

# The Stability of Mode Preferences: Implications for Tailoring in Longitudinal Surveys

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## **Abstract**

One suggested tailoring strategy for longitudinal surveys is giving respondents their preferred mode. Mode preference could be collected at earlier waves and used when introducing a mixed-mode design. The utility of mode preference is in question, however, due to a number of findings suggesting that preference is an artefact of mode of survey completion, and heavily affected by contextual factors. Conversely, recent findings suggest that tailoring on mode preference may lead to improved response outcomes and data quality. The current study aims to ascertain whether mode preference is a meaningful construct with utility in longitudinal surveys through analysis of data providing three important features: multiple measurements of mode preference over time; an experiment in mode preference question order; and the repeated measures within respondents collected both prior and after the introduction of mixed-mode data collection. Results show that mode preference is not a stable attitude for a large percentage of respondents, and that these responses are affected by contextual factors. However, a substantial percentage of respondents do provide stable responses over time, and may explain the positive findings elsewhere. Using mode preference to tailor longitudinal surveys should be done so with caution, but may be useful with further understanding.

*Keywords:* Mode preference; tailoring; mixed-mode designs; question order; context effects



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