Testing the Equivalency between Online and In-Person Measurement of RWA, SDO, and MRS

Bradlee Gamblin, Benjamin Lindsay, & Matthew P. Winslow

Eastern Kentucky University

Introduction

There are a number of advantages of computer-based psychological research, including convenience, automation, efficiency, and anonymity. Through these four benefits researchers can increase the number of eligible participants, have data automatically cleaned and entered into an analyzable file, reduce the amount of time and money required to collect data, and decrease or eliminate demand characteristics and observer bias. Because internet-based measures have been shown to reduce the level of demand characteristics and social desirability effects, computer-based research may be preferable when appraising potentially sensitive social beliefs or attitudes, such as racism and prejudice.

The current study seeks to examine the equivalency between internet and in-person administrations of three measures of explicit social attitudes. The results of previous research suggest that for many measures, especially personality measures, internet administration produces equivalent results when compared with in-person administration. The current study attempts to expand these findings to measures of social psychology, or more specifically to common measures of racism and prejudice.

Methods

Participants

- 151 participants (74 in person, 77 online)
- Average age = 20.5
- 40 males, 110 females
- 123 Whites, 14 African Americans, 9 other (no Hispanic)

Measures

Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 2006) 20-item scale measuring authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism.

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) 16-item scale measuring preference for inequality.

Modern Racism Scale (MRS; McConahay, 1986) 7-item scale measuring beliefs about race-relations in the U.S.

Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) response-time measure of association between categories and general valence.

Procedure

All participants came to the lab and completed the IAT. Half were then randomly assigned to the online condition, and half to the in person condition. The online participants were told to complete the RWA, SDO and MRS online through the Sona system at their convenience in the next two weeks. Order of presentation of the scales was randomized.

In person participants completed the three measures immediately following the IAT. Again, order was randomized.

Results

There were no significant differences between the in-person and online versions of any of the measures.

Discussion

The data show that there are no significant differences between the “online” and “in person” conditions. This means that data collected using the Modern Racism Scale (MRS), Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), and the Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) measures will be reliable whether they are administered online, or in a lab. There was also no significant difference in the results of a racial IAT (implicit attitudes task) between the two groups, showing that they had similar implicit racial preferences at the beginning of the study. Based on these results, internet based measures are equivalent to measures used in a lab setting.

The results of each of the three explicit measures were significantly correlated both conditions, save for a single instance. In the “online” condition, SDO did not show a significant correlation with RWA. None of the explicit measures in either condition were significantly correlated with the results of the racial IAT.

Conclusions

• Online assessment techniques are equivalent to assessment in a lab.
• Based on the current results, researchers can use online assessment when convenience or other research concerns call for it.
• Future research should explore this topic with other samples, and with other measures.