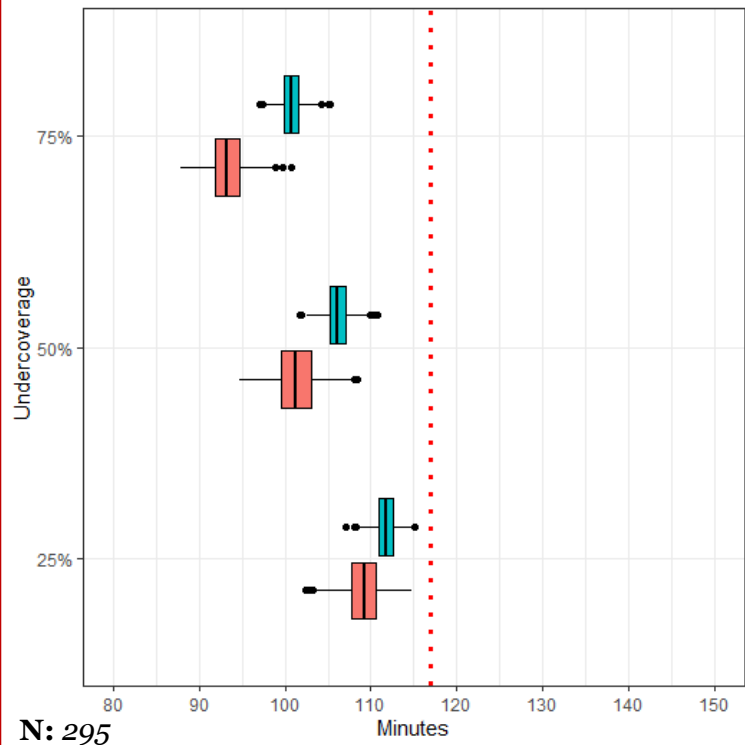


Objective: measuring individuals' behaviours

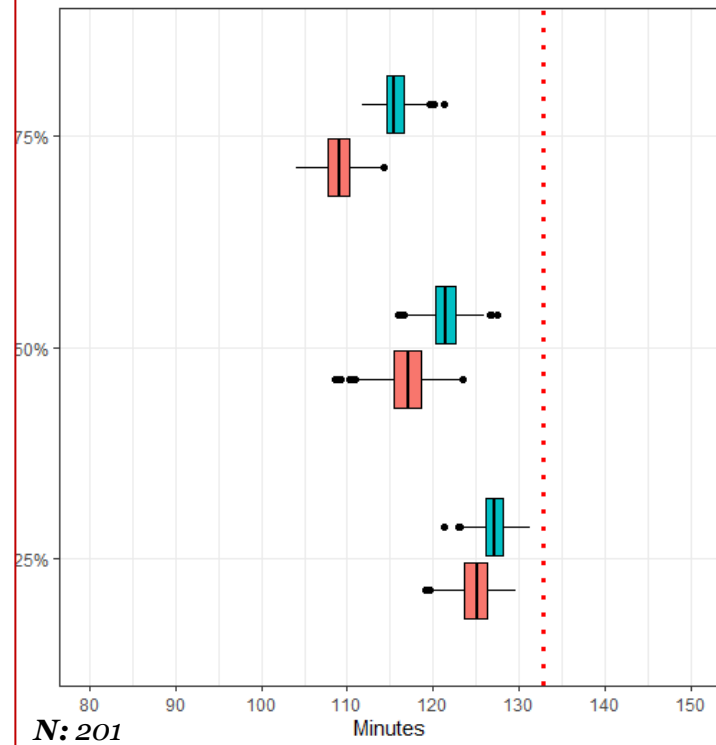
Reality: vector of those behaviours that individuals' do through all their *targets*

