Survey Professionalism:
New Evidence from Web Browsing Data

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APSA 2024

Motivation

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20 Companies That Will Pay You To Take Surveys Online

By Indeed Editorial Team
Published February 8, 2021

In the age of technology, you can make money from the comfort of your own home by taking surveys online. Companies who pay people for taking surveys value market research and can use your replies to improve their business operations. You might enjoy a job taking surveys if you prefer working from home to commuting to an office every day. In this article, we explore 20 companies who offer payment for taking surveys online.

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Reducing Costs x Data Issues

- **Inference**:
  - Representativeness of online surveys (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2014, Baker et. al 2014, Castorena et. al 2023)
  - Inference from survey experiments (Berinsky et al 2012, Coppock 2019)
- **Quality issues**:
  - Low attentiveness, speeding and straightlinning (Krupnikov, Nam, and Style 2021; Cornesse and Blom 2023)
  - Cheating on surveys (Munzert et. al 2022, Clifford, S and Jerit, 2016)
- **Professionalism**:
  - How many surveys participants are completing per days?
  - Does it matter for inference?
  - Data Quality?

Contributtions and Research Questions

Our contribution: We use high-quality digital trace data to identify the prevalence of survey professionalism, and then its consequences for data quality and inference from online surveys.

- **RQ1:** What is the degree of survey professionalism among online panel members?
- **RQ2:** Do survey professionals differ from non-professionals sociodemographically and politically?
- **RQ3:** Do survey professionals exhibit higher between-waves response instability than non-professionals?
- **RQ4:** What is the extent to which participants take the same questionnaire more than once, and do survey professionals engage in more repeated participation than non-professionals?

Data, Measurement and Design

Data

We collect web-browsing (digital trace data), roughly 90 days of data, from participants across three U.S. samples:

- **Facebook**: participants recruited through Meta Ads; install web-historian app; decide to donate/or not their digital trace data; 707 participants, 16.4 million visits, 90 days of data
- **Lucid**: online market place for surveys; install web-historian app; decide to donate/or not their digital trace data; 2,222 participants, 73.8 million visits, 90 days of data
- **Yougov**: high-quality survey provides; use their own data donation system; users decide to register with the data donation; 957 participants, 6.4 million, only up to 60 days

Definying a survey visit

Three-steps to define what counts as a survey url using their domain names:

- **Step 1:** Pre-Curated list of survey platforms (Bevec et al, 2021). We manually verify all the links, and end up with 229 platforms.
- **Step 2:** Classify all hosts that contained the word survey" as survey; Identify another 2,714 URL hosts.
- **Step 3:** Manually coded the 500 most frequently visited hosts from each of our three datasets; identify 291 additional URL hosts

