

Problems of Respondents' Honesty and Objectivity in Sociological Surveys: Motivational Aspects and Their Influence on Data Quality

Yevhen Yasniov

Founder, director of the research department Pollsar LLC, USA, Miami

Abstract: The article analyzes the influence of respondents' motivation on the sincerity and objectivity of their answers in sociological surveys. Special attention is paid to the problems that arise in the process of data collection and to the possibilities of motivating respondents in order to improve the quality and reliability of the information obtained. Based on the analysis of existing research and practical examples, strategies for optimizing the data collection process are proposed.

Keywords: data collection quality, motivational influences, questionnaire design, respondent sincerity, social desirability bias, survey objectivity, survey participation incentives

I. INTRODUCTION

Sociological surveys play a key role in collecting data on social, economic, and political phenomena. However, the honesty and objectivity of respondents' answers are critical determinants of the quality and reliability of the results. Despite this, researchers face a number of challenges, including social desirability effects, misunderstanding of questions, and reluctance to waste time for no apparent personal gain.

II. PROBLEMS OF HONESTY AND OBJECTIVITY IN SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEYS

One of the main problems is social desirability - the tendency of respondents to answer in the way they think society or the researcher expects them to. [1] For example, the 2020 study found that questions about sensitive topics such as income or social behavior are often skewed by respondents' desire to appear in a more favorable light.

In addition, the wording of questions and the context of the survey can significantly influence responses. For example, complex or ambiguous terminology can lead to misunderstanding of the question and misleading responses.

III. MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN SURVEYS

Motivation to participate in surveys ranges from extrinsic motivation, such as financial rewards, to intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest in the research topic. Extrinsic motivation can lead to greater willingness to participate, but can also reduce the honesty of responses as the respondent's primary goal becomes obtaining a reward [2]. At the same time, intrinsic motivation has been shown to lead to more accurate and honest responses

IV. STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING THE SINCERITY AND OBJECTIVITY OF RESPONSES

Let us consider several effective strategies that can improve the quality and reliability of data collected in sociological surveys, contributing to a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study.

1. Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymous surveys reduce the fear of possible negative consequences of speaking or expressing opinions, which encourages more honest responses. Confidentiality, on the other hand, assures respondents that their answers will only be used for research purposes without revealing their identity.

2. Careful question wording

Thoughtful question wording is critical to eliciting honest responses. Questions should be clear, neutral, and unbiased. Consider an example of a bad question: "Do you agree with the common belief that smoking is bad for your health? As you can see, the question assumes a "correct" answer and may encourage the respondent to express a socially desirable position. Here is an example of a valid question: "What is your opinion on the health effects of smoking?" This question is open-ended and non-biased, allowing the respondent to express his or her opinion freely.

3. Using a Likert Scale

A Likert scale is a popular method of assessing attitudes or opinions used in surveys and questionnaires where respondents are asked to express their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. A typical Likert scale has 5 or 7 attitudinal levels, ranging from complete disagreement to complete agreement. Likert scales allow respondents to express their attitudes toward statements in a more nuanced way, which can help provide more accurate data. Instead of simply saying "yes" or "no," respondents can indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. Let's look at two examples of statements that use a Likert scale:

Statement: "I feel that my workplace supports equal opportunity for all employees."

Response options:

- Strongly disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree

In this example, respondents can indicate exactly how much they agree with the statement, allowing for more nuanced data collection.

Statement: "I am satisfied with the quality of educational services provided at my university."

Response options:

- Totally disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

This example allows respondents to express their opinions about educational services, which can be useful for universities in terms of assessing student satisfaction.

The advantage of the Likert scale is that it minimizes the pressure on respondents to choose yes or no by giving them a scale to express their views more accurately. This helps to avoid the social desirability effect, where respondents may feel the need to respond in a certain way in order to conform to expected norms.

4. Variety of question formats

Using a variety of question formats in social science surveys can improve data quality by providing a more complete understanding of respondents' attitudes and behaviors. Let's look at how different types of questions can be used for this purpose.

5. Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions allow respondents to express their thoughts and feelings without restriction. This can lead to a deeper understanding of opinions and provide qualitative data. Open-ended questions often begin with "why" or "how," which encourages longer answers.

Example: "What factors are most important to you when choosing a job?"

6. Closed-End Questions

Closed-ended questions limit respondents' answers to a predetermined set of options. They are useful for collecting quantitative data and making it easier to compare responses between different groups of respondents.

For example: "How often do you go to the gym?"

Response options:

- Don't visit
- Once a month
- Several times a month
- Once a week
- Several times a week

7. Rating Scales

Rating scales allow respondents to rate a particular statement or product on a given scale, such as 1 to 10. These questions are good for measuring the magnitude of something, such as satisfaction or preference.

For example: "How satisfied are you with your current Internet service provider? Rate from 1 to 10, where 1 is completely dissatisfied and 10 is completely satisfied.

8. Dichotomous questions

Dichotomous questions require you to choose one of two possible answers, often "yes" or "no". They are useful for obtaining specific information, but may not provide an in-depth understanding of respondents' motivations.

Example: "Have you ever bought anything online? Yes/No."

9. Multiple Choice Questions

These questions offer respondents a choice of multiple response options. They can reveal preferences over a wide range of options, but can also be restrictive if the response options do not cover all possible opinions.

Example: "What social media do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)."

- Response options:
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- I don't use social media

By using a variety of question formats, the depth of qualitative data can be combined with the precision and comparability of quantitative data. This helps researchers gain a more complete and multifaceted understanding of their topics.

V. PREVENT RESPONDENT FATIGUE

Long surveys can cause respondent fatigue, which reduces the quality and honesty of responses. Designing short surveys or providing breaks in long surveys helps keep respondents attentive and motivated.

VI. MOTIVATION THROUGH FEEDBACK

Motivation through feedback is a strategy for increasing respondent engagement and honesty in the social research process, as well as a way to increase the value and quality of the resulting data. Here are some key aspects of this strategy:

Pre-Feedback: Before participants begin answering questions, they can be given information about how their input will help the research. This could be an explanation of how their answers will help solve specific social problems or be used to improve products and services.

Interim Feedback: Feedback can be provided during the survey process, such as confirming the importance of participation or expressing appreciation for continued participation in long-term research.

Final Feedback: At the end of the study, it is important to let respondents know how their information has been used and to share the overall results of the study. This can be done by sending emails, publishing reports or newsletters. For example, POLLSAR's social research service takes the approach that at the end of the survey, in addition to a final thank you message, the respondent can click through to the survey results page in real time.

VII. CONCLUSION

The sincerity and objectivity of respondents' answers are key to the validity of sociological survey results. The development and application of effective motivational strategies can significantly improve the quality of the data collected. It is important to continue research in this area to find new ways to motivate survey participants and ensure their honesty and objectivity.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Smith, J. A. (2020). Social desirability in survey research: A review. *Social Indicators Research*, 123(2), 123-135.
- [2]. Brown, A., & Taylor, K. (2019). The effect of incentive on the quality of response in survey research. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 182(3), 679-698.
- [3]. Johnson, T. P., & Van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2019). Social desirability in cross-cultural research. In *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences* (pp. 143-162). Springer.