Recruiting Research Participants across the World

Observations from a 30+ country data collection project

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February 18, 2025

This session

1. Recap: How to recruit research participants via social media?

2. Advantage for cross-national research

3. Overview of what we have done

4. Explaining cross-country cost differences

5. Comparing our samples to the population

6. Quota sampling experience in Burkina Fasa

7. Disadvantages and challenges

Recruiting research participants through Meta platforms

How does a Facebook ad look like?

Step-by-step to participant recruitment

1. Set-up a Facebook account and page

2. Purchase advertisement space on Facebook and Instagram

3. Run your ads on Facebook and Instagram

4. Users self-select into clicking on your ad or not

5. Direct users to your survey platform (e.g. Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, Google Form)

6. Participants complete your survey

Resources

Recruiting Research Participants through Facebook Advertisements: A Handbook*

Anja Neundorf (University of Glasgow)
Aykut Öztürk (University of Glasgow)

Version: December 9, 2021

RESEARCH ARTICLE

How to improve representativeness and cost-effectiveness in samples recruited through meta: A comparison of advertisement tools

Anja Neundorf, Aykut Öztürk

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Social Media Recruitment in Online Survey Research: A Systematic Literature Review
Zaza Zindel

Abstract

The growing percentage of the population on social media creates new and expanded opportunities for survey researchers. Recently, a growing number of studies have been using social media to recruit survey respondents. Many social media platforms have powerful targeting capabilities that can be used to recruit even rare or hard-to-reach populations. However, thus far, the survey research literature lacks a comprehensive overview of potentials and limitations. This literature review aims 1) to provide an overview of the current literature on the use of social media as a recruitment tool, 2) to highlight the potential advantages and disadvantages for survey research, 3) to identify current research gaps, and finally, 4) to provide practical guidance for researchers interested in integrating social media recruitment into their research.

A guideline on how to recruit respondents for online surveys using Facebook and Instagram: Using hard-to-reach health workers as an example (Version 1.0)

[working paper]

Pötzschke, Steffen
Weiß, Bernd
Daikeler, Jessica
Silber, Henning
Beuthner, Christoph

Advantage for cross-national research

Advantage for cross-national research

- Meta is everywhere
- Consistent way of collecting data
- Full control
- Reach to the Global South, security concerns for f2f surveys
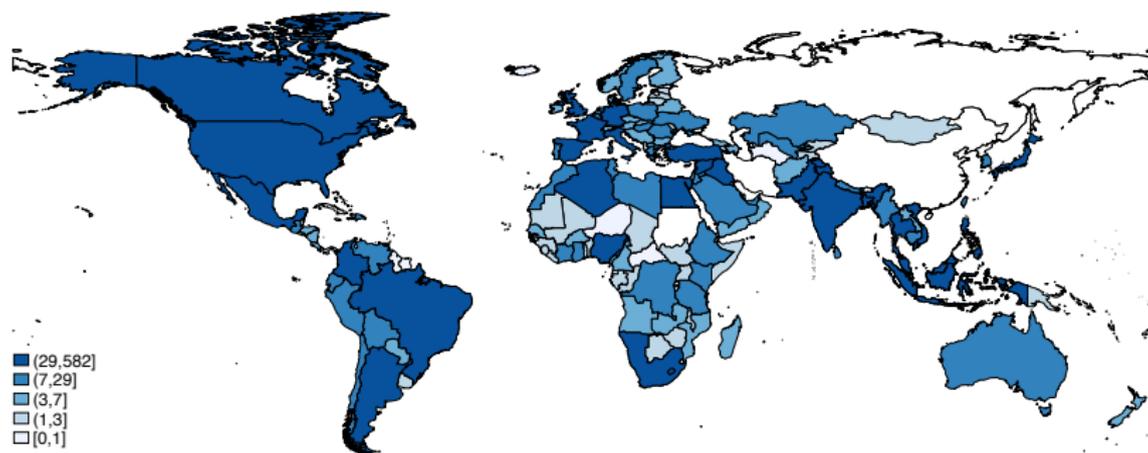- Cheap

Meta is Everywhere-1

Figure 1: Number of regular Facebook users (in millions - 2024)
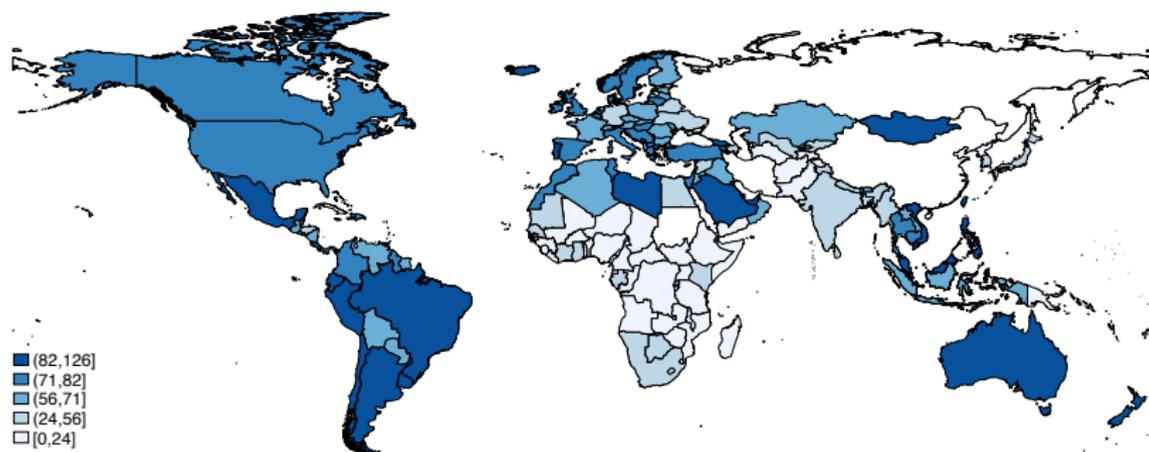
Meta is Everywhere-2