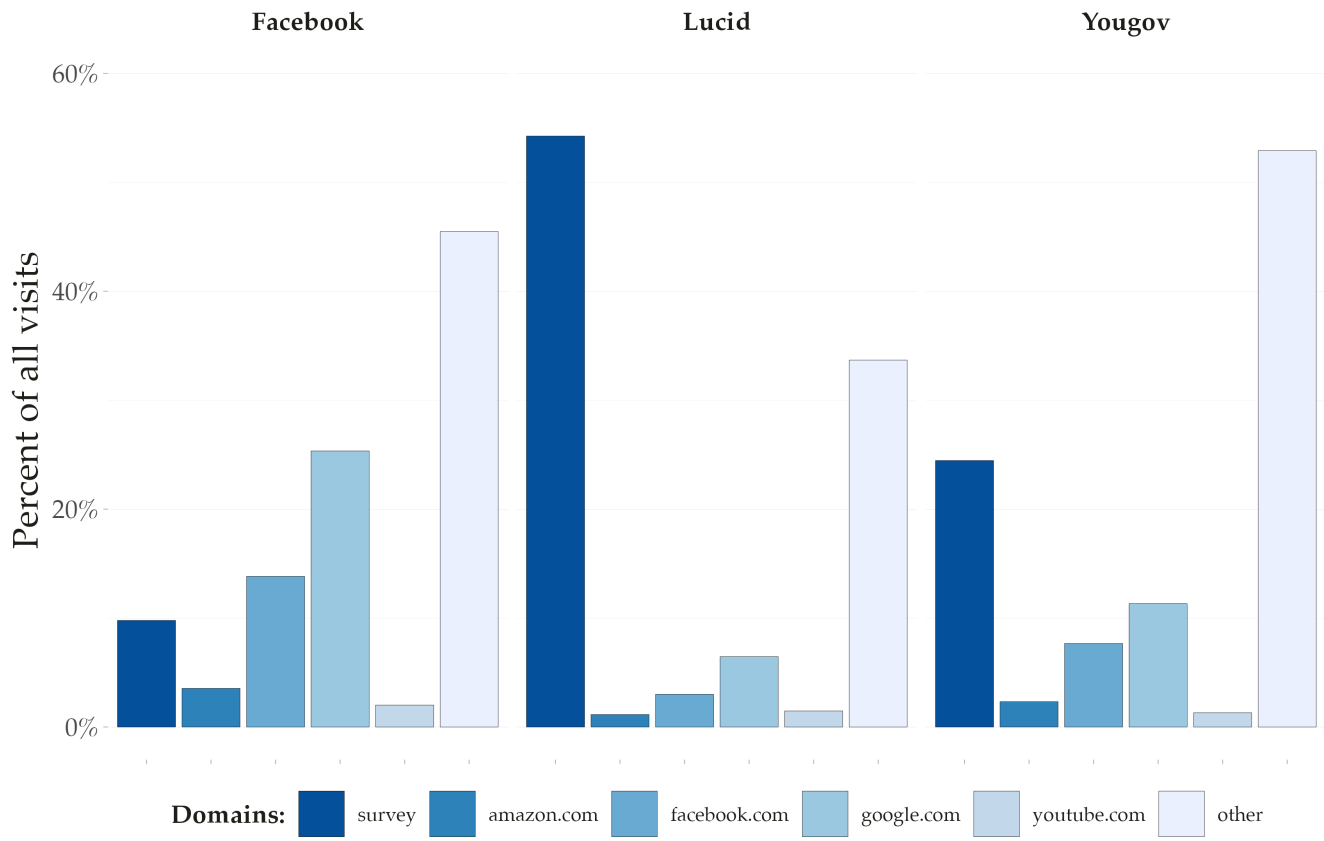
Survey Professionals

We provide four categories of survey professionalism. All results in the presentation us our first category. Results are largely robust across the different categorization.

