Pitfalls in Survey Research

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Survey Research Methods
Introduction

• Who I am

• Should take my class

• My experience falling into these pits
Question Design Pitfalls

• Goal in question design is to create a standardized stimulus that is understood in the same way by everyone and that you have a method for systematically recording answers.

  - Not knowing your specific analytic objectives interferes with writing an appropriate question

  - Using someone else's measures blindly

  - Not pretesting
More Question Design Pitfalls

- Structural Pitfalls in Question Design
  - Not including enough choices
  - Writing scale choices that are “uneven”
  - Not writing balanced scale choices
More Question Design Pitfalls

• Content Pitfalls
  - Putting two questions (or more) in the same question.
  - Using Technical Terms without definitions
  - Using Jargon/Slang
  - Leading Respondents
Avoiding Question Design Pitfalls

- Pretest
- Pretest
- Pretest
- Pretest
Data Collection Pitfalls

- Accepting low response rates to mail surveys because that's what everyone else gets
  - Pitfall: Increasing sample size instead of increasing response rates.
    - Reminders work
    - Incentives work
    - Using both works better
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

- Pattern of reminders are: Initial mailing, 1st reminder letter (or postcard), 2nd reminder includes replacement copy of survey; 3rd reminder is a letter or postcard.

- Send reminders only to those who haven’t sent back survey yet. This means you have to have an ID number on survey.
  - Sending to all is weak because you start out with an apology to those who have already returned; plus some who have returned think you really know which survey is theirs so they send in a second one!
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

• Timing of reminders is the key.
  - You want to build motivation from previous mailing so you can't wait too long
  - If you send too soon however you waste resources on those who would return anyway
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

Returns after first mailing

30-40%

<--- 10-14 days---->
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

Returns after second mailing

30-40%

Another 20%

<--- 10-14 days--->

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

Returns after third mailing

30-40%

Another 20%

10-14 days --->

+10%
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

Returns after 4th

Another 20%

5-10%

30-40%

10-14 days

+10%

10-14 days

10-14 days
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Incentives

- The promised reward
  - You return survey we will send you reward
  - Least effective

- Lottery
  - A conditional promised reward (big prize)
  - Somewhat better than small promised reward

- Up-front incentive
  - Include with survey
  - Most effective (boosts response by 15 - 30%)
  - Doesn't have to be that much but $5 to $10 is common
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Incentives

• Money is best

• Other incentives
  - movie passes
  - gift certificates
  - gifts of value (mugs, pens)
  - books of postage stamps
Pitfalls in Interviewing

• Using untrained interviewers

• Using interviewers who are not used to academic quality (interviewing dynamics or response rates)

• Using interviewers who do not expect to do well
  - Smooth George
  - Spunky Cynthia
Sampling Pitfalls

• Random sampling is the method of choice because it potentially allows you to estimate the degree of precision to your measurements and is more generalizable

• Several Pitfalls Interfere with this Goal
  - Using a list to sample from that does not correspond well to the population you want to generalize to.
  - A sampling frame (list) that is out-of-date
  - Not using stratified sampling procedures