The influence of Forced Answering on response behavior in Online Surveys: A reactance effect?

1. The Forced Answering Option (FA)

The FA (or forced response) option forces the respondent to answer or enter a response to each single item.
- Items cannot be skipped without answering
- Rationale: No missing data

2. State of the Art

Effects of FA on different quality parameters
- Less item-nonresponse (Albaum et al., 2010, 2011; Roster et al., 2014)
- Inconclusive results for FA on dropouts
  - No effects on dropouts (Albaum et al., 2010, 2011; Roster et al., 2014)
  - Higher dropouts (Décieux et al., 2015a, O’Neil, Penrod & Bornstein 2003, Steiger et al. 2007)
- Earlier dropouts (Décieux et al., 2015b; Mergener et al., 2015)
- Decrease of validity of answers (Décieux et al., 2015a)

3. Psychological Explanation?

Reactance effect
- Reactance appears when an individual’s freedom is threatened and cannot be directly restored (Brehm, 1966).
- In case this personal freedom is restricted, individuals feel pressured.
- Reactance defines the motivation to restore this loss of freedom.

4. FA and Reactance: Hypotheses

H1: FA leads to decreasing answer quality
  - Increasing dropouts
  - Increasing faking behavior
  - Increasing satisficing behavior

H2: T Reactance is a reason for decreasing answer quality

5. Study Design

Sample overview
- Students at two German universities (contacted via e-mail)
- N = 914; 54.7% females; Age: M = 26.1 years, SD = 6.6;

Survey design
- Cover story / survey topic: partnership and sexuality; No incentives
- Median response time = 9.4 minutes
- Implementation of a Dropout-Button
- Randomization across two experimental conditions:
  - FA: “You have to answer each question to reach the next page.”
  - NFA: “If you do not want to answer a question, you can skip it, without giving an answer.”

6. Questionnaire Structure

Introduction — Manipulation — Dropout-Button — Demography — 68 questions about partnership and sexuality — State Reactance — Self-reported faking

7. Measures

- State reactance: „The questionnaire made me angry“ (from 1 to 5)
- Faking: „How many questions did you not answer honestly?“
- Dropout: Did the respondents quit the survey between Manipulation and Debrieing (Dropout = 1) or not (Dropout = 0)

8. Results (I): Survival Curves

- Log-Rank Test: \( \chi^2=4.3, \text{df}=1, p < .05 \)
- Cox regression: \( \text{HR} = 1.47; 95\% \text{CI} \ [1.02; 2.11] \)

9. Limitations

- Reactance was measured after dropout
- Correlational test of mediation
- Convenience sample (student population)

10. Summary and Conclusion

- Point-biserial correlations are low, but odds ratios are high
- First support for postulated mediation model: reactance as underlying psychological mechanism
- FA leads to satisfying behavior