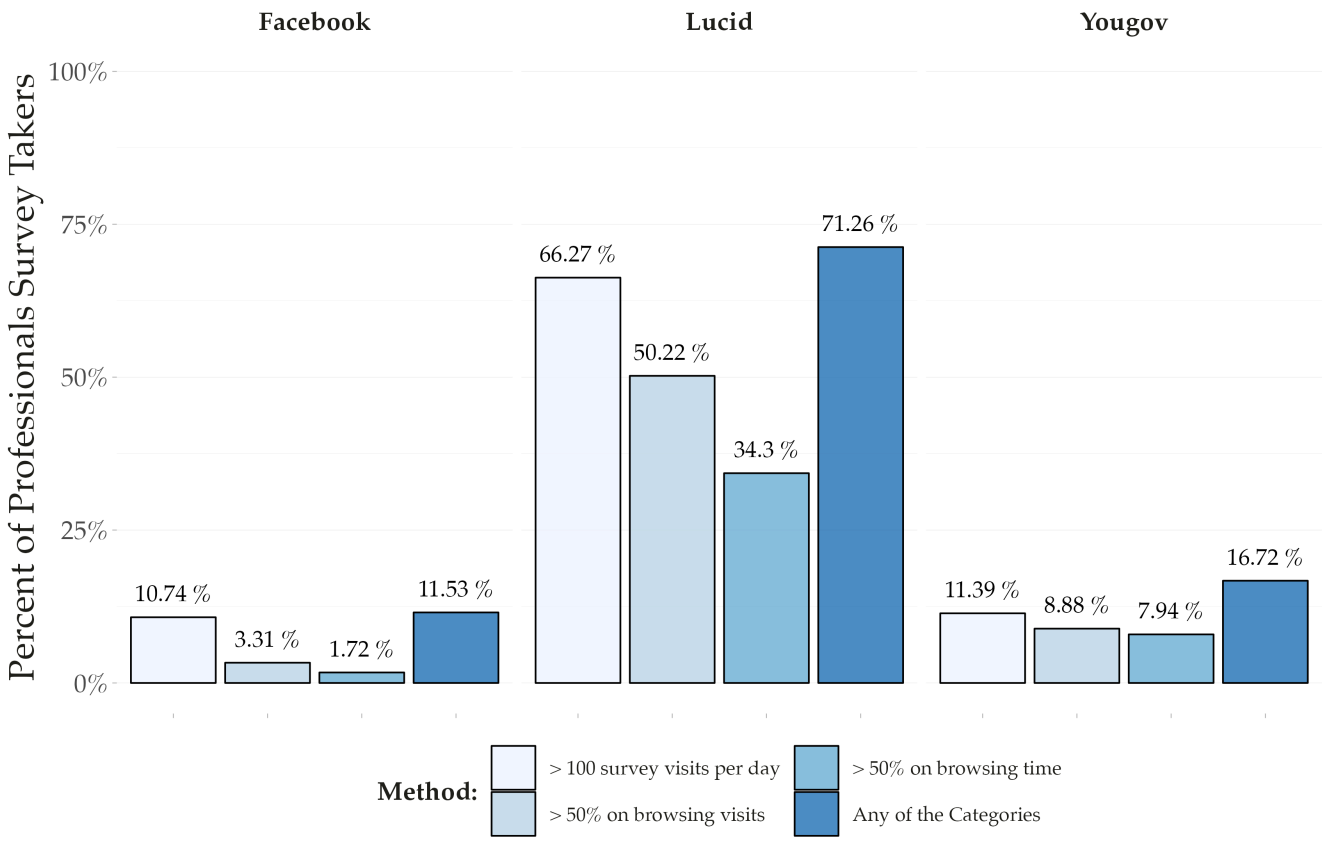
- **Definition 1:** a respondent that has on average more than 100 survey visits per browsing active day
- **Definition 2:** a respondent that spends more than 50 percent of all browsing time on survey sites
- **Definition 3:** a respondent that has more than 50 percent of all visits to survey sites
- **Definition 4:** any of the three categories above.

Results

RQ1: Time Spent on Survey Platforms vs Popular Domains



RQ1: Prevalence of Survey Professionals Across The Three Online Panels



RQ2: Demographics and Political Differences Between Professionals and Non-Professionals

Table 1: Survey professionals vs. non-professionals vs. population (professional = more than 100 survey visits / day)

