

Preliminary study for representative surveys on social media in collaboration with the University of Zurich, granted by Innosuisse

Opinion research, forecasts for votes and trend barometers are important elements of companies, media and politics. But traditional surveys (telephone, panels) struggle with challenges on various fronts (difficult recruitment; biases; high costs).

The value of a company's market research largely depends on the quality of its data collection efforts. Up to now, companies mainly relied on online panel providers and crowdsourcing platforms, that pay partakers for participation in a study. However, even when stratifying for common socio-demographics like age, gender and educational level, these financial incentives introduce a number of problems such as an overrepresentation of unemployed and retired subjects or automated bots "answering" the survey that diminish the quality of the collected sample and hence the validity of the conclusions drawn from it.

Boomerang Ideas is a start-up that establishes social media as a serious market research channel using automation. Their self-service tool includes a method, that allows recruiting specific respondents quota-based through social media posts without the usual monetary incentives (so purely interest/curiosity). According to Boomerang, this allows to run representative surveys with more accurate samples, faster responses, more affordable research and thereby enable the needed validations & feedbacks.

Together with the University of Zurich and funded by an Innocheque grant of Innosuisse, a pre-study was conducted. The goal was to identify if social media is indeed a valid channel for representative opinion research. This was done comparing the novel method of Boomerang Ideas using thirteen boomerang-surveys against a measurable and objective opinion (several national votes) as well as with an established panel provider (Intervista).

Study Results

Under the scientific supervision of the University of Zurich, the pre-study examined how recruiting participants via Boomerang Internet surveys (i) more strongly motivates a self-selection into participation due to personal interest in the subject and (ii) as a consequence generate more valid results than the current status quo in participant recruitment. For this purpose, Boomerang collected thirteen Boomerang polls on social media (N between 416-976) over a period of seven months and conducted one validation study through the Swiss market research institute Intervista (N = 1007) with the scientific partner at the University of Zurich.

In a series of political polls preceding the past two Swiss national referenda, Boomerang Internet surveys often approximated actual voting results better than traditional polls conducted by Swiss market research organizations (e.g., Tagesanzeiger/Leewas, SRG/gfs; annex 1). The responses that Boomerang collected revealed that on average Facebook users hold a more conservative political opinion (e.g., in favor of the Burka initiative or opposing the E-ID law) while users from LinkedIn, Instagram or Snapchat are more progressive. In a validation study, we further measured individuals' fear of a Corona infection as well as their perceived and actual knowledge of the virus and compared Boomerang responses to responses from the Swiss market research institute Intervista: While the average fear of a Corona infection did not significantly differ between both samples, the knowledge illusion, i.e., the gap between perceived and actual knowledge of the virus, was bigger for social media users compared to the participants of the marketing panel (annex 2).

This series of Boomerang polls taught us a few things about the psychology of social media users and the optimal framing of a Boomerang survey. As participants self-select into participation by clicking on the first survey question that is shown in their social news feed, the wording of that question is essential: While an emotional, provoking question is suitable to target impulsive responses (e.g., impulse buying, popular political issues), a factual, objective question is better at targeting deliberate responses (e.g. planned buying, complex political issues). In general, individuals who stick through

the survey are usually more committed to the subject compared to individuals who drop off early. Finally, the wording of each survey question should be chosen carefully. For instance, the political polls predicted voting results much more precise when participants had an 'Undecided' option and were not forced to take a position.

All in all, the results show that Boomerang is indeed a valid tool to collect large samples that accurately depict the public opinion. The data indicates that the self-selection of participants and the structure of the sample heavily depend on the framing of the first survey question that is shown on the social media news feed (for instance its emotional value). In general, the responses on social media tend to be more intuitive compared to responses from traditional marketing panels. In the future, it will be interesting to analyze how this affects the suitability of Boomerang Internet surveys in different domains (e.g., impulse vs planned buying). Moreover, we aim to further uncover the main differences between the populations of different social media platforms in order to enable an optimal customer targeting when launching Boomerang surveys.

Take Aways

1. Boomerang offers a valid solution to conduct large customer samples and political polls. In **2 out of 3** political polls Boomerang predicted voting results better than the competition. While a Swiss market research institute took **10 days** to collect 1'000 observations, Boomerang finished within **6 days**.
2. Boomerang participants are committed. **More than 30%** of the participants who self-select into participation fill in the Boomerang until the last question. Among those, between **25-50%** voluntarily disclose further personal information.
3. Boomerang allows for the sophisticated – and often, due to the high effort in recruiting, neglected method – **cross-quota sampling** ensuring that all population groups are reached, and group differences can be clearly identified.
4. In contrast to traditional marketing panels, participants recruited by Boomerang give more **intuitive responses**: This makes Boomerang the optimal channel for surveys on fast consumer goods and polls on topics of high societal interest.
5. As Boomerang collects data across **various social media platforms**, different population groups can easily be targeted: For instance, while Facebook users hold a more conservative political opinion, users on LinkedIn, Snapchat and Instagram are more progressive.

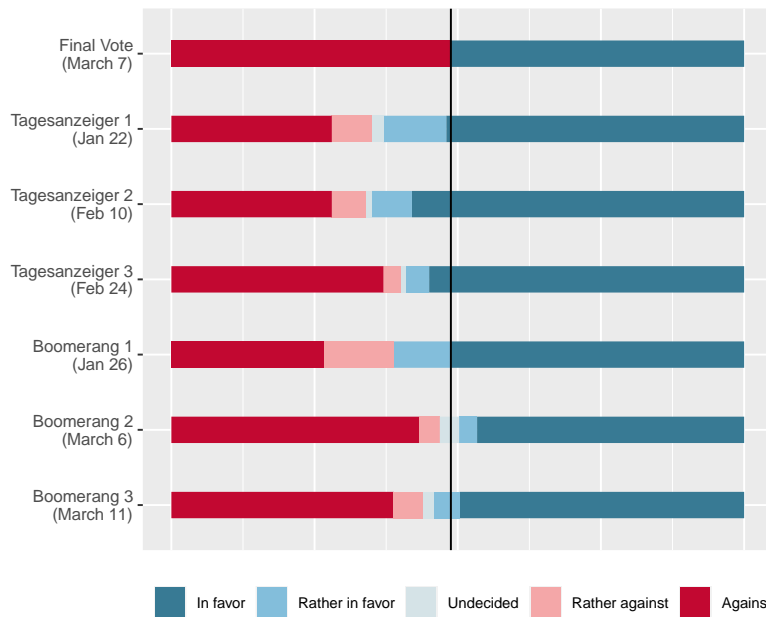
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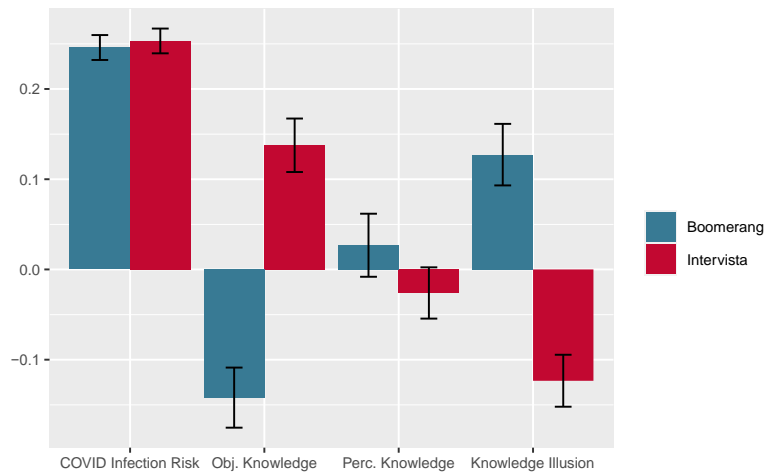
Annexes

Boomerang Validation – Burqa Initiative



1 – Boomerang polls on social media often approximated actual voting results better than traditional polls.

Boomerang Validation – COVID Infection Risk



2 – For intuitive questions, Boomerang does not significantly differ with the control group. However, due to the nature of social media, there is a larger knowledge illusion.