Panel Conditioning in a Mixed-Mode Probability Panel: Comparing Novice and Experienced Respondents

Panel Conditioning Effects (PCE)

= artificial changes over time due to repeated survey participation

Differentiation of real change in respondents' attitudes, knowledge, and behavior from artificial change caused by prior survey participation

→ Validity of longitudinal studies is at stake
→ Conclusions on stability and change of societal patterns and causal relationships can be undermined

Mechanisms of PCE

- PCE can work through three main mechanisms
  - *Reflection:* change based on deliberation and information search
  - *Satisficing:* change based on response strategies to reduce survey burden
  - *Social Desirability:* change based on conformity with social norms

Data

- 17th panel wave of the GESIS Panel (Oct – Dec 2016) surveying experienced sample members + new panel cohort
- Random sample: German-speaking population, aged 18+, permanently residing in Germany
- Mixed-mode: Mail- and web-based data collection
- N = 4720 ($n_{experienced}$ = 3273; n_{novice} = 1447)

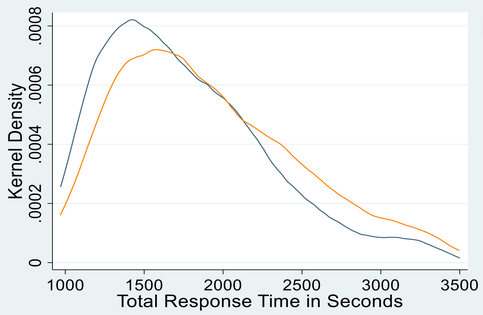
Methods

- Between-group comparisons across experienced sample members and new cohort
- Comparison between the respondent groups regarding:
  - Response latencies (excluding speeders)
  - Prevalence of "Don't Know"-responses
  - Straightlining
  - Motivated misreporting
  - Speeding
  - Socially desirable responding

– Main Findings –

Response Latencies

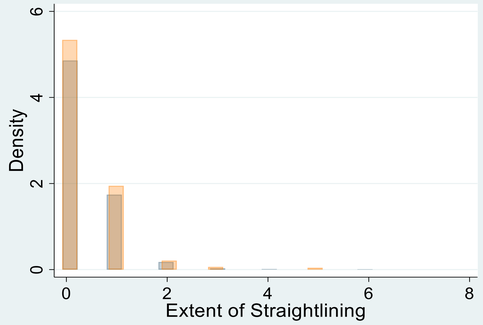
H1: Experienced respondents will show shorter response latencies due to previous reflection and familiarity with the answering process than novice respondents. ✓



p < .001

Straightlining

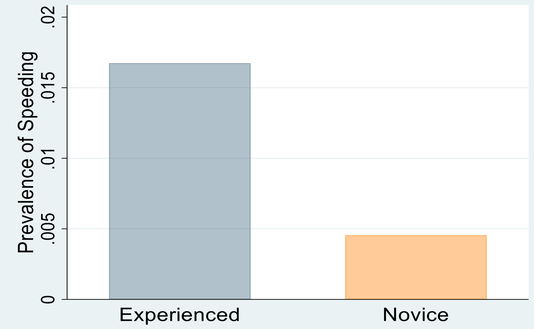
H3: Experienced respondents show greater straightlining as a form of satisficing behavior than novice respondents in order to reduce survey burden. ✗



p = .521

Speeding

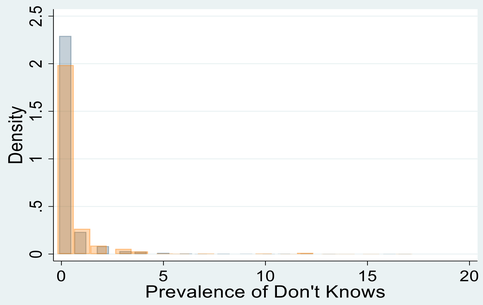
H5: Experienced respondents show greater speeding as a form of satisficing behavior than novice respondents in order to reduce survey burden. ✓



p = .001

Don't Know

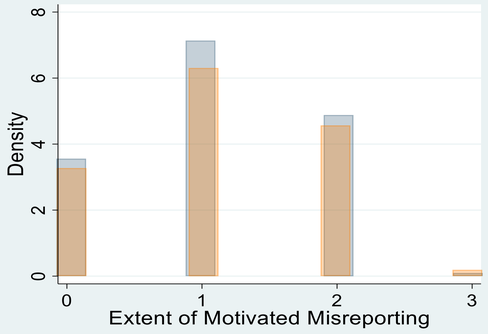
H2: Experienced respondents provide less don't know-responses compared to novice respondents due to previous reflection and information search on the surveyed topic. ✓



p = .007

Motivated Misreporting

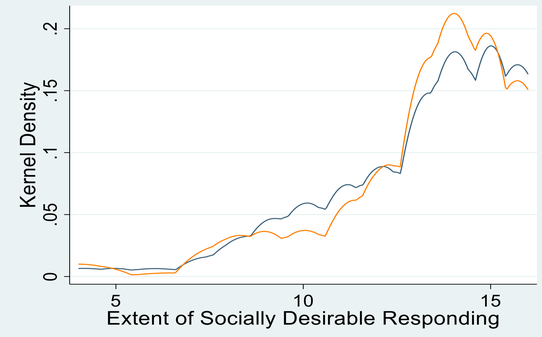
H4: Experienced respondents show more misreporting to avoid follow-up questions as a strategy to reduce survey burden compared to novice respondents. ✗



p = .139

Socially Desirable Responding

H6: Becoming familiar with the survey process results in less socially desirable responding of experienced respondents compared to novice respondents. ✗



p = .707

Negative Conditioning

- Satisficing negatively affects survey responses:
  - higher prevalence of speeding of experienced sample members as a strategy to reduce survey burden

Positive Conditioning

- Reflection positively affects survey responses:
  - shorter response latencies of experienced sample members indicating familiarity with the survey process and more reliable responses
  - lower prevalence of don't know-responses of experienced sample members

Added Value

- PCE affect response quality and can undermine results of analyses based on data of longitudinal surveys
- It is necessary to be aware of and control for PCE before making statements about causal relationships and stability or change of found patterns

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