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Surveys and Mixed Methods

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Surveys and Mixed Methods

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- Benefits of Conducting a Survey
- Common Missteps in Survey Design
- Using Surveys with Other Methods



Experience designing surveys?

Benefits of Conducting a Survey

- A survey is a useful tool for gathering a variety of information, e.g., opinions, attitudes, behaviors, demographics
- Benefits include:
 - Flexible content and format
 - Fixed response options allow for easy comparisons
 - Open-ended questions allow for deeper insight
 - Can be cross-sectional or longitudinal
 - Ease of administration

Common Missteps in Survey Design



OOPS!

Rushing the Survey Design Process

- Build in time for:
 - Defining objectives
 - Drafting questions
 - Formatting
 - Pilot testing
 - Editing
 - IRB

Not Having Clear Objectives

When determining the objectives, consider:

- What are you trying to learn from this survey?
- What is the target population?
- How will the information you collect be used?

Not Having Clear Objectives

What information is needed to meet your objectives?

Example

Objective: Determine if and how the level of student engagement changes over time.

Information Needed: Year in college, time studying, use of office hours, class discussion, gender, parent's education, income, etc.

Poorly Designed Questions

Example: Survey of Adolescent Sexual Behavior

“How far did your mother go in school?”

Good Questions Are:

Clear & Unambiguous: Simple language & Specific

Example

Poor: “With what frequency do you study for class?”

Better: “In a typical week, about how many hours do you spend studying for class?”

Good Questions Are:

Clear & Unambiguous: Avoid double-barreled questions

Example

Poor: “In the last week, how many times did you speak with your instructor and other students about course related material?”

Better: “In the last week, how many times did you speak with your instructor about course related material?”

“In the last week, how many times did you speak with other students about course related material?”

Good Questions Are:

Concise and to the point

Example

Poor: “In a typical week, what amount of time, in hours, do you devote to preparation for class, whether in reviewing your notes or reading course material?”

Better: “In a typical week, about how many hours do you spend studying for class?”

Good Questions Are:

Free of bias and leading statements

Example: Pew Research Center Survey

51% favored “making it legal for doctors to give terminally ill patients the means to end their lives”

44% favored “making it legal for doctors to assist terminally ill patients in committing suicide”

Not Considering the Ordering of Questions

Ordering effects – The order of questions or response options can bias responses to subsequent questions

More People Favor Civil Unions When Asked After Gay Marriage

Asked first	<i>Legal agreements</i>	%	<i>Gay marriage</i>	%
	Favor	37	Favor	33
	Oppose	55	Oppose	61
	Don't know	<u>8</u>	Don't know	<u>6</u>
		100		100
Asked second	<i>Gay marriage</i>		<i>Legal agreements</i>	
	Favor	30	Favor	45
	Oppose	58	Oppose	47
	Don't know	<u>12</u>	Don't know	<u>8</u>
		100		100
N		780		735

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 2003.

Ordering effects

To minimize this...

- Place possible “priming” questions at the end
- Randomize the order of questions

Not Taking the Time to Pilot Test

- Are questions designed appropriately for your populations?
- Test survey items

Example: Likert scales in Brazil

- Identify technical issues
- Estimate length of survey

Basic Pilot Test Process

- Test on a small group of people
- Best to test on a similar population
- Ask for feedback on clarity of questions and length of time it took to complete the survey
- Review test responses, looking for inconsistencies or unexpected answers
- Make any necessary changes. Consider a second test if extensive changes have been made.

Not Attending to Bias

Social desirability bias – the tendency to want to give the “right” or “normal” answer

People understate “bad” behaviors/attitudes

- Example: alcohol and drug use, tax evasion, racial bias

People overstate “good” behaviors/attitudes

- Example: Church attendance, donations, voting

Social desirability bias

To minimize this...

- Self-administered questionnaire
- Anonymity
- Neutral language

Not Attending to Bias

Non-Response Bias – when non-responders are different than responders

Non-Response bias minimizes generalizability

To minimize this...

- Examine who responded to your survey
- Oversampling
- Weighting

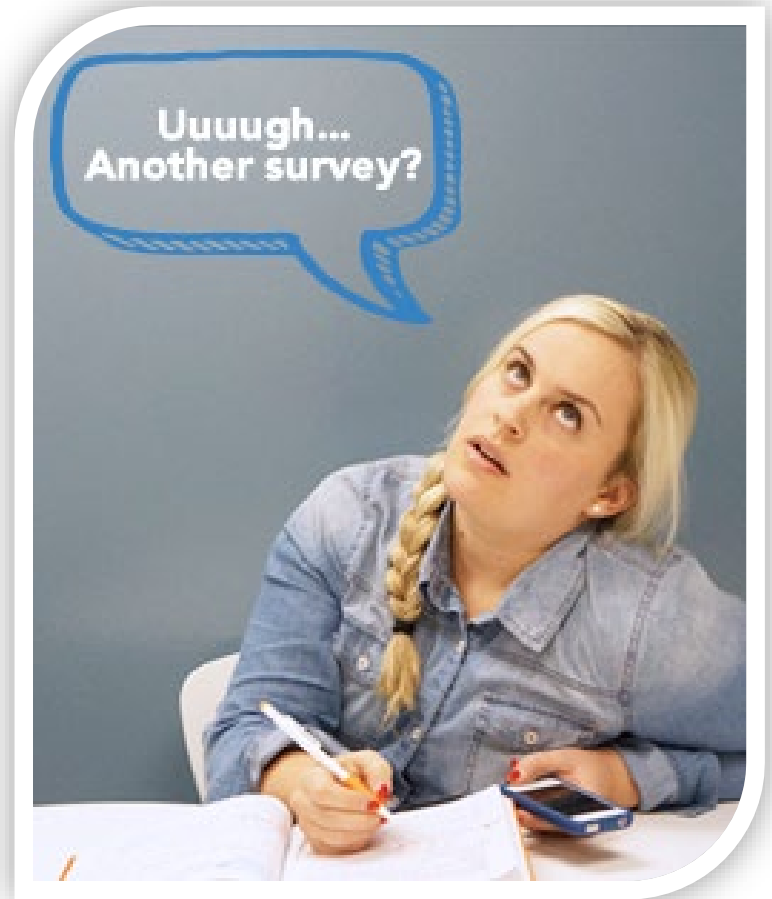
Not Attending to Bias

Recall/Memory Error – respondent is not able to remember an event accurately

To minimize this...

- Administer survey as close to the end of the event as possible

Overreliance on Surveys



Overreliance on Surveys

What can a survey measure?

- Attitudes
- Perceptions
- Experiences
- Satisfaction
- Personal information
- Actual behavior
- Actual knowledge/skill
- Greater sense of why/how

Using Surveys with Other Methods

Open-ended

- “What,” “How,” “Why”
- Specific but concise

Example

“What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?”

Using Surveys with Other Methods

Why Use Mixed Methods with Survey Research?

- Can address limitations of a singular method

Example: Assessing student learning

- Inform the survey design process

Example: Evaluating student satisfaction with group study rooms

Using Surveys with Other Methods

Why Use Mixed Methods in Survey Research?

- Confirm your findings

Example: Peer challenge and retention

- Provide a richer, fuller picture

Example: Satisfaction with library services

Using Surveys with Other Methods

Using Surveys with Other Methods

- Focus Groups
- Observations
- Secondary Data Analysis
- Direct Assessment of Student Learning

Questions?

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