Preview Questions

1. What are the four cornerstones of quality surveys?
2. What has changed about surveying in the last 20 years?
3. What is the advantage of mixed-mode data collection?
4. How is the tailored design method different from other surveying methods?
5. What surveying challenges does the tailored design method address?

Reading Summary

Introduction

* There are numerous reasons for conducting a survey.
  + Understanding how attitudes about a topic vary with other characteristics is often the objective of the survey sponsor.
* There are also numerous uses for survey results.
  + Making capital investment decisions.
  + Setting policy.
* Surveys can be large or small.
  + Q: what is considered a large survey?
* Most surveys are based on samples of a target population.
  + Carefully selected sample surveys enable researchers to make inferences about a population that are only slightly less precise than a census of the entire population and much less costly.
* Non-survey methods used to collect data
  + Unstructured interviews
  + Focus groups
  + Participant observation
  + Content analysis
  + Simulations
  + Small group experiments
  + Records analysis
* A census is the opposite of a sample survey.
  + 100 percent of the target population is surveyed.

Four Cornerstones of Quality Surveys

* Minimizing the four main types of errors
  + Coverage error 🡪 sample frame does NOT accurately represent the population on the characteristic of interest.
  + Sampling error 🡪 difference between the estimate from sample survey and estimate from census survey
  + Nonresponse error 🡪 difference between the estimate generate when only some sampled units respond and estimate when all sampled units respond
  + Measurement error 🡪 difference between the estimate produced from the survey and the true value caused by inaccurate respondent answers
    - Types
      * Response bias 🡪 systematic shift in estimates
      * Response variance 🡪 variability in estimates of the same attribute taken over time
    - Causes
      * Poor question design
      * Survey mode effects
      * Interviewer behavior
      * Respondent behavior
      * Data collection mistakes
* Total Survey Error (TSE) framework attempts to minimize data inaccuracy within unavoidable constraints.
  + Often focuses on discrete actions.
  + Attempts to simultaneously control all four types of errors.

What Is Different About Surveying in the 2010s

* Many more ways of contacting survey respondents and more ways for respondents to complete surveys.
* Less need for an intermediary (i.e., interviewer) between surveyor and respondent.
* Traditional methods are still used for a variety of reasons.
* We can now connect with roughly 98% of U.S. households but there are more buffers that filter out unsolicited messages such as surveys.
* Traditional sample frames no longer provide the desired coverage of some populations.
* Different characteristics for different populations that prefer one communication medium over others.
* Web-based surveys have not lived up to their potential.
* Mail surveys are considered less desirable because they tend to have lower response rates and don’t enable intensive branching.
  + Up to 97% of U.S. households are accessible via mail surveys.
  + Mail has the lowest response rate and highest cost per response
* Single mode surveys are generally not as effective as they once were.

Why Emphasize Mixed-Mode Data Collection?

* More likely to minimize the four major sources of error and survey costs.
* Possibilities:
  + Offering respondents more than one way to complete a survey.
  + Contacting respondents in multiple ways even when only one collection method is used.
  + Creating synergy between contacts via different modes.
    - Postal request followed by an email with an electronic link to a web survey.
* Four types of mixed-mode surveys:
  + Type 1: Use one survey mode to encourage response by another mode.
  + Type 2: Use multiple survey modes to collect responses from the same respondent.
  + Type 3: Use multiple survey modes to collect responses from different population segments.
  + Type 4: Use multiple survey modes to collect responses from the same respondent at different times.
* Effect of four types of mixed-mode surveys
  + Types 1, 3 & 4 focus on minimizing coverage and nonresponse error.
  + Type 2 focuses on minimizing measurement error.
* Single-mode data collection still has value.
  + Mixed-mode data collection may be impractical or ineffective.

What is Tailored Design and Why Is It Needed?

* Researchers must tailor their survey designs to their situations.
* No simple set of procedures for designing surveys.
* Key considerations when designing surveys.
  + Topic knowledge
  + Survey sponsor objectives
  + Target population
  + Available resources
* Fundamental considerations
  + Reducing total survey error may undermine the quality of the information collected.
  + Survey procedure elements must operate synergistically to encourage all sample members to respond to the survey.
  + Build positive social exchange to encourage responses.

Preview Questions

1. What is social exchange theory?
2. How can social exchange theory be used to increase response rates?
3. What are the basic guidelines for applying social exchange theory to surveys?
4. What are the differences in how social exchange theory is applied to mixed-mode survey designs?
5. Why did the WSU doctoral student experience survey generate such a high response rate?

Reading Summary

Introduction

* Must reconcile contrasting views of survey sponsors and potential survey respondents.
* Survey request is usually an annoyance and intrusion for potential survey respondents.
  + Disinterest in the topic
  + Uncertainty about the requestor
  + Concerns about privacy
  + Concerns about security
* Surveyor actions often reinforce or exacerbate the concerns of potential survey respondents.
* Approach to addressing concerns of potential survey respondents is based on social exchange theory.
* Mixed-mode data collection is increasingly required because of changes in technology and communication patterns.

Example of a Survey with a High Response Rate

* Target population was doctoral students that had completed preliminary examination.
* One month for data collection
* Mail request with $2 incentive followed by an email with an electronic link. This was followed by a second email request then a second mail request offering the option of responding by mail. Finally, a third email request was sent.
* Cumulative response was 77 percent.
* Offering choice of multiple survey modes in initial request rather than at a later point tends to decrease final response rates 🡪 it complicates the potential respondent’s decision.

