

SOCIAL SURVEYS

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- Surveys are deployed to measure facts, attitudes and behaviours through asking questions. Good survey research follows a common process in its testing, development and use.
- There are many methods and tools of analysis, but these do not relieve the researcher from the need to interpret data and be mindful of the limitations of what the survey method can reveal: for instance, about how people interpret the world around them and respond to questions.
- Surveys have been challenged because of their assumption that there are causal, quantifiable relations between variables, in a manner which is not applicable to the human realm of action; and because they provide limited understanding of how people adopt certain values and actions in the first place.
- Digital technologies are transforming the use and analysis of surveys: for example, through crowdsourced data.

Survey research seeks to remove as much bias from the research process as possible and produce results that are replicable.

(May, Perry and Sutton, 2022: 107)



DISCUSS

- What type of research question would lend itself to a survey?
- What pre-survey preparation would you need to do to enhance the reliability and validity of the survey?
- What are the advantages and limitations of the survey method over ethnographic or qualitative interviewing?
- What are the key stages in survey question construction, and how will these vary by the data collection method?

DO

You have been asked to devise a survey to capture students' views of healthy food while studying at University by student age and gender.

- Drawing upon your own experiences, define the concept of 'healthy food'. What dimensions of healthy food are you going to focus on? What other data will you need to collect?
- Develop a short survey of 20 questions.
- What topics are you focussing the questions on, and how do these frame, and perhaps constrain your research?
- What background data will you need to collect to explore differences and associations?
- What would be your preferred data collection method? Why? And what are the practical and ethical considerations?
- How will you select participants?

This summary has been developed as an Open Access resource to support educators, students and researchers to develop and extend their understanding of the practice of social research. It draws on May, T. and Perry, B. (2022) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. London: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill. To buy the book, please visit [Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process](#), use code OPENUP20 for a discount.