

# Methodological aspects of comparisons between Web & paper surveys

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In recent years there are many studies that compare different modes in collecting data, especially web vs paper mode. Comparisons are made between surveys or in the same survey; in some study respondents are randomly assigned to modes and in others people can choose the preferred mode. Results are often discordant, depending on type of population and/or by study's year.

We are presenting a comparison between paper and Web response mode, using data from a longitudinal continuous survey with a choice-free response mode. The survey is extended to a special population, defined as graduates at Pisa University since 1995; survey's goals are to acquire university assessment at the moment of graduation and to help graduates in finding job, collecting data for almost three years, both at successive waves and at graduate's request. Survey started as a paper survey in June 1997; since March 1998 a Web questionnaire was implemented but we decided to not force people in using a mode that could be perceived not adequate or not interesting: each respondent were, and is still, free to make a choice of response mode.

At a first glance, from our data it is evident that Web responses have a clear increasing rate during time: the following table contains respondents classified for response mode, survey enrollment year and gender. It regards a subset of respondents, and precisely those who compiled a questionnaire after Web questionnaire availability.

## *Changing in mode response from 1997 to 2002*

1997	F	M	Total	2000	F	M	Total
mixed mode	36.1	63.9	9.72	mixed mode	50.5	49.5	18.69
only paper	52.5	47.5	90.28	only paper	57.7	42.3	63.23
only Web	—	—	—	only Web	46.6	53.4	18.08
Total	50.9	49.1	1224	Total	53.7	46.2	2279
1998				2001			
mixed mode	29.8	70.2	11.27	mixed mode	39.5	60.5	9.91
only paper	52.1	47.9	81.72	only paper	56.9	43.1	56.28
only Web	38.8	61.2	7.00	only Web	42.2	57.8	33.80
Total	48.5	51.5	1658	Total	50.3	49.7	2594
1999				2002			
mixed mode	44.0	56.0	14.14	mixed mode	45.2	54.8	6.05
only paper	56.7	43.3	71.84	only paper	55.4	44.6	56.13
only Web	36.4	63.6	14.02	only Web	40.8	59.2	40.80
Total	51.7	48.2	1683	Total	49.1	50.9	2323

Survey characteristics and number of respondents permit us to assess comparisons between paper and Web mode in different manners. In this paper we compare:

1. response rate over time in order to investigate why graduates choose Web vs paper mode, taking into account many variables (gender, year, discipline, place of residence, hours

and/or final vote);

2. mode patterns among respondents to an equal number of questionnaires (in a longitudinal way) in order to understand which variables (if any) could be able to predict choice;
3. questionnaires by year of compilation (or other interval of time) in a cross-sectional way: each questionnaire is treated for itself, not considering if it is the first or the  $n$ th one compiled.

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