

## Question in Project:

PaCo - Mechanisms of panel conditioning in longitudinal surveys: Questions on social desirability, gender roles, and environment (English Version)

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## Question Topic:

Environment/ Environmental behavior

## Construct:

Environmental behavior: Intention

## General Information:

**\*Note: This item was tested in German. This is an English translation of the original German wording.\***

## Question Text:

Would you be willing to pay more money for drinking water if it financed measures against drinking water pollution?

*[Wären Sie bereit, mehr Geld für Trinkwasser zu bezahlen, wenn damit Maßnahmen gegen die Trinkwasserverschmutzung finanziert werden würden?]*

## Answer Categories:

1 No, not ready at all *[Nein, überhaupt nicht bereit]*

2

3

4

5

6

7 Yes, fully ready *[Ja, vollständig bereit]*

*Don't know [Weiß nicht]*

## Cognitive Techniques:

General Probing, Category Selection Probe, Specific Probe

## Findings for Question:

**Do the test persons have problems understanding and/or answering the question?**

At first glance, none of the test persons had any problems understanding the question or locating themselves on the answer scale. Four test persons each indicated that they were "rather" (scale points 5 and 6) or "completely" (scale point 7) willing to do so. Two test persons chose the middle category (scale point 4). The test persons' reasons in each case matched the previous answer locations.

However, the responses to the probing question itself indicated two potential problems with the question. First, test persons thought either only of supermarket water, only of tap/source water, or both. Second, those test persons who chose scale items 6 and 7 (and thus answered socially desirable) justified their choices with very different things, e.g., that water was very cheap, that it was important to have clean water, and that one also had to think about the future:

- *"I already have a desire for clean drinking water. And if I know that my taxes, for example, will be used for these measures, then I am fully prepared to do so."* (TP 02)
- *"I have now simply thought of the bottles that are available in Lidl and Aldi, the drinking water. And due to I personally just would not have a problem if that would also cost more, because the things are so cheap."* (TP 04)
- *"Well, I find that very important. I also have children. I find it very important for the future, and that's why I would be willing to do it. [...] I find it important that you can continue to drink it with a clear conscience. Or if you dissolve an effervescent tablet, you can also do that with water from the tap."* (TP 07)
- *"We need water for drinking and washing. Due to the fact that water is difficult to purify, we have to be prepared to [pay more]."* (TP 09)

Some test persons suggested that it depended on the actions that were taken:

- *"If I were to notice that this is just window dressing, then I would not be willing to pay more money for it. But if I see that these are actually measures that are suitable for changing something, then I am also prepared to pay more money for them."* (TP 06)
- *"So, I am willing to pay more money for it [...]. But I am against corporations getting their hands on it and then buying up huge tracts of land and selling the water on at a high price."* (TP 09)

Those who had chosen scale points 4 and 5 said that this depended on the need, that water was already expensive and that it was necessary to start much earlier to prevent drinking water pollution in the first place.:

- *"Well, we have already invested our own money in a better drinking water system here in the house, and I don't know exactly how many people drink the drinking water altogether. [...] If you would like to do that, you can also take it into your own hands."* (TP 05)
- *"On the one hand, it is commendable that it is not polluted. But why should you pay even more money everywhere? You have to get it from somewhere, and that's the problem."* (TP 08)
- *"I am willing to do that, but I find that drinking water is already very expensive. And on the other hand, it is a valuable resource and I think that we should actually start somewhere else, i.e. much earlier, so that the drinking water is not so badly polluted."* (TP 10)

### **How sensitive do the test persons perceive the question to be?**

The test persons were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how unpleasant they found it to be asked the question (Sample N3\_F6, see Appendix). All but one of the test persons found it "not at all unpleasant" (scale point 1; n = 9) to be asked the question. Test person 05, on the other hand, found it "rather unpleasant" (scale point 5); she had positioned herself in the middle of question 5 (scale point 4) and justified her answer by saying that for her it already went in a very personal direction: *"The pollution thing, that then goes along the lines of saying of course you're willing to pay something, but the bottom line is somehow you're not."*

All other test persons expressed that this was an important topic that did not involve anything private or embarrassing:

- *"Because I find that it's actually a topic that's fine to talk about, and I don't think it's a taboo subject per se."* (TP 01)
- *"This is not an intimate topic for me."* (TP 03)
- *"Because I also have an opinion about it, and what's wrong with that? Even if someone says they don't want to spend money on it, it's not bad either. I find this is a very normal question that is not embarrassing."* (TP 07)
- *"Because it's a very important issue that many people don't think about enough."* (TP 10)

Furthermore, the test persons were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how honestly they thought respondents would answer this question in a real survey (see Table N5\_F6). Five test persons believed that this question would be answered "rather honestly" (scale points 5 and 6; n = 3) or "very honestly" (scale point 7; n = 2) in a questionnaire, four chose the middle answer category (scale point 4) and one test person (TP 05) believed that this question would be answered "rather not honestly" (scale point 3). The last test person named was the same test person who had been the only one

to choose the middle category in the previous probing question (TP 05). She justified her selection by saying that she believed that "most would like to be in a better position."

Those who believed that the question was answered "rather/very honestly" expressed that it was not a question fraught with embarrassment and was a very important topic:

- *"In principle, this does not concern anything you do that you should be ashamed of."* (TP 04)
- *"Because it's less embarrassing if you don't necessarily want to pay money for drinking water. Maybe people don't see it that way either. Throwing away Kleenex or cigarette butts in public is more embarrassing because it is immediately noticeable."* (TP 07)
- *"Because that is our livelihood. You can live without wine, but not without water, that's not possible at all."* (TP 09)
- *"Because I think people realize, at the latest when they ask the question, that this is an important issue to think about."* (TP 10)

Those who placed themselves in the middle category cited social pressure as a possible reason for this:

- *"Because I think it comes across a bit better if you indicate that you would be willing to pay more, even though in the end you wouldn't be. That this acting according to social norms, that you think it's expected of you, [...] tends to tempt you to answer a bit dishonestly."* (TP 01)
- *"Because I think that due to this many people feel a social pressure and prefer to answer in a way that is compliant. [...] And I think that is one of these topics, especially now with Fridays for Future, where people are now [...] reacting more sensitively to what they answer."* (TP 06)

## Recommendations:

Question: The results of the cognitive interviews indicate that question 6 is not particularly well suited to capture socially desirable response behavior. In addition, the intention of the question is not clear (is it about drinking water treatment or water prices in the supermarket?), which allows respondents room for interpretation. Although the frequency distribution of the answers gives the impression that the majority of the test persons answered in a socially desirable manner, in most cases this did not seem to be because the test persons wanted to present themselves in a better light. If the goal of the question is to capture socially desirable behavior, we therefore recommend deleting the question.

Response format: No changes recommended.

**Question documented in ZIS (DOI):**

<https://zis.gesis.org/DoiId/zis167>