

Continuous large-scale volunteer web-surveys

The experience of LohnSpiegel and Wageindicator

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Online surveys have been playing an increasingly important role in academic research. Until now, however, they have been primarily used in marketing and voting research, but rarely in the field of work and employment. In comparison to traditional surveys, the major advantages in such aspects as costs, speed and flexibility, mean that web-surveys are expected also to increase in academic research.

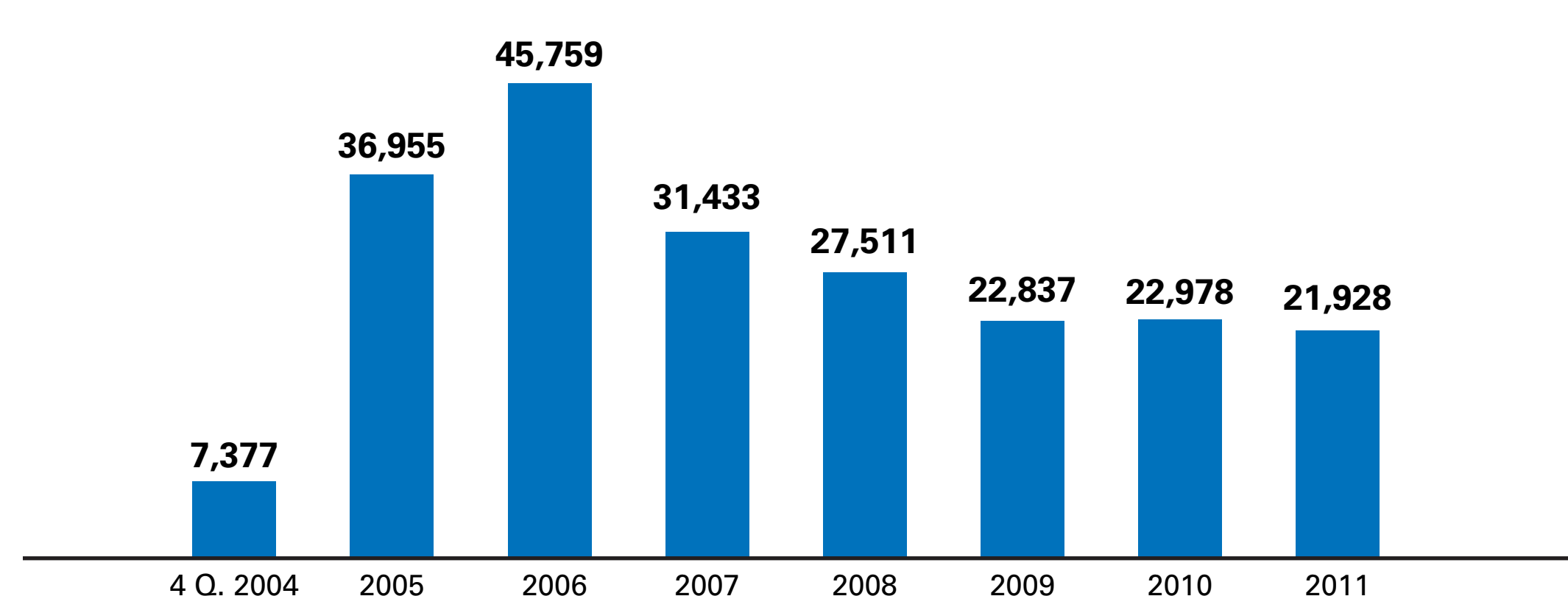
Since 2004 the Institute of Social and Economic Research in the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung (WSI) has been conducting regular online surveys regarding pay and working conditions. The **LohnSpiegel** Online-Survey is a national part of the Wageindicator web-surveys which are conducted simultaneously with similar and comparable content in over 65 countries. The target population is the labour force, including employees, self-employed, job seekers and the unemployed.

Participants of the LohnSpiegel web-survey | 2004 – 2011

Employees	191,433
Self-employed, own-account worker, freelancers	6,369
Students	3,822
Apprentice	3,592
Job seekers / unemployed	3,361
Never worked	3,072
Retired	1,763
Other groups	3,366
Total	216,778

216,778 persons filled in the **LohnSpiegel** questionnaire between the last quarter of 2004 and end of 2011.

The annual number of questionnaires



On average, around 22,000- 25,000 participants submit the **LohnSpiegel** questionnaire per year.