Figure 2: Percentage of the population using Facebook (2024)

Introducing the DEMED study

Research Design

- Online survey experiment testing the impact of three original civic education treatments.

- Data collection: May 6 to October 5, 2023

  - Participants were recruited online using Facebook and Instagram ads.
  - Over 90,000 people saw our videos and over 65,000 completed the survey.
  - Survey was administered through Qualtrics.

- Facebook Ads setup

  - Targeting: Age (3 categories), Gender (2 categories), Education (Lower education prioritized)
  - Budget: Around 100£ per country per day
  - Goal: Around 1,500 respondents per country

Case selection: 33 countries worldwide
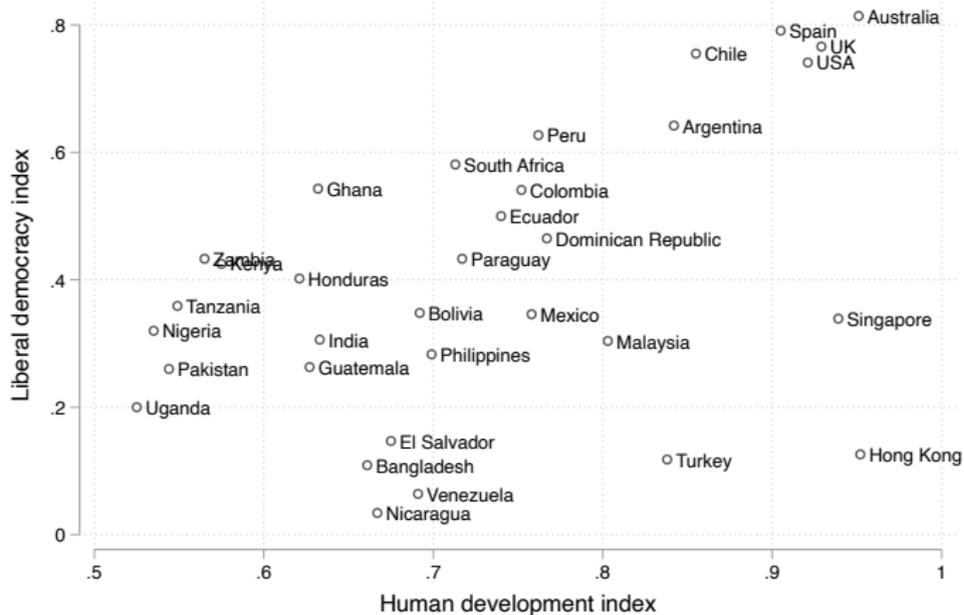
1. Maximize variation in pol. and econ. context
2. At least 2 Mill regular FB users
3. English or Spanish official language + Turkish
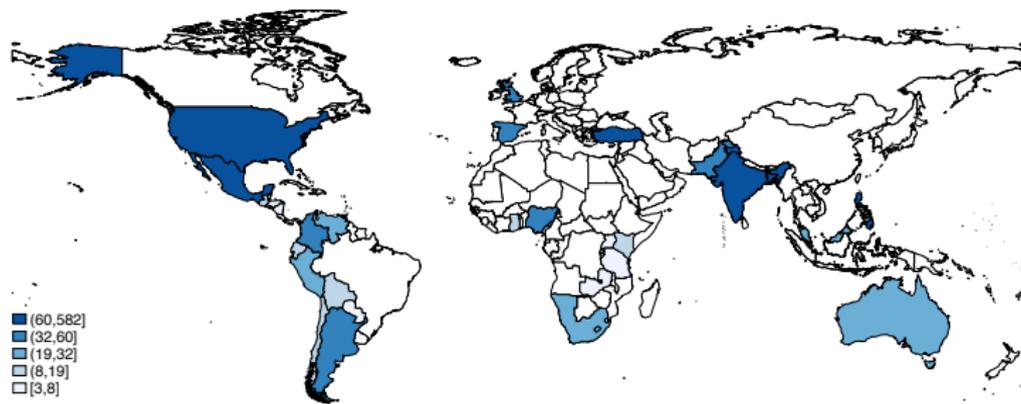
DEMED cases: 33 countries worldwide

Figure 3: Number of regular Facebook users (in millions)

