

USD Survey Research: Determining if a Survey is the Best Way to Get the Information

I. What Is Survey Research?

- use of a standardized survey instrument
- administered to a representative sample of individuals
- gather valid and reliable information about a research problem
- explore associations using multivariate data analysis techniques

II. Is Survey Research Appropriate for Your Information Needs?

A. Match the Research Problem to the Measurement Strategy

- A survey instrument is one tool to gather information.
- Is it a suitable measure for my research problem?
 - carefully define the research problem
 - review the literature
 - develop the research design
 - design sampling frame

Then ask:

- What direct measures can be used to answer my research questions (e.g. embedded measures, lab results, simulations)?
- Are there existing sources of data e.g., census data, Institutional Research data such as student data course file or admission file, national studies?
- What direct and indirect measures will provide reliable, valid, and meaningful data?
- Can a survey collect the needed information?
 - Are respondents capable and willing?

III. Survey Research Methods

Goal: design a standardized instrument that exposes the sample of respondents to the exact same stimulus so that each respondent interprets the questions in the same way. This reduces measurement error.

- Measurement error occurs "when a respondent's answer to a survey question is inaccurate, imprecise, or cannot be compared in any useful way to other respondents" (answers). (Dillman, 2000)

IV. Determining and Drawing a Sample

- know your population
- determine appropriate sample size
 - formulas to estimate sample size
 - increase sample size to account for expected response rate
- consider a stratified sample and over sampling
 - stratify sample by characteristic e.g., major or college
 - randomly select within each stratum