Pictures in Online Surveys: To Greet or Avoid?

Manuela Schmid & Bernad Batinic - JKU Linz

Theory and Research Question

In the literature on methodologies of online surveys we can find a lot of contributions with the main focus on dropout rates. Due to the fact of high dropout rates in online surveys, it raises the question of how to motivate participants. The questionnaire design is a crucial factor in this regard. Pictures can make questionnaires more attractive and contribute to higher completion rates, but they can also be counterproductive (Vicente & Reis, 2010). Couper, Tourangeau, and Kenyon (2004) suggest caution as pictures can trigger recalls of incidents. The present research focuses on the question if pictures shown at the beginning of an online survey to work-related aspects distort participants’ self-evaluations of well-being, work-life fusion, and work-life conflict.

Method

Sample and Procedure:

Based on an experimental design, participants (n = 321; 65 % females; age: 15 to 69 years, M = 31.36, SD = 10.58) took part in an online survey where they were asked about work-related issues. Participants were randomly assigned into 3 groups: Group 1 and 2 were shown a picture at the beginning of the survey (see Figures below) while Group 3 was shown no picture.

Measures:

- Subjective Well-being:
  WHO-5 (World Health Organization, 1998): Well-being during the last 2 weeks, 5 items (α = .84). 6-point Likert answer format.
  - Work-Life Fusion:
    Referring to Haeger and Lingham (2014) formulation of 24 items (α = .90), e.g., “I use e-mails at work to get my family/life aspects organized.” 5-point Likert answer format.
  - Work-Life Conflict:
    Work-Life Conflict Scale by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) with 12 items (α = .88), e.g., “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like.” 7-point Likert answer format.

Results

There were no stat. sig. differences between the 3 experimental groups concerning their evaluations of well-being (Fig. 1) (F(2, 319) = 0.48; p = .62), work-life fusion (Fig. 2) (F(2, 319) = 0.62; p = .54) and work-life conflict (Fig. 3) (F(2, 319) = 0.51; p = .60).

Conclusion and Added Value

When designing an online survey, a lot of aspects need be considered to prevent high dropout rates. Meanwhile a lot of studies focused on this crucial point, but there is a need for more research which concentrates on the question when visual presentations can distort people’s self-evaluations. In this survey, pictures did not lead to distortions. Further research is needed and we encourage future studies to incorporate also time tags between showing pictures and self-perceptions.