Survey costs

DEMED advertisement campaign - *Survey Cost (in $)*
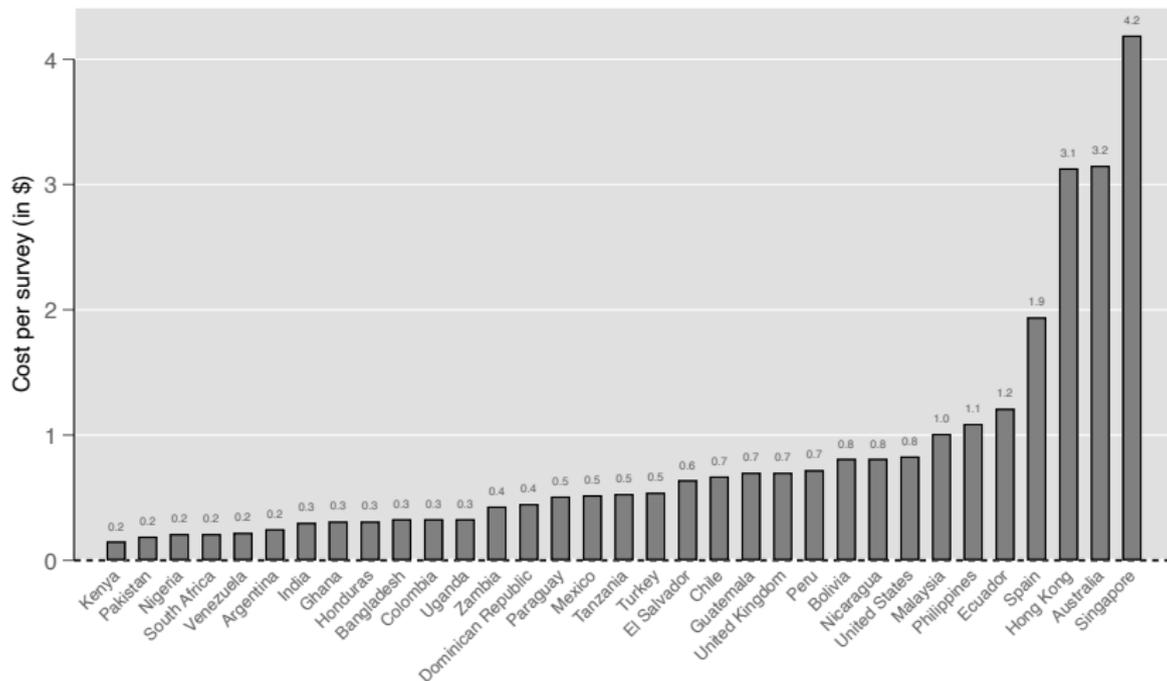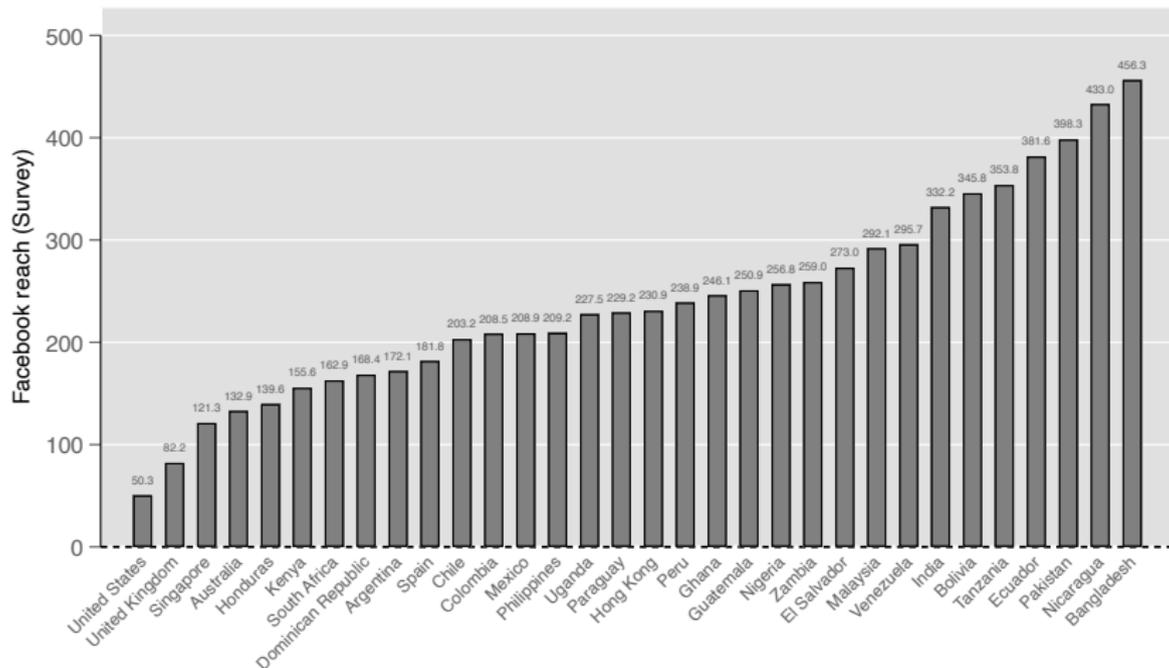

Figure 4: Costs per completed survey

Where do cost differences come from?

1. How many "reach" can you buy?
2. What is the proportion of social media users clicking on your advertisement?
3. How many Facebook users are there in the country?

DEMED advertisement campaign - *Reach* (N of people who viewed the ad)

Where do cost differences come from?

1. How many "reach" can you buy?
2. What is the proportion of social media users clicking on your advertisement?
3. How many Facebook users are there in the country?