Using Social Exchange Concepts to Motivate Potential Respondents

* Theories suggesting what might motivate potential respondents
  + Cognitive Dissonance Theory 🡪 appeal to people’s desire to be act consistently with their past behavior
  + Reasoned Action Theory 🡪 appeal to positive attitudes toward surveys and subjective norms
  + Adult-to-Adult Communication Style 🡪 do not speak down to potential respondents
  + Influence Theory 🡪 Emphasizes scarcity of opportunity, reciprocation by respondents, and social proof
  + Leverage-Saliency Theory 🡪 Make positive features more salient and negative features less salient
  + Cost-Benefit Theory 🡪 Focus explicitly on costs and benefits for respondents
  + Gamification Theory 🡪 Make responding to surveys seem game like
* The above theories are psychological in nature.
* Sociological focus is concerned with how the survey materials fit with general culture in a way that affects response behavior.
* Social exchange theory
  + Compliance with a request more likely when people believe and trust that the rewards for complying will eventually exceed the costs of complying.
    - Q: Must rewards be individual in nature?
  + Not the same as economic exchange.
    - Only a general expectation of positive return.
    - Exact nature of benefits and why they will be provided are often not specified in advance (i.e., trust in the likely outcome rather than explicit bargaining).
    - Benefits can be social, psychological, economic, etc.
    - Not a rational behavior model.
* All decisions that individuals make about social interactions (e.g., completing a survey) are NOT always or even mostly the result of lengthy, careful consideration.
* Decision to respond to a web or mail survey is generally made in the first couple of days; most potential respondents decide almost immediately.
* Examples of influencers of potential respondent decision
  + Cultural influences
  + Respect for the requestor
  + Wanting to do interesting things

Does Social Exchange Still Apply in Today’s Asynchronous and Rapid-Fire Communication Environment?

* Social exchange theory developed during a time when society was significantly different than it is today.
* There is now more spontaneous social interaction.
* Social interactions are more distantly remote.
* People still make decision considering cost, benefits, and trust.
* Social exchange concepts may be more relevant in today’s environment.

Increasing the Benefits of Survey Participation

* Benefits to responding to surveys are likely limited.
* Many things people do for which they feel satisfaction involve helping others.
* Ways of increasing emotional satisfaction-based benefits for potential respondents
  + Specify how the survey results will be helpful
  + Ask for help or advice
  + Ask interesting questions
  + Sponsorship by a legitimate organization
  + Stress that opportunities to respond are limited
  + Convey that others have responded
  + Use incentives to encourage, but not require, reciprocity
    - Small advance incentive combined with a larger postpaid contingent incentive is often effective.
    - Incentives often help reduce nonresponse error.
    - Does NOT seem to have substantial effect on data quality.
  + Leverage the additive effects of benefits
    - Using several techniques in combination will generally increase response rates more than using just a single technique.
  + Do NOT deny the existence of benefits
    - Required IRB disclaimers often deny the existence of benefits

Decreasing the Costs of Participation

* Reduce the burden of length
* Reduce complexity
  + Respondents feel an increased sense of burden when they question whether they can provide accurate answers to survey questions.
* Use visual design principles to make questionnaires easier to complete
* Avoid subordinating language
  + Don’t make potential respondent feel obligated or beholden.
* Make responding convenient
* Don’t make potential respondents use survey modes that are uncomfortable for them.
* Don’t offer a choice of response mode in the initial request
* Minimize requests for personal and sensitive information
* Show similarity to other previous response to requests
  + Foot-in-the-door technique 🡪 make a small request followed by a larger request after compliance with the small request

Establishing Trust

* Trust is likely the single most important issue affecting response rates to surveys.
* Relevant to all survey modes.
* Survey sponsors should NOT make promises about benefits they can’t guarantee.
* Ways of instilling trust
  + Provide ways for potential survey respondents to confirm the authenticity of the survey
  + Emphasize sponsorship by a legitimate authority
  + Build upon previously established relationships and friendships
  + Provide a token of appreciation in advance
  + Assure confidentiality and protection of data
    - Excessively detailed explanations in situations with low data sensitivity will often raise concerns and deter response.
  + Design professional communications
    - Make each contact appear important
      * Personalized cover letters
      * Including a relevant picture on front of questionnaire
      * Provide information about the survey project
    - Do NOT make the survey information appear too much like a brochure

It’s More than Just Getting People to Respond

* Always consider response rates in conjunction with nonresponse error.
  + Do NOT increase response rates by obtaining data from uncertain types of respondents.
  + Avoid biasing the survey.
  + Do NOT employ techniques that have differential appeal to different segments of the target population.

Putting the Parts Together: Some Guidelines for Applying Social Exchange

* Use a holistic approach to survey design.
  + Consider all features of the survey effort; do NOT focus on just one element.
  + Communication occurs in multiple places within the elements of the survey.
  + The more information presented, the less likely potential respondents will remember it.
  + Survey requests that repeat the same content repeatedly don’t increase response rates.
* Social exchange concepts should be applied differently depending on the survey population, topic, sponsorship, and survey modes available.
  + The same elements don’t have to be used in very situation.
* Identify and evaluate whether to change or eliminate design constraints that are especially likely to have a negative impact on response and data quality.

Mixed-Mode Designs Provide New Opportunities for Applying Social Exchange

* Use multiple modes of communication to gain more opportunities to increase benefits, decrease costs, and build trust.
  + Mode of response does not need to be synonymous with the mode of contact.
  + Difficult to develop trust and convey benefits with single-mode survey designs.
* Use multiple modes of response to increase benefits, decrease costs, and build trust.
  + Potential survey respondents may be more receptive to one mode over others.
  + Alternative mode can provide a different stimulus.
* Utilize knowledge from past research and feedback from early contacts to adapt implementation procedures to reduce nonresponse error.
  + Communications via a different mode than the previous mode used are less likely to be ignored.
  + Adaptive design (also called responsive design) involves adjusting procedures during the data collection processed based on observations about the types of individuals who are responding and not responding.