

Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Eighth Edition



Chapter 10

Survey Research

Learning Objectives

- 10.1** Outline the milestones in the development of surveys.
- 10.2** Describe key steps in the process of survey research.
- 10.3** Construct survey questionnaires using the principles of good question writing.
- 10.4** Compare the features, advantages, and disadvantages of different types of surveys.
- 10.5** Describe the various approaches used to conduct effective survey interviews.
- 10.6** Summarize the ethical considerations when conducting survey research.

10.1 A History of Survey Research (1 of 2)

Objective: Outline the milestones in the development of surveys.

- The modern survey goes back to ancient forms of the census.
- Surveys for social research started with the 19th century social reform movements in the United States and Great Britain.
- In the 1920s and 1930s, researchers began to use statistical sampling techniques.

10.1 A History of Survey Research (2 of 2)

- By the 1930s, professional researchers who embraced a positivist orientation displaced social reformers who used surveys to document local social problems.
- Survey research dramatically expanded during World War II, especially in the United States.
- Since the 1970s, private industry, non-profit organizations, governments. And many academic fields expanded the use of quantitative research.
- The United States has about 12,000 full-time professional survey researchers.

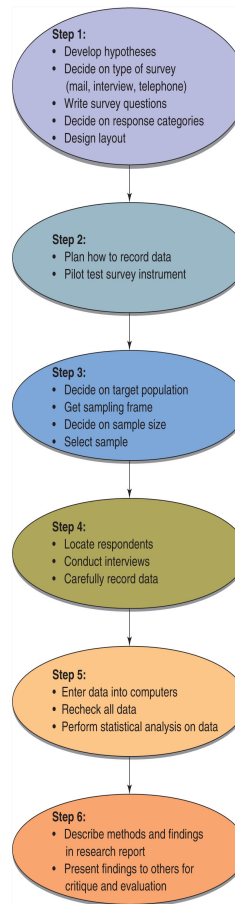
10.2 The Logic of Survey Research (1 of 2)

Objective: Describe the steps in the process of survey research.

- Survey research proceeds deductively.
- Conceptualize variable and then operationalize each one as one or more survey questions.
- Rewrite survey questions for clarity and completeness.
- Sequence the questions.
- Consider how you will organize the data.
- Train interviewers if needed.

10.2 The Logic of Survey Research (2 of 2)

Figure 10.1 Steps in the Process of Survey Research



10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (1 of 13)

Objective: Construct survey questionnaires using the principles of good question writing.

- Principles of Good Question Writing
 1. Avoid slang, jargon, and abbreviations.
 2. Avoid ambiguity, confusion, and vagueness.
 3. Avoid emotional language and prestige bias.
 4. Avoid double-barreled questions.
 5. Avoid leading questions.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (2 of 13)

- Principles of Good Question Writing (continued)
 6. Avoid questions beyond respondents' capabilities.
 7. Avoid false premises.
 8. Avoid asking about distant future intentions.
 9. Avoid double negatives.
 10. Avoid overlapping or unbalanced response categories.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (3 of 13)

- Respondent Recall
 - Recalling past events often takes more time and effort than respondents are willing to take to answer a question.
 - A person's ability to recall declines quickly over time.
 - If referring to past events, write questions specifically for that purpose and interpret results with caution. Provide timeframes and location references when needed.
 - Respondents often **telescope**, or compress time, when asked about past events.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (4 of 13)

- Sensitive Topics
 - Create comfort and trust.
 - Use enhanced phrasing.
 - Desensitize the context.
 - Use anonymous or indirect questioning methods.
 - CASAI
 - CAPI
 - RRT
 - Social desirability bias

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (5 of 13)

- Knowledge Questions
 - A large majority of the public cannot correctly answer elementary geography questions, name their elected leaders, or identify major documents.
 - Respondents may lie because they do not want to appear to be ignorant.
 - Knowledge questions can tell us whether people are forming opinions based on inaccurate information.
 - Sleeper questions can help determine whether a respondent actually knows what he/she is talking about.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (6 of 13)

- Question Format Decisions

1. Contingency Questions
2. Open-Ended vs Closed-Ended Questions

Partially open questions

A total reliance on closed questions can distort results.

