

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES RELATING TO INTERNET-BASED SURVEYS

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### ABSTRACT

Internet surveys are widely used in marketing research, and their use continues to grow, partly because they provide a number of technological features that are designed to reduce common sources of respondent error that can impact data quality. This session deals with selected methodological issues concerning Internet surveys.

Linda Golden (University of Texas at Austin, USA) and Patrick Brockett (University of Texas at Austin, USA) in their presentation, "Trials, Tribulations, and Trust: Addressing Issues in Internet Surveys," review recent literature on Internet surveys, identifying major issues researchers need to consider. In addition, they discuss various current market practices in Internet research. Some techniques provide solutions for reliability and validity issues, while others contribute reasons for a lack of confidence in Internet survey results.

The use of highly interesting questions and where they should be placed in a questionnaire are discussed by Jared M. Hansen (University of North Carolina, Charlotte, USA) and Scott M. Smith (Brigham Young University, USA) in "Effects of Using Highly Interesting Questions on Data Quality and Survey Completion Rates." The insertion of a two-staged highly interesting question in an online, survey-based field experiment is shown to produce better survey results and better data quality than a typical highly interesting question placed at the beginning of a questionnaire. Measured effects include survey completion rates, response bias, and reported demographic and empowerment differences.

There are four major theories of survey response behavior that seem to underlie survey design that uses all modes of data collection—exchange, cognitive dissonance, self-perception, and commitment/involvement. These theories are examined by James Wiley (Temple University, USA) and Vallen Han (New Zealand Post Office, New Zealand) in "Using A Theory of Survey Response Behavior to Design Internet Surveys." This presentation is the first to examine the applicability of these theories for designing a survey using the Internet for data collection.

A widely, and increasingly, used technique in Internet surveys is "forced answering," (FA) which requires respondents to enter an "appropriate" response before they are allowed to proceed to the next survey question. Forced answering virtually eliminates sources of respondent error due to item omission. But, using FA might cause respondents to opt-out entirely or break-off early in the survey, which would increase non-response error. It has been suggested that one way around this is to provide a "prefer not to answer" (PNA) option if FA is used, which would allow respondents to continue without providing a response to each question. "Item Omissions in Internet-Based Survey Data Collection" by Gerald Albaum (University of New Mexico, USA) and Catherine Roster (University of New Mexico, USA) examines effects on item omission rates of using FA and PNA in Internet surveys.