Average time spent on the internet

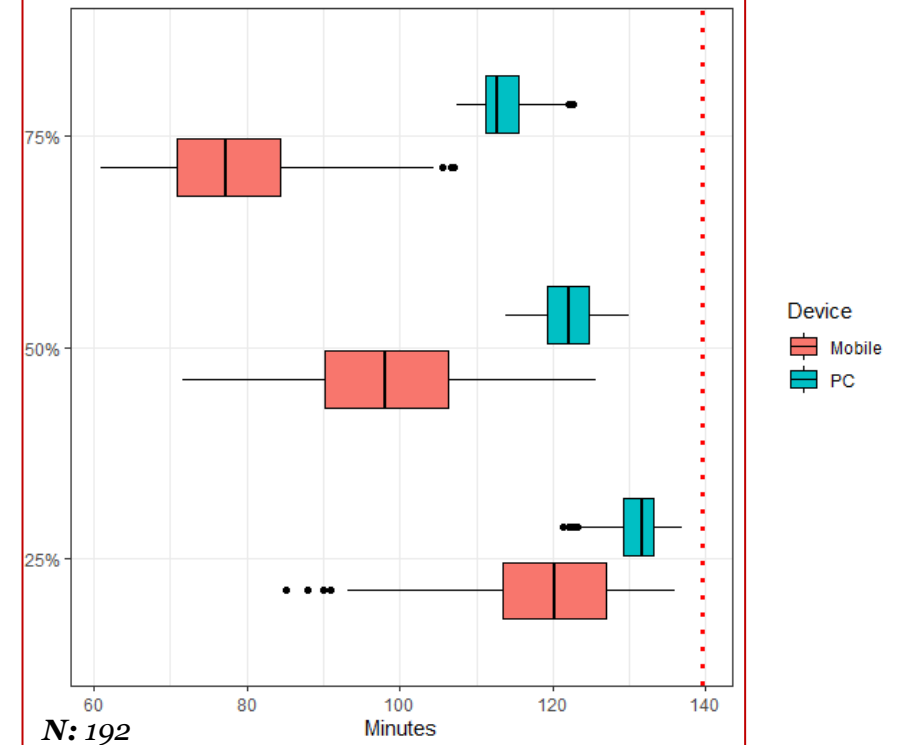
SPAIN



ITALY



PORTUGAL



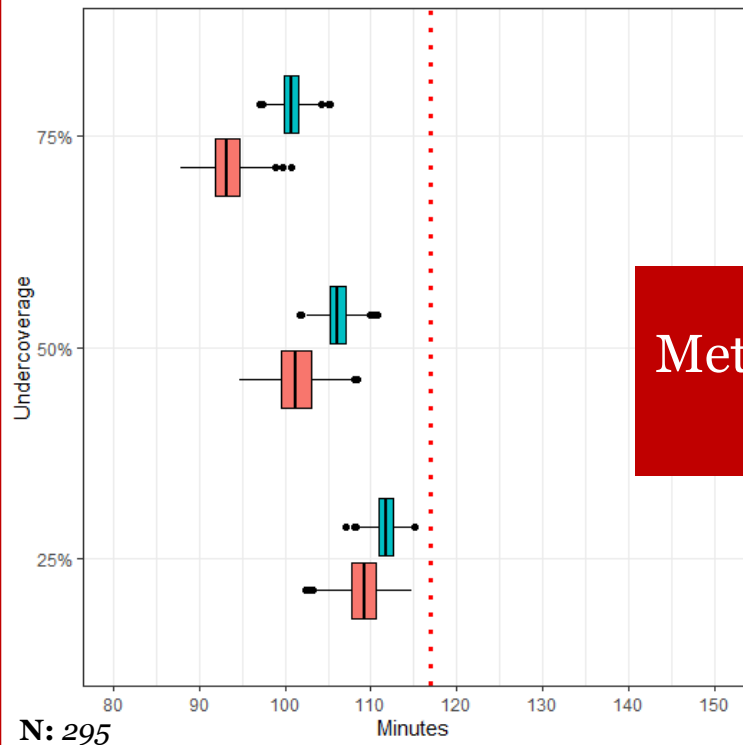
Avg. bias: 5 – 38 minutes

5 – 23 minutes

5 – 24 minutes

Average time spent on the internet

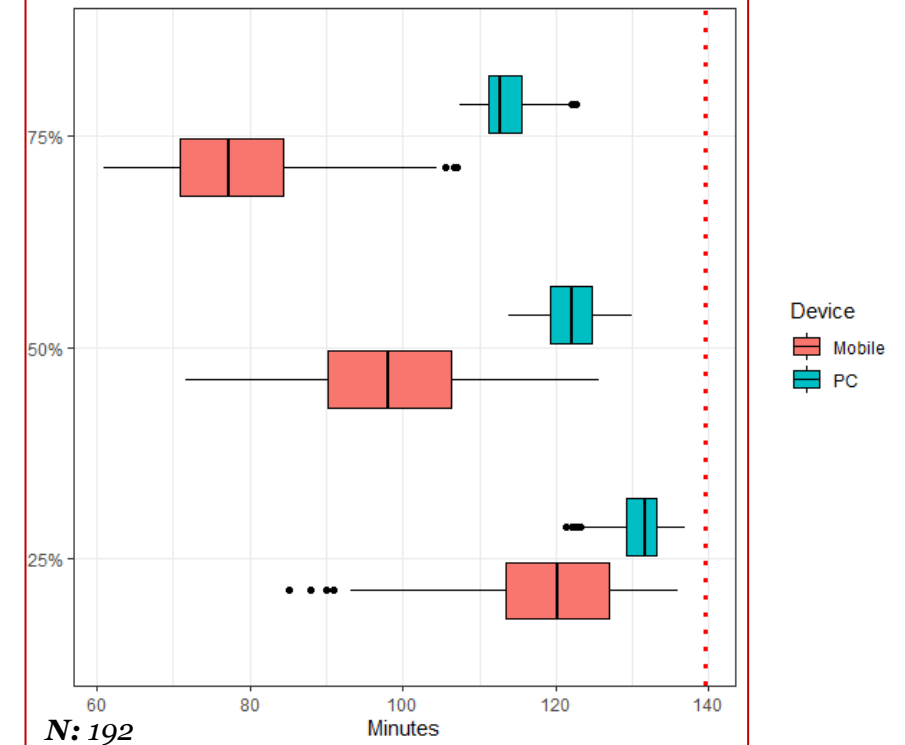
SPAIN



ITALY



PORTUGAL



Metered data is actually biased!

Avg. bias: 5 – 38 minutes

5 – 23 minutes

5 – 24 minutes

Closing remarks

Take-home messages

- Any data collection method suffer from errors
 - This is not just the case of surveys...



Three ways to measure UK coronavirus deaths

Deaths with positive test result*

40,597

Death certificate mentions Covid-19**

50,107

Deaths over and above the usual number at this time of year**

63,708

*Figure to 7 Jun. Source: DHSC

**Figures to 29 May (31 May, in Scotland). Source: ONS, NRS, NISRA

Source: DHSC, ONS, NRS, NISRA

BBC

- Probably not realistic to aim to perfect measures
 - What we need is to be aware of the errors and their consequences
 - Try to minimize them / correct for them
 - Be careful about not concluding too much!

Thanks!

Questions?

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