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Henning Silber (2015): On the interaction of study design and response behavior

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Summary:

The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between study design and response behavior. The impact of a study design on response behavior is a central issue in survey research. This relationship is especially important because recently many new and innovative survey methods have been employed by survey designers, such as collecting data using online access panels. Whereas large-scale studies employ sophisticated study designs, smaller studies, pretests and exploratory research, are carried out without any comparable data quality standards. At the same time, adjusting data quality markers seems reasonable for the purpose of exploring new ways of conducting surveys. It appears crucial to investigate, however, how these innovative study designs systematically influence response behavior. The goal of this thesis, therefore, is to theoretically systematize the interaction between study design and response behavior in order to show how differences in response behavior can be predicted which would ultimately reduce the necessity of *ex-post* explanations. The theoretical framework is based on a combination of soft form of the rational choice theory and a framework borrowed from cognitive psychology. The combination of these two theories explains various aspects of a survey interview, because the rational choice approach can be applied to model the cognitive decision making process, while the cognitive theory can be applied to model the cognitive information processing. In this theoretical context the satisficing theory, which models the cognitive process of answering a survey question may be interrupted, is combined with Stockés theory of framing. Specifically, the satisficing theory helps to explain the attitude toward a survey, while the framing theory specifies that the attitude toward the survey, guides response behavior and has a systematic and, therefore, predictable impact on response behavior.

Additionally, this new theoretical approach can be applied to cross-cultural settings, because respondents from different countries think, behave and respond differently. This is thought to be true, if the compared cultures vary in their country-specific social desirability levels. The impact of cultural variables, such as social norms and behavior, is described by the concept of culture-dependent framing. Culture-dependent framing occurs regardless of a specific question topic and is, consequently, an independent factor that influences response behavior.