

SURVEY TYPES: ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES

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Format

- 1. Mail & Self-Administered Questionnaire/Survey: Advantages & Disadvantages**
- 2. Telephonic Interview/Survey: Advantages & Disadvantages**
- 3. Face-to-Face Interview/Survey: Advantages & Disadvantages**
- 4. Web-based Interview/Survey: Advantages & Disadvantages**

1) Mail/Self-Administered Questionnaires

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Mail/Self-Administered: Advantages

- Can be given or mailed directly to respondents, who read the instructions and questions and then record their answers.
- A single researcher can conduct this type of survey at a **very low cost** and **cover a wide geographical area**.
- Respondents can complete the questionnaire at their **convenience** and can **check personal records** for information if necessary.
- Mail questionnaires offer **anonymity** and avoid **interviewer bias**.
- They are very effective and can achieve **acceptable response rates** from an educated sample (if has a strong interest in the topic or the survey organization).

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Mail/Self-Administered...: Disadvantages

- Low response rate:
 - People do not complete and return mailed questionnaires
 - response rates can be improved by sending non-respondents reminder letters (adds to the time and cost of data collection).
- Lack of control over the completion
 - We can't be sure **who** in **what** condition filled our questionnaire.
 - Absence of interviewer to clarify questions, probe for more information.

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Mail/Self-Administered...: Disadvantages

- **Respondent's reactions** to questions, physical characteristics, or the setting can't be observed. e.g., lying about physical features, socio-economic status, food consumption etc.
- **Lack of control** over order of completion of questionnaire items
- **Incomplete** questionnaires.
- **Visual aids** (e.g., look at this picture and tell me what you see), open-ended questions, many contingency questions, and complex questions cannot be used in most mail questionnaires.
- Ill-suited for illiterate or nearly illiterate people.

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2) Telephone Interview/Survey

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Telephone Interview/Survey: Advantages

- **Quick outreach:** Using telephone directories/contacts or RDD, a large number of telephone/mobile phone-owners can be reached quickly.
- **High Response rate:**
 - In comparison to mailed questionnaire one can quickly reach many people across all geographic areas.
- **More expensive than mailed questionnaires** because it requires interviewer's time.
- **Flexibility:** (In general) has the strengths of face-to-face interviews but at a much lower cost.
 - **Interviewers control** the sequence of questions and can use some probes. A specific respondent is chosen and is likely to answer all questions alone. Researchers know when the questions were answered and can use contingency questions effectively.

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Telephone Interview: Advantages

- **The use of computer-assisted technologies: (1) Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI)** systems widely used whereby calls are made using computer.
 - Wearing a headset and microphone, the interviewer reads the questions from a computer screen for the specific respondent called and then enters the answer via the computer keyboard. The computer program will control which question next appears and will allow for complex contingency questions.
 - CATI Speeds the process and reduces interviewer errors
 - CATI eliminates the separate step of having the interviewer write responses on paper and then having someone else enter information into a computer, and speeds data collection.

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Telephone Interview: Advantages

- **(2) Interactive Voice Response (IVR)** Includes several computer-automated systems available through phone technology - widely used in marketing.
 - IVR has a respondent listen to questions and response options over the telephone and indicate responses by touch-tone entry or by voice (the computer uses voice recognition software).
 - IVR may have some advantages over live interviewers, such as rapid and automated data collection, no interviewer reading or recording errors, and high anonymity.
 - IVR can be successful for very short and very simple surveys.

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Telephone Interview: Disadvantages

- **Moderately high cost and limited interview length** (in both CATI and traditional telephone interviews).
- **Difficulty/Impossibility to reach respondents:**
 - the call may come at an inconvenient time and respondents without a telephone are impossible to reach.
- **Interviewer bias:** The use of an interviewer reduces anonymity and introduces potential interviewer bias.
- **Visual aids** impossible to use;
- **Open-ended questions** difficult to use.
- **Disruptions** (e.g., background noise) and respondent tone of voice (e.g., anger) or hesitancy can be noted without ability to manage/control.

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Telephone Interview: Disadvantages

- **IVR** has a sharp drop-off rate (about 40 % don't complete the long questionnaires).
- The issue of Cell phones:
 - Telephone survey introduced during the times of landline phones; In comparison to landline surveys, cell phone surveys tend to have
 - **lower response rates,**
 - **higher refusal rates,** and
 - **lower rates of turning an initial refusal into participation.**

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3) Face-to-Face Interviews

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Face-to-Face Interviews: Advantages

- The **highest response rates** and **permit the longest and most complex questionnaires**.
- Has all the advantages of the telephone interview + allows interviewers to observe the surroundings and to use nonverbal communication and visual aids.
 - Well-trained interviewers can ask all types of questions and can use extensive probes.

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Face-to-Face Interviews: Disadvantages

- **Highly costly.**
 - The training, travel, supervision, and personnel costs for interviews.
- **Greatest (chances for) Interviewer Bias**
 - The interviewer's appearance, tone of voice, question wording, and so forth may affect the respondent. In addition, interviewer supervision is lower than for telephone interviews that supervisors monitor by listening in.
- A variation on the face-to-face survey with questions on sensitive issues is CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing).
 - A CAPI interviewer with a laptop computer is present, and the respondent completes questions on the laptop. The interviewer serves to motivate completion and to clarify questions.

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4) WEB-BASED SURVEYS

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WEB SURVEYS: ADVANTAGES

- Two (sub)types of web surveys, viz.,
 - (1) **static web/e-mail survey** is like the presentation of a page of paper but on the computer screen. AND
 - (2) **interactive web/e-mail survey** has contingency questions and may present different questions to different respondents based on prior answers.
- Both
 - Fastest and least expensive
 - Allow flexible design and
 - can use visual images and even audio or video.

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WEB SURVEYS: DISADVANTAGES

- **Coverage Issue**
 - Sampling and unequal access to and use of the internet
 - Older, less educated, low-income, and rural people are less likely to have access.
 - Many people have multiple e-mail addresses!
- **Privacy and verification**
 - Protecting respondent privacy is an issue.
 - Secure web sites with passwords or pins and high confidentiality protection can help.
 - **Respondent verification** is needed to ensure that the sampled respondent alone participates and only once.

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WEB SURVEYS: DISADVANTAGES

- **Design complexity & flexibility issue:** The compatibility of various web software and hardware combinations must be verified. E.g.,
 - best to provide one or a few questions per screen, making the entire question visible on the screen at one time in a consistent format with drop-down boxes for answer choices.
 - Best to include a progress indicator (as motivation) such as a clock or symbol indicating progress.
 - Keep visual appearance simple (limited colours and fonts) and maintaining consistency is best.
 - Provide clear instructions for computer action (e.g., Use of drop-down screens) and they should include "click here" instructions.
 - Also, make it easy for respondents to move back and forth across questions is best.
 - Providing detailed questions and a large space for answers in open-ended questions on internet surveys helps elicit longer and more complete answers.

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