



Running Case Study 7

Surveys

In the last chapter, we learnt that Rebecca had designed a web-based questionnaire to collect her responses. But was it a wise decision to use the web? Looking at her response rate, it compares well with similar studies and compared to her friend Alexander (see Chapter 4) her response rates were impressive. Except for the Facebook approach (for which she could not really calculate a response rate, as she did not know how many people were approached through the snowball system), in her two other samples the vast majority did not respond. In the past, Rebecca has also received requests to fill in questionnaires online. In the last few months, she honoured all these requests just to see how other people designed their questionnaires, but previously she would usually only fill out those that came from other students she knew or if she was interested in the topic. She suspected that her topic 'student ethics' was also the major reason for her rather high response rates, as student ethics is a hot topic among students.

Thus, despite the fact that Rebecca had collected 161 responses, she worried about the quality of her data. One issue was whether her sample would suffer from a systematic non-response bias. It seemed obvious to her that people who knew her well were more likely to respond and she also thought that the respondents from her Amsterdam sample probably knew Brenda better than the non-respondents. But would that matter? Another worry she had was whether the respondents were really honest in answering her questions (see also the Running Case Study Chapter 13). Her final concern was the uneven distribution of respondents across university – she had just four or less respondents for universities other than Amsterdam and Maastricht. Were all her concerns justified? Her supervisor told her that she could probably compare Amsterdam and Maastricht respondents with each other, but not with the respondents from the other universities.

Next week, she has been invited to the 25th birthday of her high school friend Esther, who studied accounting in Rotterdam. Esther was one of the Facebook friends she approached and currently she has four responses from Rotterdam. Now she is considering whether to take some of the questionnaires with her to conduct a few face-to-face interviews in Rotterdam. She could either ask some of Esther's friends directly to answer the questionnaire or could even walk into the university canteen or library and ask students there whether they could spare a couple of minutes to fill out a paper and pencil questionnaire. If she could get about 20 more responses from Rotterdam, she could at least compare three universities and not just two. Would it also make sense to approach her brother Leon, who studied in Tilburg to collect 20 more responses from students in Tilburg? She could even offer to pay him €2 for each completed questionnaire. Of course she could not mention to Esther that she would be paying her brother while she did it for free.

- 1 Should Rebecca use the web to collect data?
- 2 What do you think about her measures to increase the response rate?
- 3 What response errors are likely to occur in Rebecca's research and what could be done to reduce, if not eliminate, them?