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## **Differences in Reported Travel Behavior for an Online Panel versus Mail Panel**

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DKS&A has been conducting mail panel surveys to a large (25,000-45,000/month) representative sample of the US population utilizing the Synovate mail panel for more than 10 years to track travel and brand purchase behavior for travel by US residents. Results from these studies are used to estimate market share for travel brands and travel volume for the US, Cities and States. DKS&A has more than 20 years of data collection experience utilizing the NPD, NFO and Synovate panels. While there exists biases in the demographic makeup in “mail panels”, commonly accepted practices employing a combination of response weighting and revised sampling schemes are commonly employed to overcome panel limitation.

Since 2000, DKS&A has conducted four separate parallel tests with two different panel companies of more than 25,000 online panel members to determine if they provide a representative sample of US travel using the Synovate mail panel results as an “industry accepted benchmark or standard” for comparison.

Below are a few examples of the statistically significant differences noted between the responses from the two parallel samples.

The online sample under represents those with less education defined as up to a high school education. This reflects both a minority and age bias in the online panel.

The online sample under represents those with lower income defined as those households making less than \$25,000 per year. This reflects both an age and ethnic bias in the online panel.

The online sample over represents those households making more than \$75,000 per year. This introduces an ethnic and age bias in the online sample.

The online sample is under representative of those 65+ years of age.

Demographic re-weighting can address the demographic differences, but the question arises; do online panel members behave differently once demographic differences are factored out?

Online panel members report a significantly higher rate of travel (Varying from 1.5-3 times higher).

Online panel members report more than 3 times as many day trips as do mail panel members with a high degree of seasonal variance.

Tests reveal that online panel members report far fewer (20-40%) business trips and more leisure trips with high seasonal variation noted.

Conclusion: Users of syndicated online panels cannot easily project behavior back to the total US population for market share or volumetric estimates. Parallel studies utilizing a mail panel or other representative US population sample are needed to provide a valid benchmark for proper re-weighting of online results. Marketing and management decisions can be misled if information is based solely on online panel data.