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The Relevance of “Data Science” for Survey Research: Finding Solutions in an Ever-Changing Data World

Our world is a kaleidoscope of changing informational needs, technological advancements, and methodological developments. “Data Science” – an interdisciplinary field which uses analytic methods, computer processing and systems to extract information and develop insights from data in various forms – is a key component underlying many of these changes. Data science approaches are used routinely in the commercial sector for measuring or drawing conclusions about people’s attitudes and behaviors and becoming more commonplace in other sectors. Operating in conjunction with or parallel to more traditional statistical survey research approaches, data science is having a transformative effect on the ways in which researchers seek to understand attitudes and behaviors. Here we explore some of the major trends in data science as they pertain to the measurement of attitudes and behaviors as well as its relationship with traditional survey approaches. The talk focuses on three key areas: (1) understanding how the field of data science relates to traditional survey research efforts; (2) discussing ways in which key methods and tools are being applied to and transforming survey research; and, (3) delineating some of the key advantages and disadvantages of leveraging data science in survey research efforts. We conclude with a look at where the field of data science is going and its longer term implications for how we measure and understand attitudes and behaviors.