		Facebook			Lucid			Yougov		
	Population	Professionals		Non-professionals	Professionals		Non-professionals	Professionals		Non-professionals
Sociodemographics										
Age (median years)	38.2	40-44	⋆⋆	30-34	42 (0.37)	⋆⋆⋆	35 (0.59)	53 (1.48)		50 (0.54)
Gender (% female)	50.8	75.7 (5.2)		74.8 (1.7)	54.2 (1.3)		53.9 (1.9)	53.8 (5.3)		54.2 (1.8)
Education (% Bachelor or more)	30.4	55.7 (6)		54.8 (2)	50.8 (1.3)	⋆⋆	44.6 (1.8)	37.4 (5.1)		35.8 (1.8)
Ethnicity (% white)	62.6	88.6 (3.8)		84.3 (1.5)	80 (1.1)	∘	76.6 (1.6)	70.3 (4.8)		71.9 (1.7)
Political outcomes										
Partisanship (1-7)	4 (0.059)	3.67 (0.27)	∘	3.14 (0.07)	3.62 (0.06)		3.48 (0.07)	3.43 (0.23)		3.49 (0.08)
Ideology (0-1)	0.54 (0.006)	0.49 (0.03)	⋆⋆	0.4 (0.01)	0.5 (0.01)	⋆⋆	0.46 (0.01)	0.55 (0.03)	⋆	0.49 (0.01)
Thermometer out-party (1-100)	17.4 (0.425)	29.98 (3.44)		25.32 (0.93)	28.16 (0.72)		28.99 (1)	21.24 (3.2)	⋆	13.97 (0.91)
