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**Position paper:**

**Paper would fit in: Innovative teaching methods**

**Selfies as a means of controlling students as interviewers**  
**in a Market research course at a Swiss University**

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**Selfies as a means of controlling students as interviewers  
in a Market research course project at a Swiss University**

**Paper would fit in: Innovative teaching methods**

**ABSTRACT**

Students of a market research course project at a Swiss university were asked to take a selfie with their respondents as a control method. Students and interviewee perceptions, as well as selfies, were analyzed. The analysis of the students' perception shows that it is much more positive when the request is well explained. The respondents' perception appeared to be more positive than the students', especially when the respondents were younger and reassured on the fact that the photo would remain anonymous. Although many interviewees did not mind having their face clearly identifiable on the photo, most of them preferred to have their face hidden.

**Keywords** Market research, control, interviewers, selfie, Marketing teaching

**INTRODUCTION / LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is consensus on the importance of the quality of the data collected. Therefore, it is important to find methods to encourage interviewers to scrupulously comply with the data collection procedures. Behavior of not consciously complying with the data collection procedure is called interviewer falsification (Schreiner, Newbrough, and Pennie 1988) or interviewer cheating (Schraepler and Wagner 2003).

“Interviewer falsification” means the intentional departure from the designed interviewer guidelines or instructions, unreported by the interviewer, which could result in the contamination of data. “Intentional” means that the interviewer is aware that the action deviates from the guidelines and instructions (AAPOR 2003). In its best practices and preventive methods, AAPOR proposes observation methods, data analysis methods (e.g. analysis of extreme cases in the length of interviews), procedures for selecting people to be re-contacted (mix of random selection and identification of suspicious cases) and thus recontacting the interviewees. They all belong to a method of a posteriori verification approach (Biemer and Stokes 1989).

There are several levels of falsification ranging from partial to complete falsification (called curbstoning), i.e. the making of the entire interview without even contacting the person (Bredl, Storfinger, and Menold 2011). There is also another form of fraud that involves not following prescribed procedures for data collection, and therefore interviewing a person with different characteristics than those reported and stipulated, or under other conditions (Schraepler and Wagner 2003). The latter is known as cheating.

Various studies have shown that the percentage of manufactured interviews rarely exceeds 5%, but this can have a significant impact when conducting multivariate analyses (Bredl, Storfinger, and Menold 2011). All these methods are mainly intended to detect potential suspicious cases and to estimate the extent of falsification. These authors, after reviewing the research on this subject, concluded that the methods focus on the interview itself rather than trying to detect fraud at the interviewer level, which would represent significantly more data to analyze.

The incentive to fraud is quite strong. Indeed, from the interviewer's point of view, fraud saves a great deal of time and even cost, with minimal risk of being caught since the control mechanisms are relatively easy to bypass (Blasius and Friedrichs 2012 cited in Bhuiyan and Lackie 2016). Based on this observation, we have decided to test a new control method that will allow interviewers to better understand the risks involved. We asked the students to take a selfie of themselves with each respondent, so that we could see if the respondent met certain socio-demographic criteria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As part of a market research course at a Swiss university in April 2019, 90 students, from 3 classes, taught by 2 different instructors, were asked to conduct a street survey, on a representative sample of the population. Students were given questionnaires and instructions on the specific respondents' profiles in terms of location, age and gender. They were asked, as a control method, to take a selfie with each respondent.

Students had to send their instructors the selfies they had taken and to respond to a qualitative questionnaire including 2 questions: one asking them about their perception of the selfie method and one asking them about the reaction of the respondents when asked about the selfie. They were also asked to provide their recommendations as to how to best do this. 70 questionnaires were collected, which amounts to a 78% response rate. 32 students sent selfies, amounting to 194 photos in total<sup>1</sup>. 2 students sent respondents' telephone numbers, 1 sent respondents' e-mail addresses and 2 students had excuses as to why they were not able to send photos<sup>2</sup>. The next section synthesizes the analysis of the questionnaire responses and the photos.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Students' perception***

Overall, the perception regarding the selfie request were positive for 13% of the students, neutral for 31% and negative for 51%. However, there seemed to be an instructor bias as the students of one of the instructors had

