

Surveys and Interviews

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PS 585
Research Methods

Today's Blueprint

Last Class

- Analyzing Records:
 - What are records?
 - What types of records do researchers analyze?
 - How do researchers analyze records?

Today's Class

- Survey Research:
- Interviews
- Surveys
 - Defining them
 - Why we use them
 - How to do them
 - Strengths and Weaknesses

Survey Research

Survey Research

- The basic idea behind survey research:
 - Measure variables by asking people questions
 - Examine relationships among the variables

“Survey research is research based on the interview method of data collection. Also known as opinion polling, it is one of the most familiar political science research methods.”—Johnson, et. al. (2001, 276)

Two Major Survey Research Approaches:

1. Ask people questions *via* **Interviewing**
2. Ask people questions *via* **Surveys**

Interviews

Interviews

What are they?

- Asks respondents questions:
 - Face-to-face
 - In an non-standard, individualized manner

Interviews

What's the purpose?

- Obtain large amounts of information from limited numbers of people, usually through non-random sampling

Interviews

Why do we use them?

- As preliminary or exploratory research
- As a supplement other methods
- As a self-contained means of collecting data

Interviews

How do we do them?

- Good interviews have the following:
 - Range
 - Specificity
 - Depth
 - Content

Interviews

1) Range:

- The interview data should be *wide-ranging* rather than narrowly restricted
 - Should cover a maximum range of relevant topics

Interviews

2) Specificity:

- Interviews should provide data that is highly *specific* and not general or diffuse
 - However, gaining specific data does not mean “pigeonholing” discussion

Interviews

3) Depth:

- Interviewers should explore the participants’ feelings in some *depth*
- Researchers want to know:
 - What the topic means to the participant
 - How much the participant is/was involved in the topic

Interviews

4) Context:

- Interviews should take into account the *personal context* (*i.e.* the attributes, prior experiences, etc.) that participants use when they give their responses to the topic

Interviews

- Types of Interviews
 - Elite:
 - Ask special people
 - Personal:
 - Ask regular people
 - Focused:
 - Ask groups of people

Interviews

Strengths & Weaknesses:

- Strength of interviews = weakness of focus groups and *vice-versa*
 - Neither approach can replace the other
 - Both approaches complement each other

Interviews vs. Focus Groups:

	Interviews	Focus Groups
Nature of Data	General, limited	In-depth, detailed
Structure	More formal/	scripted
Intrusiveness	Less formal/	free-flowing
Directed By	More intrusive	Less intrusive
# People asked	Researcher	Participants
Trade-off	1 at a time	5-10 at a time

Surveys

Surveys

What are they?

- Procedure for systematically collecting information about:
 - Attitudes
 - Preferences
 - Knowledge
 - Behavior

Surveys

What's the purpose?

- Obtain limited amounts of information from a large number of people, usually through random sampling

Surveys

Why do we use them?

- The answers provide information about the group(s) that those people represent

Surveys

How do we do them?

- Some issues to consider:
 - Choosing a design
 - Developing *survey* questions
 - Administering the survey

Surveys

Choosing a Design:

- Cross-sectional
 - One or more samples tested @ one time
- Successive independent samples
 - Different samples tested @ different times
- Longitudinal
 - Same sample @ different times

Surveys

- Can you use an existing questionnaire?
 - Doing so makes your results comparable to existing results
- If you have to design your own, ask:
 - What do you want to accomplish with your questionnaire?

Surveys

- What types of questions?
 - Open-ended
 - Closed-ended

Surveys

- One issue per question
 - Avoid double-barreled questions
 - Ex) "Are you a republican? If so, do you like Arnold Schwarzenegger?"

Surveys

- Avoid biased questions:
 - Ex) If Topic = Abortion:
 - *Good*: Do you believe abortion should be legal or illegal?
 - *Bad*: Do you believe in killing unborn kids?
 - *Also bad*: should women be forced to bear unwanted babies?

Surveys

- Be wary of social desirability effects
- Be wary of question order effects

Surveys

Administering Surveys:

- By phone
- Face-to-Face
- By mail
- *Via* the Internet

Surveys

Strengths ☺

- Cheap (relatively)
- Practical
- Representative

Surveys

Weaknesses ☺

- Response style (habitual way of answering)
- Response acquiescence (yea-saying)
- Response deviation (nay-saying)
- Social desirability

References:

- FYI:
 - Morgan, David and Richard A. Krueger. 1997. The Focus Group Kit. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
 - Babbie, Earl. 1973. Survey Research Methods. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
 - Neuman, Lawrence. 2003. Social Science Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.