DEMED advertisement campaign - *Click-Through Rate*
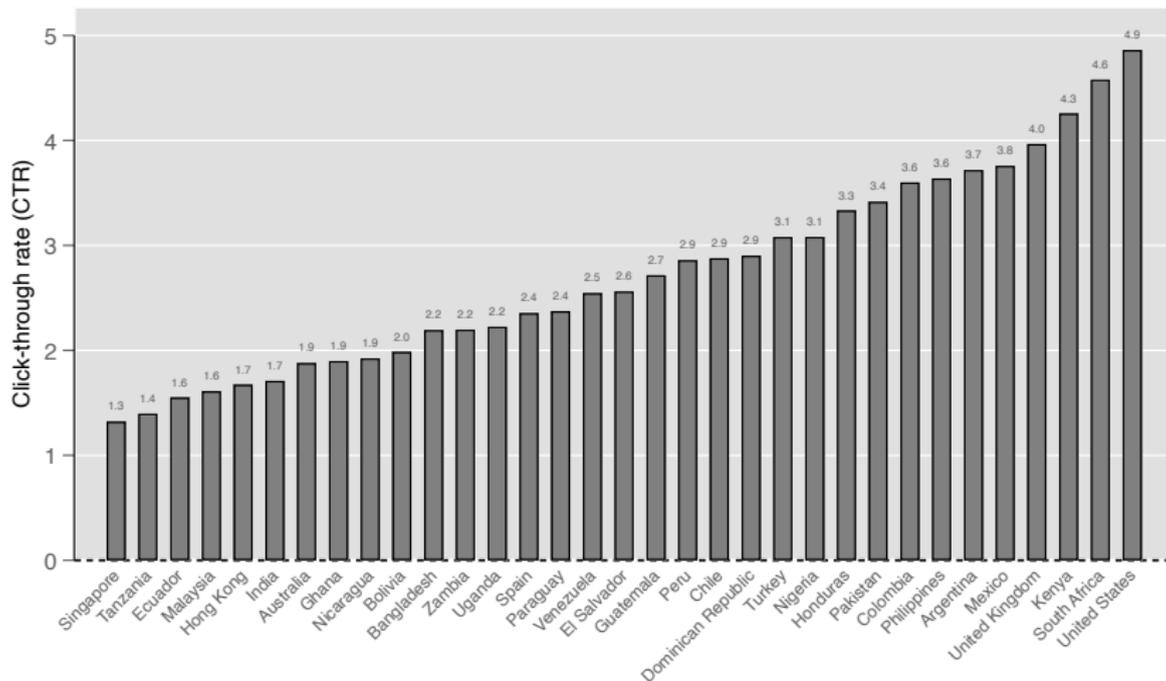
Figure 6: Click-Through Rate

Where do cost differences come from?

1. How many "reach" can you buy?
2. What is the proportion of social media users clicking on your advertisement?
3. How many Facebook users are there in the country?

DEMED cases: Number of regular Facebook users

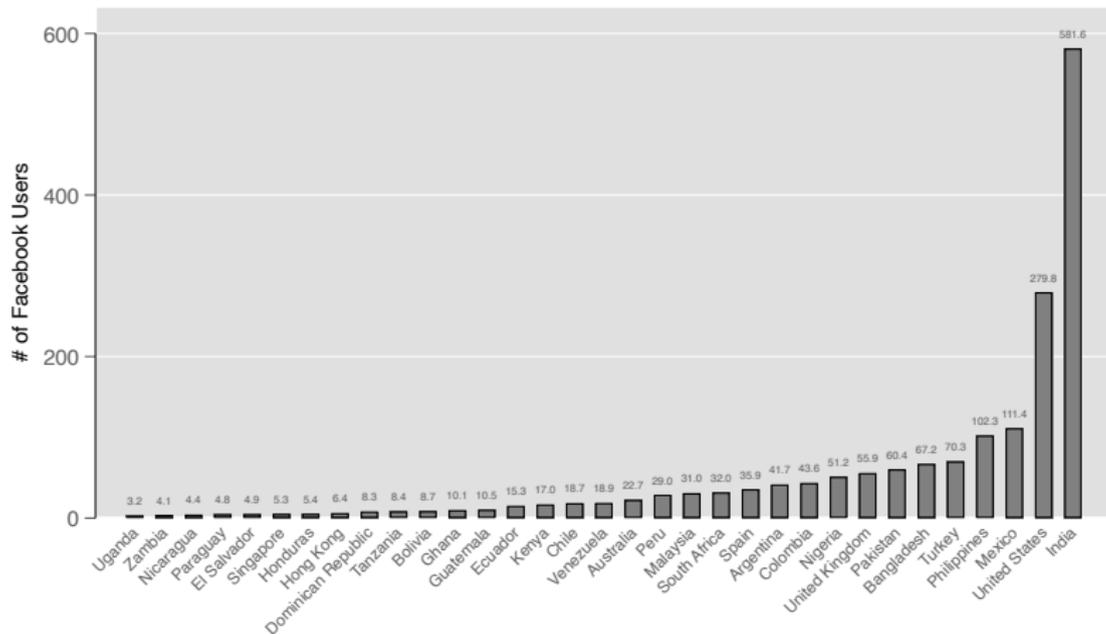Figure 7: Number of regular Facebook users (In million)

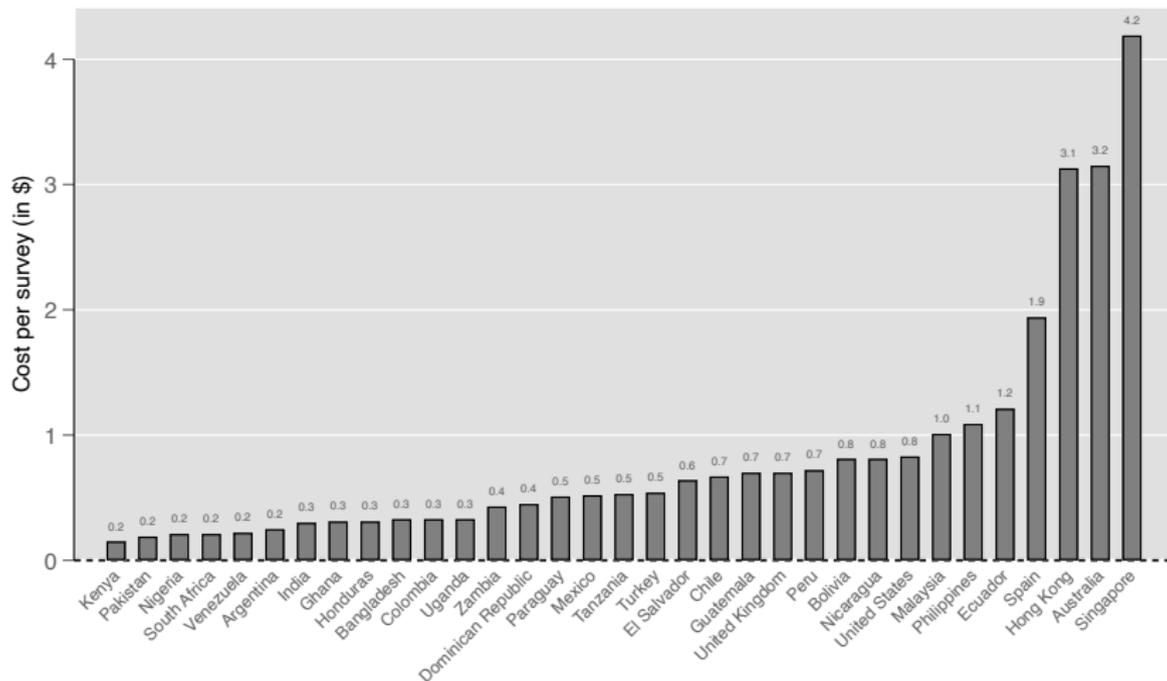# DEMED advertisement campaign - *Survey Cost (in $)*

Figure 8: Costs per completed survey

Comparing our sample to the population

DEMED cases: Percentage of Population Reachable on Facebook
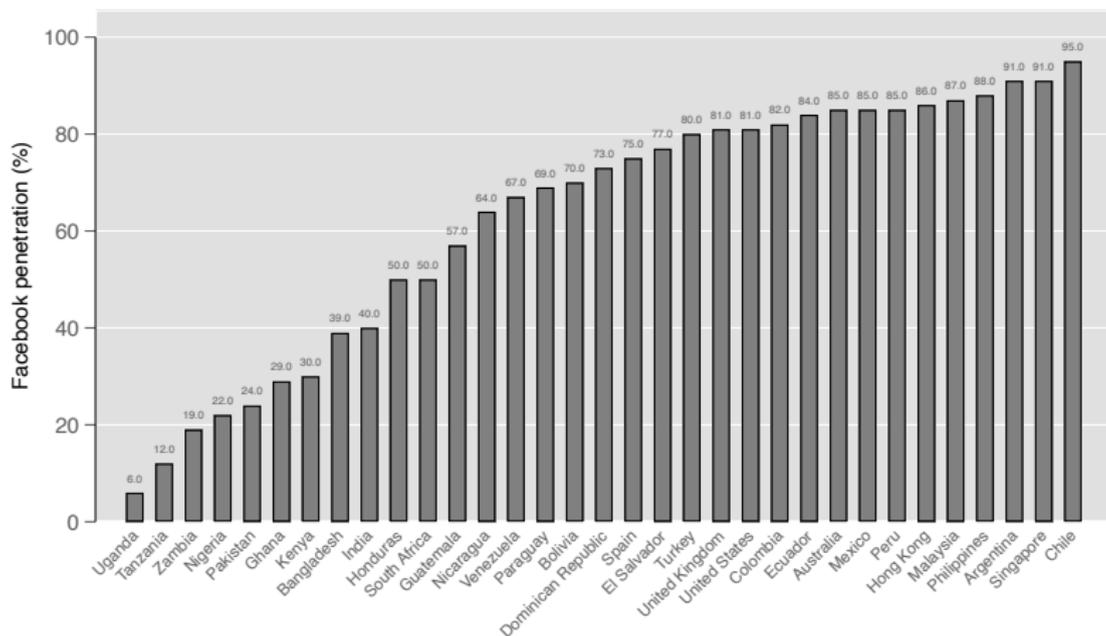
Figure 9: Percentage of Population Reachable on Facebook

What did we do to improve the representativeness?

