

Introduction to Survey Research Methodology, 1990-1999: An Annotated Bibliography

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Survey research is a blossoming enterprise in America and around the globe, appreciated worldwide as never before. A highly developed technique for empirical data gathering, it is embraced by academic psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, marketing researchers, economists, anthropologists, educators, health professionals, and scholars in many other disciplines. Billions of dollars are spent in the U.S. and abroad on surveys outside of academic arenas as well, by governments, by businesses, and by other organizations, and the value placed on survey research in these arenas has been growing exponentially as well. As the appeal of survey methodology has been increasing in these fields, so too has the demand for insights into its operation and innovations to refine the technique and improve its performance.

Fortunately, insights and innovations have been popping up at a remarkable pace in recent years. For example, the application of psychological principles in exploring how survey respondents approach their task has yielded a big improvement in our ability to understand how, why, and when different questioning methods elicit different answers from people. And technological innovations in the use of computers have changed the data collection process for the better in many ways, bringing laptops into respondents' homes for face-to-face interviewing, allowing for machine-driven, automated telephone interviewing, and permitting respondents to answer questionnaires over the Internet.

At the same time, important new challenges have emerged to make the process of effective polling more difficult. For instance, response rates for telephone interviews have been dropping in recent years, mainly because it is increasingly difficult and costly to make contact with respondents at moments when they have free time to answer questions. And the dispersion of cellular telephones is making RDD sampling increasingly difficult to accomplish as intended. All this increases the demand for innovation even more.

In that light, Graham Walden's new book couldn't arrive on the scene at a better time. Before the fast-growing literature grows so voluminous that no one can keep up with it, we must have efficient and effective tools to help us grasp what has been learned, both to facilitate its application and to set the stage for the next phase of methodological research. And Walden's book does just that.

In fact, this is not the first such effort for Graham. In 1990, he published the first of his efforts in this regard, Public Opinion Polls and Survey Research: A Selective Annotated Bibliography of U.S. Guides and Studies from the 1980s (Garland Publishing). And in 1996, he

published the next installment, [Polling and Survey Research Methods 1935-1979: An Annotated Bibliography](#) (Greenwood Press). Identifying interesting and important studies, these volumes offered remarkably readable summaries of hundreds of research investigations, allowing researchers and practitioners alike to glean the principal conclusions of an investigation quickly and pleasantly.

This latest volume in Walden's series is no less engaging, no less useful, and no less important. The book's structure separates summaries of key studies on design, sampling, interviewing, data collection methods, responses, respondents, analysis, and reporting. In addition, there is an interesting section on applications of survey methodology in a range of contexts, from business to women's studies.

This book has a special value for me, personally. For more than ten years, I have been on a hunt to locate all the published research available that would be useful for gaining insights into how to optimize questionnaire design. Through the use of computerized databases and the tracking back from the references in one article or book to the publications that preceded it, I turned up a lot: thousands of references in total, copies of which fill my file cabinets.

The most exciting moments for me in this hunt have been the discoveries of new gems, overlooked and nearly forgotten altogether, hiding in the dusty corners of university libraries around the world. But these moments have been increasingly rare in recent years, suggesting that my quest is coming to an end.

To my pleasant surprise, when I opened Walden's latest opus, I was delighted to enjoy more of those happy moments. What better evidence could there be of the value of this volume.

There is important work being done in survey methodology these days, and Graham has done a great service to bring a generous slice of it to our attention in easily digestible bites. Bon appetite!