

How to measure opinion?

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Outline

- Survey methods
- Survey psychology
- Survey question design

Survey as an imperfect representation of aggregate opinion

- What do we want to know?
- How do we measure it?
- On whom do we measure it?
- How do we summarize what we measured?

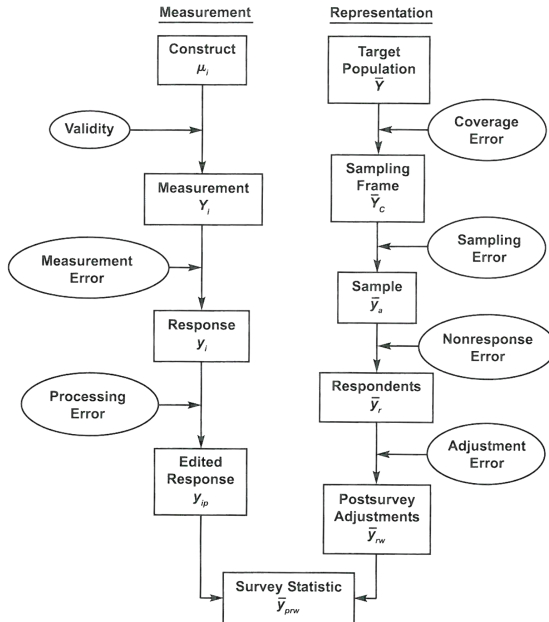


Figure 2.5 Survey life cycle from a quality perspective.

Survey Sampling

- Assume opinion exists as a population parameter
- Representative sampling identifies that parameter (with uncertainty)
- Repeated sampling tends to produce similar results
- Bias and variance

Response and nonresponse

- Survey design systematically includes and excludes
 - Exclusion based on sampling procedures
 - Exclusion based on competence (Gallup)
- Survey participation decisions further produce exclusion
 - Unit nonresponse
 - Item nonresponse

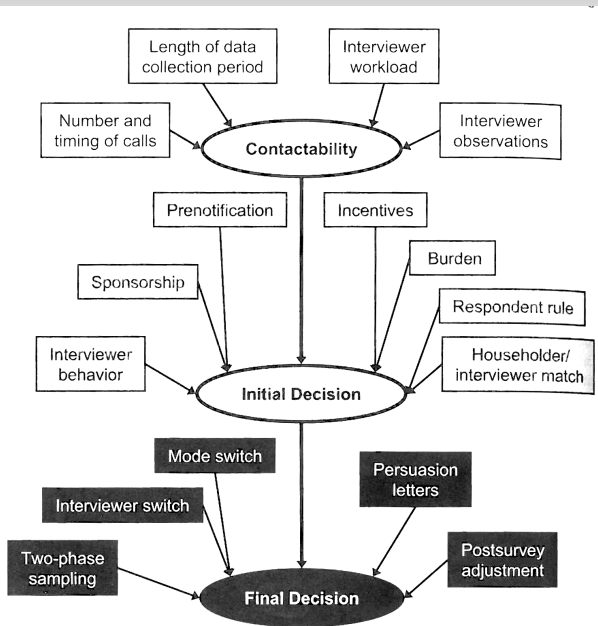


Figure 6.12 Tools for reducing unit nonresponse rates.

Survey mode

- Historically: face-to-face, in-home interviewing
- Telephone
- Internet

Answering questions

- Interpret/comprehend
- Retrieve
- Judge
- Report

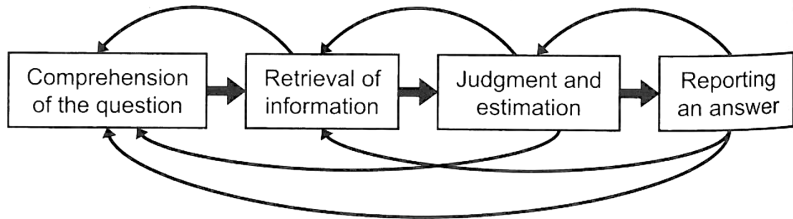


Figure 7.1 A simple model of the survey response process.

Respondent behavior

- Nonresponse/break-off
- Satisficing
 - Recency/primacy
 - “Straight-lining”
- Socially desirable responding
- Interviewer variance

Asking questions

- Open ended versus close ended

Open ended question

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

Close ended question

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Favor
- Oppose

Asking questions

- Open ended versus close ended
- Rating (ordered) versus ranking (categorical)

Rating

Which of the following best describes your opinion on abortion?

- It should be legal in all circumstances
- It should be legal except in the third trimester of pregnancy
- It should be legal only in the first trimester of pregnancy
- It should be illegal except to save the life of the mother
- It should be illegal in all circumstances

Ranking

Please rank the following from 1 for the option that best describes your opinion on abortion to 5 for the option that least well describes your opinion on abortion.

- It should be legal in all circumstances
- It should be legal except in the third trimester
- It should be legal except in the second and third trimesters
- It should be illegal except to save the life of the mother
- It should be illegal in all circumstances

Asking questions

- Open ended versus close ended
- Rating (ordered) versus ranking (categorical)
- Unipolar versus bipolar

Bipolar

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Unipolar

To what extent do you favor the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Moderately favor
- Somewhat favor
- Not at all favor

Asking questions

- Open ended versus close ended
- Rating (ordered) versus ranking (categorical)
- Unipolar versus bipolar
- Number and order of response options

Five responses

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Seven responses

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Moderately favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Moderately oppose
- Strongly oppose

Reversed order

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly oppose
- Moderately oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat favor
- Moderately favor
- Strongly favor

Asking questions

- Open ended versus close ended
- Rating (ordered) versus ranking (categorical)
- Unipolar versus bipolar
- Number and order of response options
- “Don’t know”/“No opinion” options

No opinion and don't know options

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

No opinion and don't know options

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

No opinion and don't know options

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- No opinion

No opinion and don't know options

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Don't know/No opinion
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

No opinion and don't know options

Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- No opinion
- Don't know

Asking questions

- Open ended versus close ended
- Rating (ordered) versus ranking (categorical)
- Unipolar versus bipolar
- Number and order of response options
- “Don’t know”/“No opinion” options
- “Some people think. . .”

Question stems

Some people feel that abortion should be legal in all circumstances. Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Question stems

Some people feel that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Question stems

Some people feel that abortion should be legal in all circumstances. Others feel that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. Do you favor or oppose the legalization of abortion?

- Strongly favor
- Somewhat favor
- Neither favor nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Question wording

- Stems that frame
- Word choice
 - Do you favor or oppose [abortion during the third trimester | so-called “partial birth abortion”]?
 - What is your personal opinion regarding whether or not [global warming | climate change] has been happening?
- Double barreled questions
 - Do you favor legalized abortion because it gives women the right to choose?
 - Do you oppose legalized abortion because it ends a human life?

Question order/context

- Carryover
- Backfire

Conclusion

- Surveys are often synonymous with “public opinion”
 - But don't forget about Herbst!
- Surveys are an imperfect representation
- How opinion questions are asked is critical!