Political interest (0-1)	0.4 (0.006)	0.64 (0.04)		0.66 (0.01)	0.69 (0.01)	⋆⋆	0.62 (0.02)	0.68 (0.04)		0.79 (0.01)
Political knowledge (0-1)	0.5 (0.006)				0.64 (0.01)		0.62 (0.02)	0.55 (0.04)	⋆	0.64 (0.01)
Following politics (0-1)		0.63 (0.04)		0.6 (0.01)				0.56 (0.03)	⋆⋆	0.67 (0.01)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance of differences between professionals and non-professionals were tested with a Kolgomorov-Smirnoff test for age, chi-squared tests for gender, education and race, and t-tests for all other variables ($\circ$ $p < 0.1$; $\star$ $p < 0.05$; $\star\star$ $p < 0.01$; $\star\star\star$ $p < 0.001$). Sociodemographic population data from the US Census; political variables from ANES 2020. Variables for trust, political interest, knowledge and partisanship were recoded to a scale from 0 to 1 to ensure comparability.

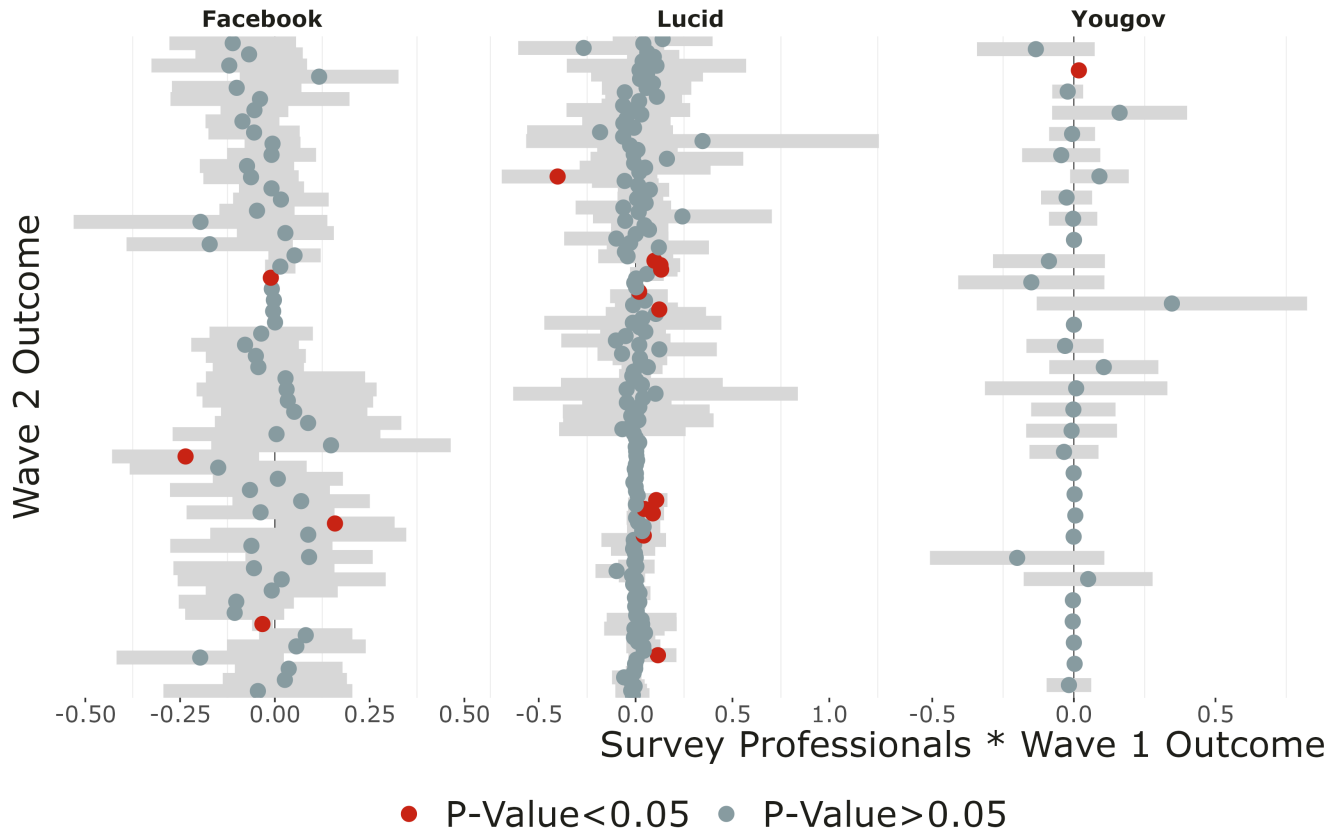
RQ3: Data Quality Between Professionals and Non-Professionals