3. Neutral or No Opinion Option

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (7 of 13)

- Question Format Decisions
 1. Contingency Questions
 2. Open-Ended vs Closed-Ended Questions

Partially open questions

3. Neutral or No Opinion Option
4. Selective Refusals

Floaters—respondents who provide an opinion on a topic, but would choose “don’t know” if the choice were available.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (8 of 13)

- Answer Format Decisions

- Agree/Disagree, rankings or ratings

Offering respondents explicit alternatives is best.

Present alternatives fairly and do not offer a reason for respondents to choose one alternative.

Attaching numbers to a response scale can assist respondents and give them a clue for understanding.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (9 of 13)

Chart 10.6 Question Format Examples

Example of Horizontal versus Vertical Response Choices

Do you think it is too easy or too difficult to get a divorce, or is it about right?

- Too Easy
- Too Difficult
- About Right

Do you think it is too easy or too difficult to get a divorce, or is it about right?

- Too Easy
- Too Difficult
- About Right

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (10 of 13)

Chart 10.6 [Continued]

Example of A Matrix Question Format

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
The teacher talks too fast.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learned a lot in this class.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The tests are very easy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher tells many jokes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teacher is organized.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (11 of 13)

Chart 10.6 [Continued]

Examples of Some Response Category Choices

Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

Approve/Disapprove

Favor/Oppose

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat

Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Too Much, Too Little, About Right

Better, Worse, About the Same

Regularly, Often, Seldom, Never

Always, Most of the Time, Some of the Time, Rarely, Never

More Likely, Less Likely, No Difference

Very Interested, Interested, Not Interested

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (12 of 13)

- Other Design Issues

 - Length of questionnaire

 - Question order or sequencing

 - 1. Organization of questionnaire

 - 2. Order effects

 - 3. Context effects

 - Funnel sequence—ask general questions before specific questions.

10.3 Construction of the Questionnaire (13 of 13)

- Layout

Questionnaires should be clear, neat, and easy to follow.

- Nonresponse

Location

Contact

Eligibility

Cooperation

Completion

10.4 Types of Surveys: Advantages and Disadvantages (1 of 4)

Objective: Compare the features, advantages, and disadvantages of different types of surveys.

Table 10.4 Types of Surveys and Their Features

Administrative Issues

Features	Mail Questionnaire	Type of Survey Telephone Interview	Face-to-Face Interview	Web Survey
Cost	Cheap	Moderate	Expensive	Cheapest
Speed	Slowest	Fast	Slow to moderate	Fastest
Length (number of questions)	Moderate	Short	Longest	Moderate
Response rate	Lowest	Moderate	Highest	Moderate

10.4 Types of Surveys: Advantages and Disadvantages (2 of 4)

Table 10.4 [Continued]

Research Control

Features	Mail Questionnaire	Type of Survey Telephone Interview	Face-to-Face Interview	Web Survey
Probes possible	No	Yes	Yes	No
Specific respondent	No	Fast	Yes	No
Question sequence	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Only one respondent	No	Yes	Yes	No
Visual observation	No	No	Yes	Yes

10.4 Types of Surveys: Advantages and Disadvantages (3 of 4)

Table 10.4 [Continued]
Success with Different Questions

Features	Mail Questionnaire	Type of Survey Telephone Interview	Face-to-Face Interview	Web Survey
Visual aids	Limited	None	Yes	Yes
Open-ended questions	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes
Contingency questions	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes
Complex questions	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes
Sensitive questions	Some	Limited	Limited	Yes

10.4 Types of Surveys: Advantages and Disadvantages (4 of 4)

Table 10.4 [Continued]
Sources of Bias

Features	Mail Questionnaire	Type of Survey Telephone Interview	Face-to-Face Interview	Web Survey
Social desirability	No	Some	Worse	No
Interviewer bias	No	Some	Worse	No
Respondent's reading skill level	Yes	No	No	Some

10.5 Survey Interviewing (1 of 7)

Objective: Describe various approaches used to conduct effective survey interviews.

Chart 10.10 Naïve Assumption Model of Survey Interviews

1. Researchers have clearly conceptualized all variables being measured.
2. Questionnaires have no wording, question order, or related effects.
3. Respondents are motivated and willing to answer all questions asked.
4. Respondents possess complete information and can accurately recall events.
5. Respondents understand each question exactly as the researcher intends it.
6. Respondents give more truthful answers if they do not know the hypotheses.
7. Respondents give more truthful answers if they receive no hints or suggestions.
8. The interview situation and specific interviewers have no effects on answers.
9. The process of the interview has no impact on the respondents' beliefs or attitudes.
10. Respondents' behaviors match perfectly their verbal responses in an interview.