- Targeting options
  - Primary audience targeting: Age (3 categories), Gender (2 categories)
  - Detailed targeting: Lower education categories prioritized
  - We had to give up targeted advertisements in some countries, such as Singapore

- Incentive-based advertisements

Advertising Online Surveys on Social Media:

How Your Advertisements Affect Your Study

Accepted for Publication at *Public Opinion Quarterly*

Anja Neundorf[1]   Aykut Öztürk[2]

Sample comparison - *Female*
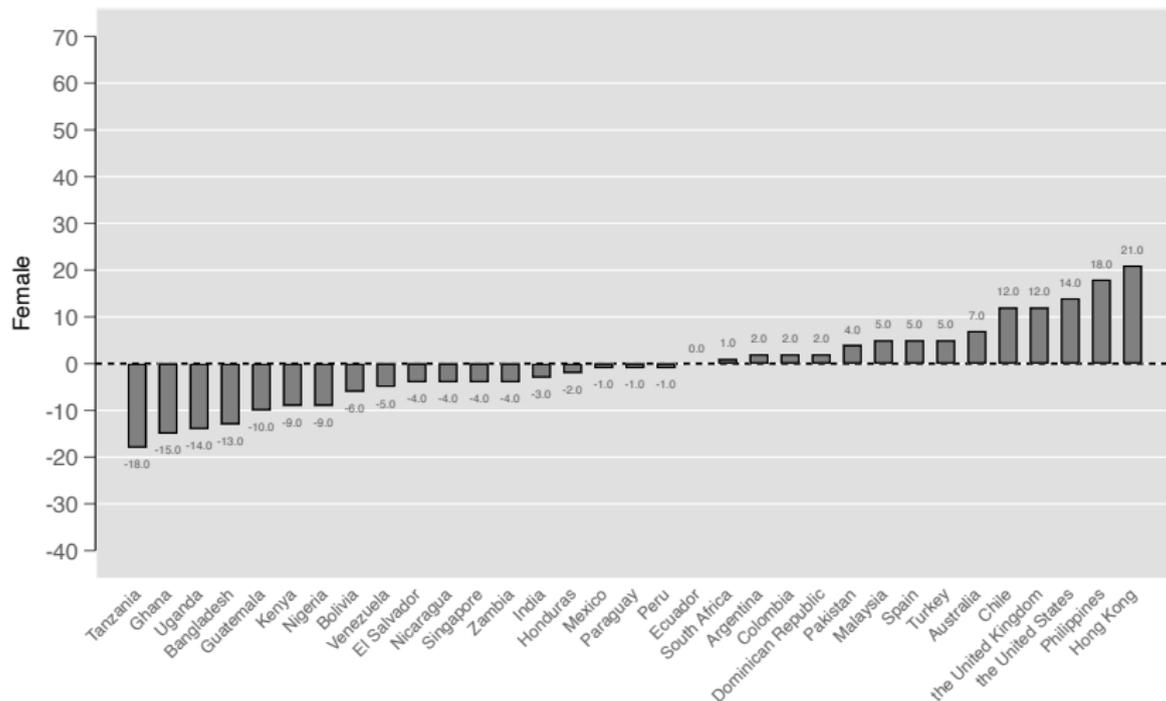
Figure 10: Diversion from the Population - 2023

Sample comparison - *Young (18-35)*
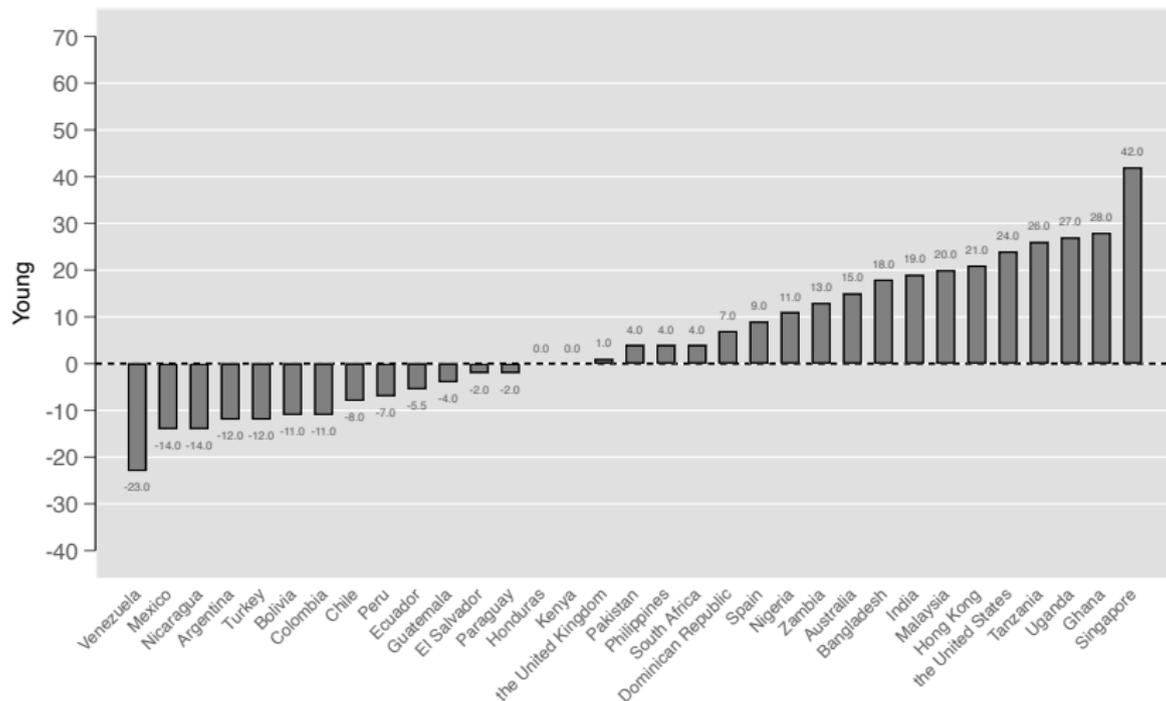
Figure 11: Diversion from the Population - 2023

Sample comparison - *Old (55+)*
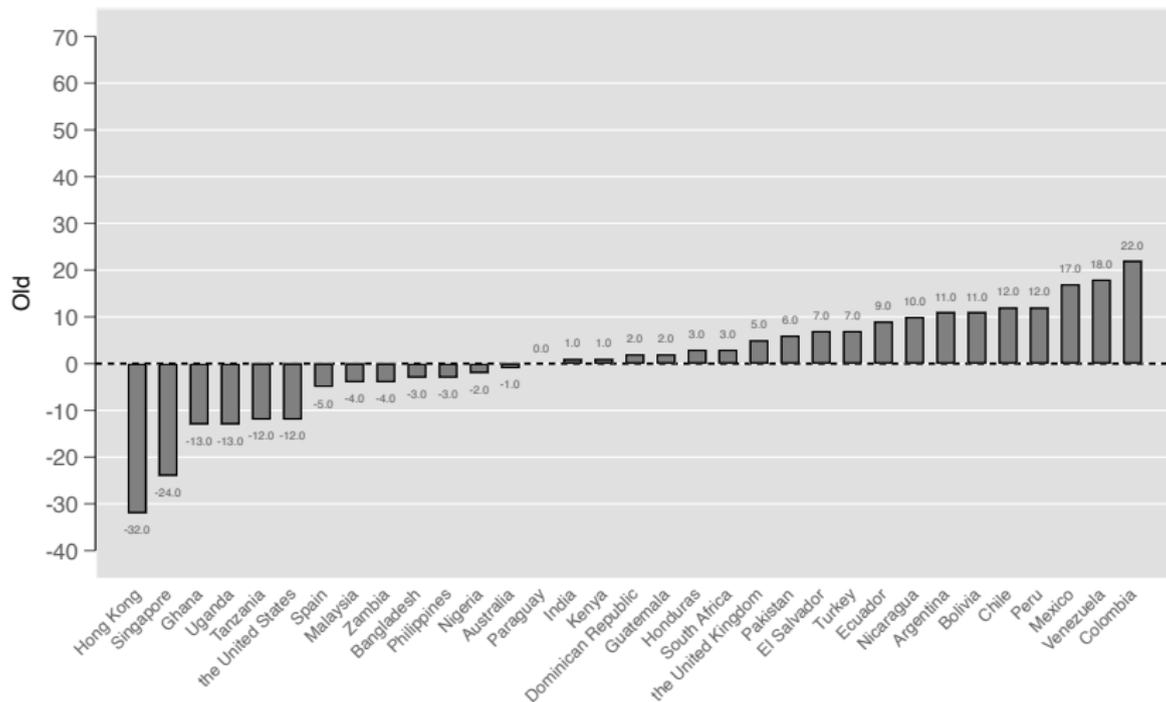
Figure 12: Diversion from the Population - 2023

Sample comparison - *University Degree*
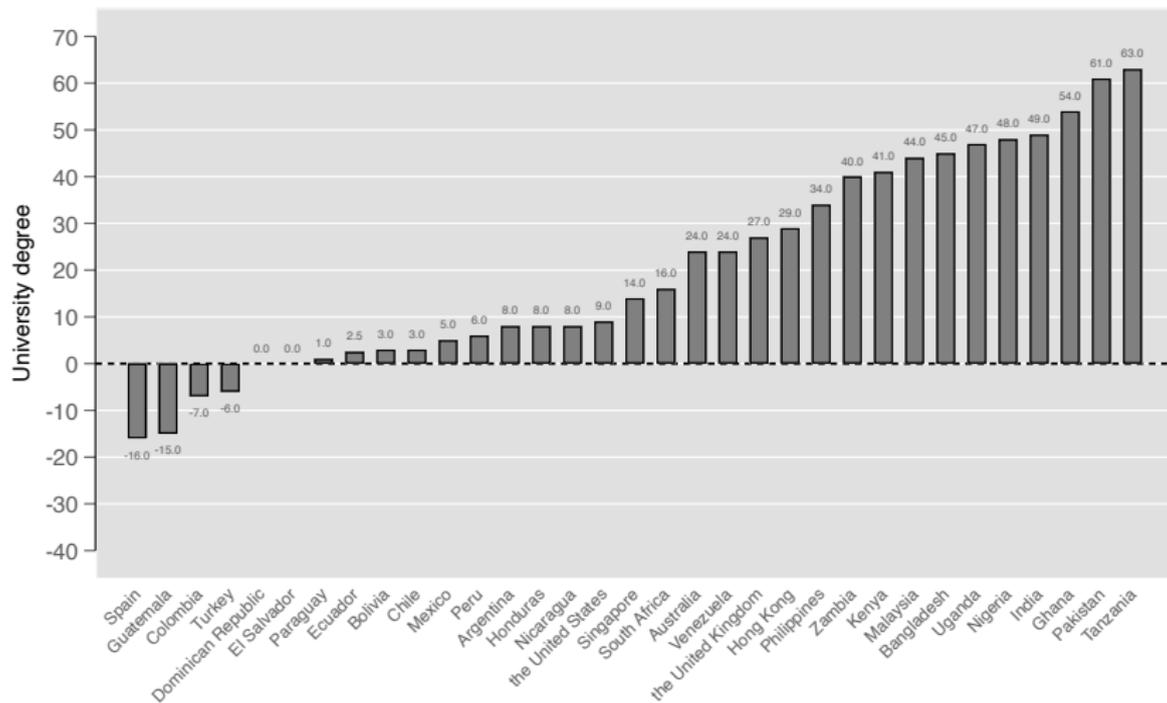
Figure 13: Diversion from the Population - 2023

