Utilizing online research subject pools (aka crowdsourcing platforms)

Most widely used:

1. Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk; US-based)
2. Prolific Academic (Prolific; UK-based)
3. Crowdflower
4. ...

How does it work, in a nutshell:

1. Set-up an account on a crowdsourcing platform
2. Program your study in any web-based platform, e.g., Qualtrics
3. Set-up a study in the crowdsourcing platform, which will include a link to your study
4. Collect data
“Conducting research online using US and UK data markets” Bastiaan Rutjens (b.t.rutjens@uva.nl) & Natalia Zarzeczna (n.j.zarzeczna@uva.nl)

Difference between MTurk and Prolific:

MTurk, like many other crowdsourcing platforms, were not explicitly designed for the scientific community. MTurk nowadays is used for many things, including having Mturkers work on boring excel sheets or programming tasks. Prolific as a dedicated research subject pool is designed solely for academic research.

Mturk:

- Sample: Slightly more women than men, average age ~31 years, mostly from US. Total pool: ?? (realistic estimates range between 7,000 and 10,000 unique workers)
  - Preselection opportunities, e.g., nationality (only US, only Canada, only India), household income, etc. (see screenshots 1 and 2)
  - “Masterworkers” only (>95% “HIT” approval)
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- Cost: a generally accepted hourly wage = between 6 and 9 US dollars
- More info in the MTurk FAQ here
- Compared to (psychology) students: better gender balance, better age range, more representative of population
- Compared to (psychology) students coming to the lab: less experimental control
- Compared to (psychology) students in your online study: similar pitfalls
  - Reward/incentive = similar
  - Solutions to these pitfalls: similar (more on that below)
  - Recent MTurk issue: bots?
- Preventing bad data quality (same for online lab research):
  - Timers and delays

- Instruction and attention checks (see this paper)

For example: “I posted a coding task where I asked Mturkers to code social media posts for their level of support for a policy (1 = strongly against policy, 5 = strongly supports policy). I also had attention checks ("please answer "4" for this item", and "please leave this item blank. If you accidentally selected a response, please change it to "3"), and an open ended question just asking what kind of car people drove. As suggested in the above article, there are people giving the usual nonsense/irrelevant responses to open ended questions (e.g., "GOOD" "VERY GOOD" "NOTHING"). Sure enough their data was typically junk.”

- Note: “Attentive Turkers: MTurk participants perform better on online attention checks than do subject pool participants”
- Generate unique code (e.g., in Qualtrics) in order to receive reward (on MTurk).
  Rejection of HIT = possible (workers know this)
More info on Turker demographics:
