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Capturing situational dynamics and processes: Strengths and pitfalls of the experience sampling method

Abstract

Communication research has often either used self-report questionnaires or experimental designs to study communication phenomena. Scholars thereby either draw inferences about these phenomena through people's retrospection in surveys or by isolating particular factors and behaviors to identify causal mechanisms. Although both approaches have strengths, they nonetheless fail to capture dynamics and processes that result from different situationally-varying environmental and personal factors. This chapter therefore proposes a situational framework that allows to investigate non-situational and situational antecedents of perceptions or behaviors. It further describes the merits of using the experience sampling method () for testing such processes. Different types of data collection techniques and sampling strategies are presented and discussed. Using a real-world data set of 164 participants who completed 1,104 situational questionnaires, this chapter further illustrates how data obtained in studies can be analyzed using a multilevel approach. Several aspects of this analytical approach such as power issues, centering decisions, random intercept and random slope models will be presented and discussed. Finally, an analytical strategy to test whether the potential burden of having to complete repeated measurements in designs produces biases in participant's response patterns will be presented.

Keywords: Situational processes, experience sampling method, multilevel modeling, sampling procedures, bias in response patterns

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