10.5 Survey Interviewing (2 of 7)

Table 10.5 Differences between Ordinary Conversation and a Structured Survey Interview

Ordinary Conversation	The Survey Interview
1. Questions and answers from each participant are relatively equally balanced.	1. Interviewer asks and respondent answers most of the time.
2. There is an open exchange of feelings and opinions.	2. Only the respondent reveals feelings and opinions.
3. Judgments are stated and attempts made to persuade the other of particular points of view.	3. Interviewer is nonjudgmental and does not try to change respondent's opinions or beliefs.
4. A person can reveal deep inner feelings to gain sympathy or as a therapeutic release.	4. Interviewer tries to obtain direct answers to specific questions.
5. Ritual responses are common (e.g., "Uh huh," shaking head, "How are you?" "Fine").	5. Interviewer avoids making ritual responses that influence a respondent and seeks genuine answers, not ritual responses.

10.5 Survey Interviewing (3 of 7)

Table 10.5 [Continued]

Ordinary Conversation	The Survey Interview
6. The participants exchange information and correct the factual errors that they are aware of.	6. Respondent provides almost all information. Interviewer does not correct a respondent's factual errors.
7. Topics rise and fall, and either person can introduce new topics. The focus can shift directions or digress to less relevant issues.	7. Interviewer controls the topic, direction, and pace. He or she keeps the respondent "on task," and irrelevant diversions are contained.
8. The emotional tone can shift from humor to joy, to affection, to sadness, to anger, and so on.	8. Interviewer attempts to maintain a consistently warm but serious and objective tone throughout.
9. People can evade or ignore questions and give flippant or noncommittal answers.	9. Respondent should not evade questions and should give truthful, thoughtful answers.

Sources: Adapted from Gorden (1980:19–25) and Sudman and Bradburn (1983:5–10); also see Neuman (2012).

10.5 Survey Interviewing (4 of 7)

- Role of the Interviewer
 - The goal is to obtain accurate information from another person.
 - Interviewers must be neutral and objective.
 - Try to reduce embarrassment and fear.
 - Interviewer should not give his or her opinions during the interview
 - The interviewer helps to define the situation and ensures that the respondent has the information being sought.

10.5 Survey Interviewing (5 of 7)

- Stages of an Interview
 - Introduction and entry
 - Main portion

Responses must be recorded verbatim.

No summarizing or paraphrasing

- Exit

10.5 Survey Interviewing (6 of 7)

Chart 10.12 Six Categories of Interview Bias

1. **Errors by the respondent.** Forgetting, embarrassment, misunderstanding, or lying because of the presence of others
2. **Unintentional errors or interviewer sloppiness.** Contacting the wrong respondent, misreading a question, omitting questions, reading questions in the wrong order, recording the wrong answer to a question, or misunderstanding the respondent
3. **Intentional subversion by the interviewer.** Purposeful alteration of answers, omission or rewording of questions, or choice of an alternative respondent
4. **Influence due to the interviewer's expectations** about a respondent's answers based on the respondent's appearance, living situation, or other answers
5. **Failure of an interviewer** to probe or to probe properly
6. **Influence on the answers due to the interviewer's appearance,** tone, attitude, reactions to answers, or comments made outside the interview schedule

10.5 Survey Interviewing (7 of 7)

- Cultural Meanings and Survey Interviews
 - Survey responses may change when a word has different meanings and implications depending on the social situation.
 - Nonpositivist researchers may advocate for the collaborative encounter model
- Pilot Testing and Cognitive Interviews
 - Cognitive interviewing helps identify problems in questionnaires under development by asking pilot participants to report their thinking process while answering questions.

10.6 The Ethical Survey

Objective: Describe various approaches used to conduct effective survey interviews.

- A major issue in ethical research is the invasion of privacy.
- Respondents' participation must be voluntary.
- Exploitation or surveys and pseudosurveys
- Misuse of survey results
- Use of poorly designed or purposely rigged surveys
- Mass media reporting of survey results

Conclusion

- Survey researchers try to minimize errors, but survey data often contain them.
- Errors in surveys can compound each other.
- Errors can arise in sampling frames, nonresponse, question wording, and interview bias.
- Be careful when designing survey research and cautious about generalizing results.

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