The main topics and the related questions of the **LohnSpiegel** concentrate on the wage and working conditions. This allows detailed analysis of diverse labour market issues.

Topic	Survey Questions about...
WAGES AND BENEFITS	wages, pay period, fringe benefits, bonuses, wage perceptions
WORKING HOURS	working hours, overtime, timing of work, shift work, time preferences
EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND CONTRACT	employment status, employment contract, collective bargaining coverage
OCCUPATION	occupation (ISCO-08), type of occupation, job level, training
INDUSTRY AND PLACE OF WORK	industry (NACE2.0), firm size, workplace characteristics, percentage female at workplace
EMPLOYMENT HISTORY	education, employment record, years of experience, employment spells
PERSONAL QUESTIONS	age, gender, ethnic/racial background, country of birth, region, household, composition, marital status, children's age, division of household chores, job and life satisfaction

Selected Literature

- F. Öz, R. Bispinck, H. Dribbusch, **Das Projekt LohnSpiegel: Tatsächlich gezahlte Löhne und Gehälter**, in : WSI-Mitteilungen 63 (1), 2010. S. 42-49.
R. Bispinck, H. Dribbusch, F. Öz: **Impact of the economic crisis on employees**. Results of an online-survey by the LohnSpiegel project. Reihe: WSI Report, Nr. 2, März 2010.
D. Postels, F. Öz, **Was verdienen Sekretärinnen und Sekretäre?**
Eine Analyse von Einkommensdaten auf Basis der WSI-LohnSpiegel-Datenbank, Arbeitspapier 02/2012, Düsseldorf, Februar 2012, 20 S.

Methods & Data Collection

LohnSpiegel is, unlike the majority of academic surveys, a continuous web-survey. The data is collected via an online questionnaire, accessible at www.lohnspiegel.de, which can be completed by any interested visitor to the site. The data sets are collected in the central unit of wageindicator network in Amsterdam and at regular intervals are sent to partner countries. To attract the attention of the visitors, several services are offered, i.e. salary estimations of over 300 occupations, several studies and additional information about the labour market. Intense cooperation with newspapers and media plays an important role in the success of the **LohnSpiegel**.

The respondents to the web-survey are volunteers. One major characteristic of the **LohnSpiegel** is its continuous nature. This challenges the traditional perception of web-surveys:

- Web-surveys can generate a large sample size, hardly achieved in other survey methods.
- Large sample size allows for the exploration of rare groups or small-scale units such as occupations or regional intersections, as each unit may still contain a sufficient number of observations.
- Large-scale web-surveys may include follow-up questions for some persons of interest.
- Continuous large-scale web-surveys may allow additional analysis possibilities with respect to visitors' behaviour, such as drop-out and feedback systems

The **LohnSpiegel** web-survey is a non-probability survey and the data, therefore, is biased and not representative for the target population. With respect to gender share, the higher rate of academics and some occupation groups in the data set constitute major methodological challenges.

	LohnSpiegel*: Employees	Employee Statistics (Labour Agency)*
Male	63.6 %	54.1 %
Female	36.4 %	45.9 %
East Germany	16.2 %	19.0 %
West Germany	83.8 %	81.0 %
Firm size		
under 100	49.5 %	52.7 %
100 - 500	22.6 %	26.2 %
over 500	27.9 %	21.2 %
Graduates of High School (Uni/FH/TH)	30.6 %	10.9 %

* Bundesagentur für Arbeit, Beschäftigtenstatistik June 2011 and Lohnspiegel dataset 2005-2011

The generalisation of web-surveys for the whole population is still a controversial issue in online research. Major methodological issues can be traced to the fact that data collection is infested with non-coverage, self-selection and non-response problems. Several adjustment and weighting techniques such as post-stratification or propensity-based weighting have been applied to the survey practice. In this respect, studies based on **LohnSpiegel** and Wageindicator data have confirmed that the application of different weight procedures deliver rather diverse results and that there is no certainty as to whether the representativeness of web-surveys can be improved.

As an example of continuous large-scale web-surveys, the **LohnSpiegel** and Wageindicator demonstrate that not only marketing research issues but also academic research themes can be investigated by web-survey design. With respect to labour market research, there is an increasing need for comparative data on wages and working conditions. The Wageindicator and the **LohnSpiegel** generate longitudinal and multi-country data on wages, working hours and benefits, as well as industrial relations. This should increase our understanding of the labour market worldwide.