

Survey Data

Basics of Survey Data

- Samples
- Question structures
- Results

Samples

- Surveys are *almost* always sent to a sample of individuals
- Surveys are generally sent to a probability sample
- Simple Random Sampling (SRS) is rare
- Weights are *usually* applied to the results

Question Types

- Open ended
- Short answer
- Multiple choice (choose one)
- Multiple choice (choose multiple)
- Ranked
- Forced Choice
- “Sliders”

Three (very) Broad Types of Questions

1. Demographic: age, region of the country, education level

Generally thought of as independent variables-- aspects of the individual that change slowly, if at all.

1. Behavioral: actions taken, usually over some time period

Things the respondent *did*, usually interested in frequency

1. Attitudinal: questions about ideology and beliefs

Getting a sense of what the respondent *thinks* about various topics

Guidelines for question design

Brevity

Longer questions inevitably lead to more confusion on the part of the respondent.

Guidelines for question design

Objectivity

Avoid leading questions, e.g. “Don’t you think that any reasonable person should . . . “

Avoid loaded questions, e.g. “Most reasonable people think that Dr. Pepper is amazing. What do you think?”

This is sometimes called push polling

Clarity in Responses

- Simplicity: Make each of the possible responses as simple as possible (relates to question brevity)

Example: bachelor's degree as opposed to baccalaureate degree

- Specificity: Make each response level as specific as possible.

Example: high school diploma as opposed to graduated from school

- Clear alternatives: Make the options distinguished from each other with no possible overlap

Example: Highest degree level is a bachelor's degree as opposed to graduated from college (what level? AA/BA/MA)

Issues with alternatives

Acquiescence bias: People will try to “fit” their response into your levels, even if it doesn’t really apply.

Example: how often do you use public transportation? 1/week, 2/week, more than 3 times/week. Many people who don’t use it will say 1/week to try and be helpful

Ordering/position bias

First response will always be the most popular, structure questions accordingly, or randomize response levels

Avoid hypothetical questions

People will make up responses to made up questions. Don’t ask “What do you think someone might do . . .” Ask “What would you do . . .”

Memory Questions

Many, many behavioral questions are based on recall.

Q: How many times did you visit the gas station this week?

0,1, more than 1

People get this wrong all the time!

Memory Questions

Frequency is a common target for behavioral questions

How frequently do you go to the library?

-Never

-Sometimes

-Often

-All the time

Memory Questions

Frequency is a common target for behavioral questions

How frequently do you go to the library?

- Never

- Less than once a year

- Monthly

- Weekly

Memory Questions

Confusing Attitudinal Questions With Behavioral Questions

Example: Do you feel like you will continue working in this profession?

Vs.

When do you plan to quit working in this current profession

Combining Independent and Dependent Variables in One Question

How important was the cost of college for you in deciding to stop attending college?

Vs.

Two questions

How much did you pay to go to college last year?

Do you intend to stop attending college?

The analysis of the independent and dependent variable will tell us what we actually need to know: are people with high costs more likely to stop attending.

Double Barreled Questions

Double-barreled questions are multiple questions combined into one.

Example:

How important do you think professional development is in the decision of administrators or teachers in their decision to stay in a school or leave the profession altogether?

Not very important . . . Very Important

Better:

How important is professional development in helping you continue to teach effectively?

Not very important . . . Very important

Survey Length

Test your survey length with the intended audience!

Over 20 minutes is a VERY long survey

Respect people's time and attention, think about pay for those asked to take longer surveys.

Guidelines for question design