Comparing meta ad recruitment to a commercial company: Case study Uganda

- Comparing our data to a sample collected by Edward Goldring and Rebecca Tapscott in January 2025.
- Data was collected by TGM Research, a global company founded in 2017. TMG runs incentive-based online panels in 85+ countries, recruiting via organic growth, affiliates, and ads.
- Participants were compensated based on survey completion time.

Comparing samples: Uganda

	DEMED	TGM	AfroBaro (w)
Female	34	52	48
University degree	51	33	3
Young (18-35)	81	66	54
Old (55+)	2	6	15
Mean age	28	34	36
N of respondents	1,650	609	3,393
Cost per respondents (in $)	0.33	7.9	

Table 1: Sample Comparison - Characteristics Across Samples (in %)

Quota sampling through Facebook ads?

Burkina Faso: Country Context and Research Overview

Country Context

- Burkina Faso, a West African country, faces rising terrorism and autocratization.

- Chronic terrorism impacts most of the population, directly (77%) or indirectly.

Research Overview

- Randomized online experiment with four educational videos

- Data collection: November 2 and December 3, 2024.

- Sample: We recruited around 2,000 respondents (see Table 2)

Quota sampling experience in BF-1

- We targeted cross-cutting groups based on age (three groups), gender (two groups), and geographic location (within and outside the capital region).

- We created 12 ads on Facebook to recruit the targeted groups.

- Weighted, representative data from the 2022 AfroBarometer survey for Burkina Faso determined the target sample proportions for 12 cross-cutting groups.

- The target size was defined by the number of respondents per subgroup providing valid responses to at least one outcome variable.

Quota sampling experience in BF-2

- We closed the ads that reached the targeted sample while keeping others open.

- Despite these efforts, we did not fully reach the target sample (see Table 2). Most groups residing outside the capital region were difficult to recruit.

- Burkina Faso presents a hard case, as only 24% of the population is accessible for direct surveys (2.85 million regular users).

Quota sampling experience in BF-3

Table 2: Percentage of sub-groups recruited based on Afrobarometer 9 targeting

		Other cities	capital region	
		0	1	Total
age group				
18-25		%	%	%
	gender			
	Male	121	193	136
	female	53	181	72
	Total	87	188	105
26-35				
	gender			
	Male	93	392	148
	female	27	208	61
	Total	55	285	98
36 and above				
	gender			
	Male	33	195	59
	female	10	106	31
	Total	22	145	45
Total				
	gender			
	Male	67	240	97
	female	25	148	49
	Total	46	191	73

Notes. Percentages are calculated by dividing the actual sample size by the targeted sample size, multiplied by 100. A value over 100 indicates over-recruitment.

Disadvantages and challenges of this data collection method

Disadvantages and challenges

- Meta can change its policies:

  - Meta is getting more aggressive with its spam detection algorithms!

  - Meta does not have a unit anymore that solves researchers' issues, e.g., account bans

  - Meta is moving away from detailed targeting options

- Skewed samples. This method is not suitable for descriptive research to estimate population distributions (could be addressed with weighting).

- Being perceived as a foreign agent

Suggestions

- Consider this as a medium-term investment for your methodological toolbox

- Try to use an official page for your advertisements; newly launched pages are under higher risk for account bans

- Benefit from online pages used by Facebook advertisers (Reddit, YouTube, etc)

Reflect on publication experience

- Success: We have published substantive papers using this method in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, and *Comparative Political Studies*.

- Push-back by reviewers:
    - Non-representative samples: "uncontrolled process of self-selection".
    - Respondents do not give truthful answers.

- Our responses
    - Stress the internal validity of the experiment.
    - Stress the trade-off of cross-country research versus single/small N studies.
    - Include attention checks to provide evidence of the quality of the data.
    - Empirically address demand effects.
    - Compare the convenient samples of commercial survey panels (e.g., YouGov, Qualtrics) to a much larger Meta user base.
    - Stress that this method is particularly useful for recruiting hard-to-reach populations.

Thank you!

- For any questions: demed-project@glasgow.ac.uk