

Methodological progress and substantial insights in the field of internet research

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Methodological Progress and Substantial Insights in the Field of Internet Research

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We are pleased to present the first issue of the International Journal of Internet Science (IJIS). As the mission statement indicates the journal is intended to cover two kinds of related research. On the one hand it presents *methodological* research that shows how the Internet can be used as a tool for data collection. On the other hand, it presents *substantial* research on the social and psychological implications of the Internet and other new online media. It is our conviction that both streams of research can profit from each other so that the journal includes both. The current issue is giving a first impression on the *variety of approaches* to be dealt with in this journal while exemplifying the *common ground* that good empirical research is enhanced by a clear theory-guidance. Many of the articles stem from earlier presentations given at one of the international conferences of the conference series General Online Research (GOR, www.gor.de). The selection of articles brings together empirical methodological studies on important determinants of response behaviour in online data collection and empirical research on the social implications of web- and computer use. To the first type of research belong the contribution of Smyth, Dillman, Christian, and Stern, the contribution of Krysan and Couper, the paper of Göritz and the article of Ollesch, Heineken, and Schulte. To the second type belong the articles of Mesch and Talmud as well as the paper of Korupp.

The methodological perspective is being picked up by the paper of Smyth, Dillman, Christian and Stern dealing with the impact of graphical and verbal languages on response behaviour. Krysan and Couper present results of experiments concerning interviewer race effects on attitudinal behaviour. Göritz performs meta-analyses of studies on the impact of various types of incentives on response and drop out rates in online surveys. The contribution of Ollesch, Heineken, and Schulte is dealing with the effects of interviewer presence in experimental settings. All these studies can also be considered as work on the determinants of measurement error in data collection.

The sociological perspective is being picked up by Mesch and Talmud who investigate the web as an instrument for building adolescent friendship networks. They systematically compare the empirical evidence of different theories on the determinants of online friendship formation and the quality of online friendships among Israeli adolescents. Korupp picks up the topic of social inequality. She takes one step back to the determinants of computer use being the precondition for entering the web. She presents a thorough analysis of the determinants of computer use based on data of the German Socio Economic Panel and discusses the implications for social inequality.

The contents of this issue should stimulate further research and innovative approaches leading to a better understanding of the implications that web use and the general use of online and computer facilities have. As this issue shows, they have clear implications for social science methodology and theory development.

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