

# SSI POV: Offline

## Data Collection Mode Effects

- Each data collection method has its own bias.
- Understanding the individual biases of each mode is essential when transferring projects to different modes, or when using multiple modes within the same study.

### Summary of Mode Effects

The “mode” of interviewing is the technique used to gather the responses to the survey. The big divide in modes is between methods using a live interviewer and those where participants complete the survey themselves. Within each of these major methods there may be differences between various techniques, for example between face-to-face interviews conducted in home as opposed to in the street or shopping mall.

Mode effects have been demonstrated many times, most effectively by interviewing the same people, using the same questionnaire, at around the same time using different modes. The effects on the data between self completion and interviewed modes are due to one or a combination of any of four factors:

- 1. Social desirability:** This is the possibility that the participant does not want to give the full truthful answer because they feel it may put them in a poor light in the eyes of the interviewer. They may not want to admit to views that may be viewed as “unacceptable” on race, class or social issues or “boast” about reading prestigious magazines or watching current affairs television programs.
- 2. Acquiescence:** This is the tendency to want to agree with the person doing the interviewing, to avoid confrontation, or the appearance of being “difficult,” or from a belief that the interviewer must be “right.” Naturally with no interviewer present there is less chance of acquiescence.
- 3. The difference between hearing and reading:** In some modes (particularly telephone) the interviewer may ask the participant to perform very difficult feats of memory—for example reading out a list of brands and asking which one is preferred. It is unlikely, if the list is too long, that the participant is choosing from the full set; he is probably choosing merely from the ones he can remember. When participants have a written list to view, however, this is a relatively easy task, (hence the use of showcards in face-to-face interviewing). On a practical level, individual interviewers may mispronounce a brand name, or pronounce it correctly, but just not the way the participant pronounces it.

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- 4. Time and control:** In an interviewed mode the interviewer is in control of the interview and therefore the time allowed for answering. In a spontaneous brand recall question the telephone interviewer is in effect asking “How many brands of X can you tell me in the time I allow before I move on to the next question?” Even the use of common prompts like “Can you think of any more?” may encourage the participant to answer “no” when in fact they could think of more if given as much time as they need; or as much time as they can give themselves in a self-completion mode.

Given that there can be more than one factor acting on the data it is impossible to accurately predict the size and direction of any data movements when modes are changed. Other changes in data that occur through a change in mode may actually be caused by changes in sample frames and questionnaire design. (See the *SSI Point of View* document on “Moving Projects Online” for more details.)