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<sup>1</sup> 28 photos were discarded before it was decided to analyze them for this research, and could not be recovered. Therefore, only 166 photos could be analyzed

<sup>2</sup> 1 claimed he had lost his phone and 1 was about to give birth and interviewed people from her neighborhood over the phone

a much higher perception (21% positive, 54% neutral and 25% negative) than those of the other (9% positive, 26% neutral and 65% negative). This is probably due to a difference in the explanations given by each instructor as to the reasons why these selfies were requested as well as tips on how to best ask the respondents for the selfie.

The most frequently mentioned perception was *discomfort* (24 mentions), followed by *reluctant* (18 mentions) and *intrusive* (15 mentions). *Surprise* was mentioned 9 times, 5 respondents said they were *skeptical*, but that in the end, *all went well*, 5 also said they *understood the goal* of the request. *Fun* was mentioned 3 times.

### ***Respondents' reaction***

Respondents had a more positive reaction than students did, with the reaction being positive for 30%, neutral for 49% and negative for 21%. There were no significant differences between instructors.

In 49% of the cases, students' perception and respondents' reaction were aligned, but in 51% there was a discrepancy. In 44% of the cases (31 cases), the respondents had a more positive reaction than the initial student perception, whereas in 7% (5 cases), the respondents' reaction was worse.

The most frequently mentioned respondents' reaction is *surprise* (22 mentions). Respondents reacted very positively to the fact that their face *did not really need to be recognizable* on the photos (22 mentions)<sup>3</sup>. There seems to have been a *difference in the reaction of younger vs older respondents* (20 mentions). Yet, although in most cases, *younger reacted more positively than older respondents* (15 mentions), in some cases, *younger respondents reacted more negatively* (5 mentions).

*Mistrust* was mentioned 18 times, *refusal* 15 times, *fear of seeing photos published* (on the net) 13 times, *lack of enthusiasm* 11 times and *everything went well* 11 times. *It was a negotiation* and *negative* were mentioned 7 times each; *questioning the need*, *accepted after explanations* and *intrusive*, 5 times each; *accepted because part of a class requirement* and *women more reluctant than men* 4 times each; *skepticism*, *annoyance* and *varies according to feeling* (interviewer-respondent) 3 times each.

### ***Strategies recommended by students***

There were 49 mentions of recommendations: the most frequent related to the *timing of the selfie request* (12 mentions). However, opinions diverged as to the best time to do it. Most recommend doing it *at the beginning of the interview* (10 mentions), but some recommend doing it *at the end of the interview* (2 mentions).

Some students recommended using a *different control method* (20 mentions), for half of them *a letter to be signed by the respondent* (10 mentions) and for the other half, the respondent should be *asked to send a confirmation SMS* (10 mentions).

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<sup>3</sup> More details on this is provided in the photo analysis section

Some students also recommended clearly explaining the *possibility to hide the face* (5 mentions) as well as the importance to *inform the respondent* on the reason of the request (5 mentions). The need to *have an ID* or a *document* guaranteeing the authenticity of the survey and the anonymity (student card, badge, letter from instructor) was mentioned 3 times, being *smiling* and *joking* was mentioned twice. Giving *a piece of candy or chocolate* and *showing the other photos taken* were each mentioned once.

### ***Analysis of photos***

166 photos were analyzed. Among those, faces were not visible in 65% of the photos and the respondent's face appeared clearly on 35% of the photos. When the respondent's face could not be seen, 38% hid it with a smiley, 27% covered it with black and 20% blurred it. 10% showed a different part of the body (hand 4.6%, feet 3.7% and back 1.8%)

### **CONCLUSION**

This research shows that asking for selfies as a means of controlling students' fieldwork in a market research project is a good option if well explained to the students, and especially if the respondents are part of the younger population. Showing students the results of this research might reassure them on the fact that respondents are much more open than expected to being photographed after the interview, when reassured on the anonymity of the photo and on the fact that their face does not need to be recognized. A badge and an official letter to be shown to the respondents might be a useful tool.

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