Table 2: Response quality of survey professionals vs. non-professionals

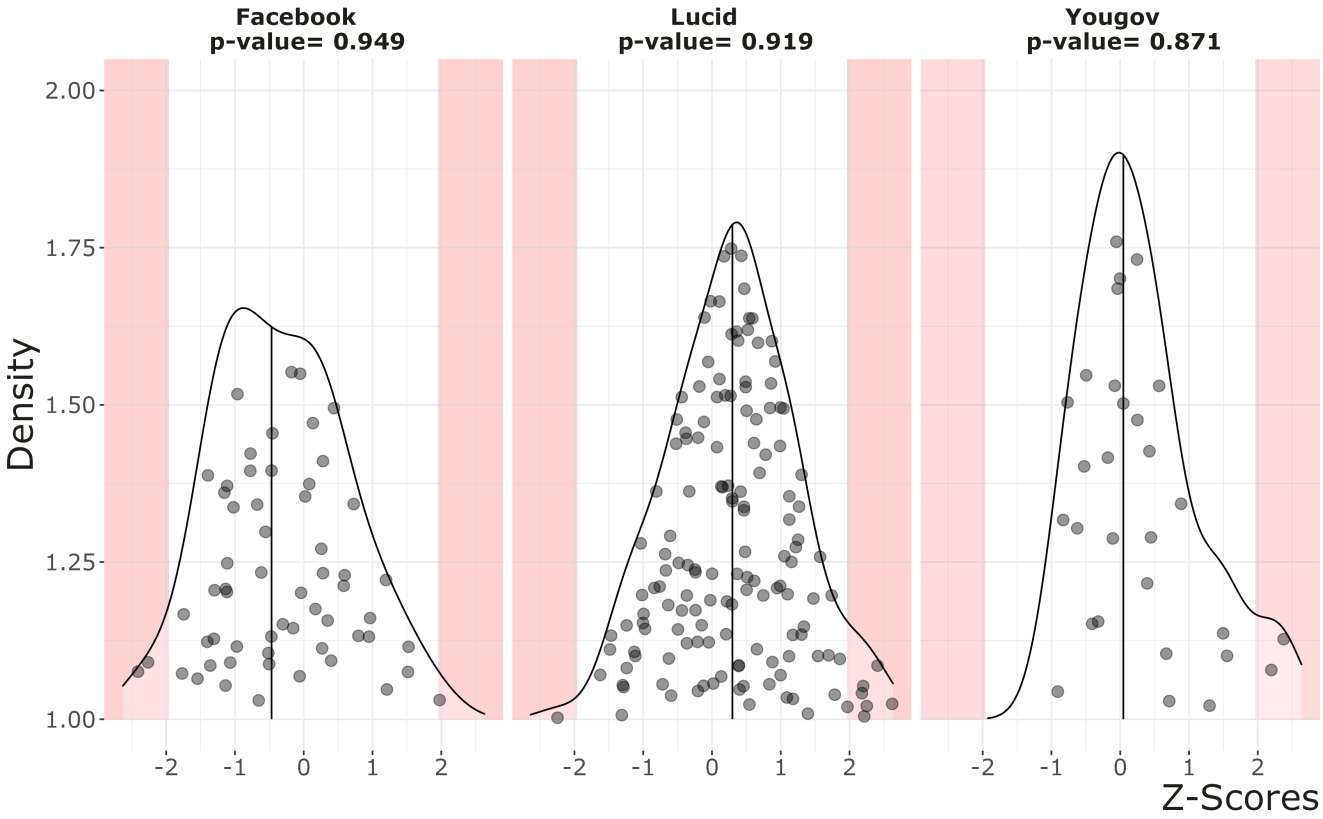
	Facebook		Lucid		Yougov	
	Professionals	Non-professionals	Professionals	Non-professionals	Professionals	Non-professionals
Straightliner (%)	2.9 (2.1)	1 (0.4)	2 (0.4)	1.3 (0.5)	8.8 (3) ∘	3.8 (0.7)
Survey duration (median seconds)	678.5 (102.46) ∘	833 (1170.086)	1108 (254.527) ⋆⋆	1189 (518.445)	1466 (9650.139) ⋆	1778 (3304.937)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance of differences between professionals and non-professionals were tested with a Kolgomorov-Smirnoff test for age, chi-squared tests for gender, education and race, and t-tests for all other variables (∘ $p < 0.1$; ⋆ $p < 0.05$; ⋆⋆ $p < 0.01$; ⋆⋆⋆ $p < 0.001$). Sociodemographic population data from the US Census; personality data from ANES 2016; political variables from ANES 2020. Variables trust, political interest, knowledge and partisanship were recoded to a scale from 0 to 1 to ensure comparability.

RQ3: Stability of Responses Across Survey Waves Between Professional and Non-Professionals



RQ3: Empirical p-value for the Stability of Responses Across Survey Waves Between Professional and Non-Professionals



Red areas represent point estimates with p-values smaller than 0.05

RQ4: Repeated Survey Taking Comparion Professionals and Non-Professionals

Table 4: Repeated questionnaire participation, professionals vs. non-professionals

	Facebook		Lucid		YouGov	
	Professionals	Non-professionals	Professionals	Non-professionals	Professionals	Non-professionals
Subjects taking at least one questionnaire repeatedly (%)	84.29	34.24	91.71	58.61	78.85	27.09
Number of repeated questionnaires per participant (mean)	7.87	1.16	15.96	2.36	4.18	0.39
Percent of repeated questionnaires per participants (mean)	8.13	7.29	9.02	7.26	8.10	5.54

Discussion

- **Professional survey taking represents a substantial portion of the online activity of the analyzed samples**
  - 34.3% of Lucid, 7.9% of YouGov, 1.7% of Facebook
- **Although prevalent, they do not introduce substantive inferential problems**
  - lack of robust cross-sample difference suggests that survey professionalism does not introduce systematic demographic or political bias
  - Professionals speed through survey, and are more likely to straightline
    - Observable behaviors:Easy to detect and control for
  - No evidence of random responses over time
- **One problematic consequence: many participants take one and the same questionnaire repeatedly**

Thank you!