

Chapter 12

Telephone Surveys

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Telephone surveys came into use in the late 1960s, and by the 1980s had become the predominant survey mode in developed countries, particularly the U.S. In the early 1990s, however, technological innovations and a worsening survey environment began to erode confidence in the validity of the results from telephone surveys of the general population, a process which continues. The fortunes of the telephone survey have thus waxed and waned in the developed world, creating an arc across the last quarter of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. At the same time the spread of one of the new technologies—mobile phones—to the remaining countries, particularly in Africa, holds out the possibility of conducting telephone surveys in areas where they have not previously been feasible. This chapter discusses the types of surveys that are currently being conducted wherever telephone penetration is sufficiently high. The benefits and advantages of each of the interviewer-administered types that are in widest use are described fully. Other uses of the telephone in surveys are mentioned in less detail. These descriptions indicate that the type of telephone survey most at risk is the general population survey based on Random Digit Dial sampling methods. Telephone surveys conducted from list samples are still successful and can achieve acceptable response rates. The chapter also outlines the challenges that mobile phones and VoIP present to the future conduct of telephone surveys.

GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

CATI. Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing systems allow centralized survey administration, instant and relatively error free data entry, and automatic dialing. Questionnaires must be programmed and loaded into the system. Interviewers then read the survey questions from a computer screen and instantaneously record the respondent's answer on the computer keyboard.

IVR. Interactive Voice Response designates a self-administered telephone survey. See T-ACASI.

List-Assisted. A list-assisted design increases the chances of selecting a working residential number for a telephone sample. It eases the interviewer burden of calling nonworking, ineligible numbers and increases the efficiency of the sample, thus also lowering costs.

RDD. Random Digit Dial denotes a procedure for drawing probability sample of the general population using computer generated telephone numbers.

SMS. Text messaging on mobile phones is made possible by the Short Message Service. Thus SMS has become shorthand for text messaging.

T-ACASI. This mnemonic refers to a telephone survey that is self-administered. The letters stand for Telephone Audio Computer Assisted Self Interviewing. See IVR.

TDE. Touchtone Data Entry is a form of self-administered telephone survey that does not require interviewer assistance.

VoIP. Voice over IP (VoIP) is the family of technologies that allow the internet to be used for voice applications, such as telephony, voice instant messaging, and teleconferencing.