PSY 501: The Basics of Survey Research

Week 13

Surveys

1. What are they?

2. Why conduct them?

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   - Questionnaires and interviews that ask people to provide information about themselves
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1. What are they?
   - Questionnaires and interviews that ask people to provide information about themselves

2. Why conduct them?
   - Best way to collect information about demographics, attitudes, etc.

Surveys

Advantages:

- One can investigate internal events (e.g., attitudes, opinions)
- Can generalize about an entire population based on relatively small samples of individuals
- Large amounts of data can be collected quckly with relatively little cost (effort, time, etc.)

Surveys

Disadvantages:

- ▶ Correlational: causal claims shouldn't be made
- ▶ Non-response bias: not everyone responds…
- ▶ Self-reports may not be truthful
    - ▶ Response set: tendency to respond from a particular perspective

Stages of survey research

Stage 1: Identify the focus of the study and select your research method

- ▶ What are the objectives of the research?
- ▶ Is a survey method the best approach?
- ▶ What kind of survey should be used?
  - ▶ Group administration
  - ▶ face-to-face interviews
  - ▶ etc.

Stages of survey research

Stage 2: Determining the research schedule and budget

Stage 3: Establishing an information base

- Find out what's been done, what's known (find other related surveys)

Stage 4: Identify the *sampling frame*

- The <u>actual</u> population that the sample is drawn from (as opposed to the *ideal* population)

Stages of survey research

Stage 5: Determine the sampling method and sample size

- ► How you sample is important
- ► Problem with voluntary response methods
  - ► Typically only individuals with strong opinions respond, so results are extremely biased!

Stages of survey research

Stage 5: Determine the sampling method and sample size

- ▶ Why is sample size important?
- ▶ Talk about sampling error

Stages of survey research

Sampling error – how is the sample different from the population?

- ▶ Confidence intervals
  - ▶ An estimate of the mean/percentage of the population, based on sample data
  - ▶ "John Doe has 55% of the vote, with a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$"
- ▶ Margin of error (the $\pm 3\%$ part)
  - ▶ The larger your sample size, the smaller your margin of error!
  - ▶ Which would you be more likely to believe:
    - ▶ We asked 10 people....
    - ▶ We asked 1000 people...
- ▶ Rule of thumb: sample as many people as you can!

Stages of survey research

Stage 6: Designing the survey instrument

- ▶ Question construction: how questions are written is very important!
    - ▶ Do your questions really target your research objectives?
    - ▶ Keep it simple, don't ask two things at once, avoid loaded or biased questions, etc.
    - ▶ How should questions be answered (question type)?

Survey questions: Good and Bad

Poor

Was the FDC negligent by ignoring the warnings about Vioxx during testing and approving it for sale?

Problem: emotionally charged words

Do you favor eliminating the wasteful excess in the public school budget?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Unsure

Good

If the FDC knew that Vioxx caused serious side effects during testing, what should it have done?

a) Ban it from ever being sold
b) Require more testing before approving it
c) Unsure

Do you favor reducing the public school budget?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Unsure

Survey questions: Good and Bad

Survey questions: Good and Bad

Poor

Are you against same sex marriage and in favor of a constitutional amendment to ban it?

a) Yes
b) No

Problem: Biased in more than one direction

Problem: Asks two questions

Good

What is your view on same sex marriage?

a) I think marriage is a matter of personal choice
b) I'm against it but don't want a constitutional amendment
c) I want a constitutional amendment banning it

Survey question types

1. Open ended (fill in the blank, short answer)
   - Can get a lot of information, but
   - Coding is time-intensive and potentially ambiguous

2. Closed-ended (pick best answer, pick all that apply)
   - Easier to code
   - Response alternatives are same for everyone

3. Rating scales
   - Used for "how much" judgements (measuring attitudes, agree/disagree)

Open vs. Closed Ended

Closed-ended

What is the best thing about TSU? (choose one)

- 1. Location
- 2. Academics
- 3. Dorm food
- 4. Rodeo

Open-ended

What is the best thing about TSU?

Rating scales

PSY 101 is an important course in my studies.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree