

## **SOCIAL SCIENCE GUIDELINES FOR SURVEY RESEARCH**

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## Social Science Guidelines for Survey Research

Abstract: Social science is scientific and, as such, does not use survey research to investigate objective or subjective phenomena. Social science relies on observation, experiments, formal model building and testing, multiple sources (of non-asking data), document/content analysis, and comparison (of non-asking data). Social science also is behavioral; focusing on what people do, not what they say. Guided by its scientific and behavioral characteristics, social science uses survey research to: provide opportunities for self expression, produce feedback (that may or may not be used), foster a sense of participation (that may or may not also be actual participation), to generate support, sell, and to produce useless information that may be entertaining.

### **Social Science Does Not Use Survey Research to Investigate Objective or Subjective Phenomena**

Social science is scientific and, as such, does not use survey research to investigate objective or subjective phenomena (Beam 2012). Survey research—asking—does not produce reliable information. When all you have are answers to questions it's impossible to know if the answers correspond to what's really going on (Category One Answers), or do not (Category Two Answers). That's The Problem with survey research. The *only* way to know if an answer is correct or accurate is to check, or verify, it with information from one or, preferably, two or more non-asking sources of information; say, from observation, experimentation, and/or documents. (Moreover, when you have information from observation, experiments, and other social science procedures, there's no need to ask.) Those who rely on the asking method—askers—do not have information from non-asking sources and, therefore, are not able to discern which, if any, answer is correct or incorrect. All survey researchers have is The Problem, i.e., unreliable information.

Survey researchers do not accept these definitions of “unreliable” and “reliable”. They contend asking produces reliable information to the extent it produces consistent, reproducible, results or scores. But this notion of reliability may just represent “everyone obtaining the same wrong answer” (Crews 2007, 14, quoting Horowitz and Wakefield 2007).

Because there are no answers without respondents and asking, and because both

respondents and asking make answers unreliable, answers to questions are *inherently* unreliable. Respondents make answers unreliable because all answers are produced by respondents and all respondents skew every answer they give. Respondents' answers are skewed and may, or may not, correspond to what's really going on—i.e., may, or may not, be in Category One or Category Two—because (1) they lie, (2) do not have relevant and correct information, (3) their values and norms affect answers, and because their (4) interest in, and (5) sensitivity to, questions bias their responses. Also, (6) answerers' memory skews answers, (7) they are not always who they say they are, and there are (8) many other ways respondents contribute to The Problem; e.g., marking middle or average positions on Likert scales rather than carefully considering which position on the scale corresponds to their actual opinions or behaviors, do not follow branching instructions, craft answers in light of the characteristics of askers; disregard questions put to them in favor of making their own points, have others answer for them, and so on.

Asking makes answers unreliable because each of the three components of asking—(1) asking instruments, (2) settings in which questions are asked and answers given, and (3) askers, themselves—affect answers. And when all you have are answers, you do not, and cannot, know the extent to which, if at all, an instrument, setting, or asker—or some combination of two or three asking components—has skewed answers into Category One or Category Two.

Answers are not phenomena to be found, nor generated from within respondents, nor are answers voluntary. Answers are responses to stimuli and reinforcements of asking. (Skinner 1957, 1992); i.e., generated or produced by specific characteristics of asking instruments, peculiarities of settings or environments in which questions are asked and answers given, and by attributes and behaviors of askers themselves (Prior 2003; Herman and Chomsky 1988, 2002).

No matter how many identical, similar, and/or different questions are asked about a topic, regardless of which asking instruments are used, despite settings in which questions are asked and answers given, irrespective of askers' attributes and behaviors, answers to questions remain skewed or biased by components of the asking method and, thus, unreliable (Beam 2012).

In other words, although every answer is skewed by both respondents and by asking, it's possible answers are skewed so that they correspond to what's really going on; i.e., it's possible responses are Category One Answers. The other possibility is answers are skewed so that they do not correspond to what's really going on; i.e., it's possible responses are Category Two Answers. *All* answers to questions *are* skewed, *and* answers are either Category One Answers (correct or true) or Category Two Answers (incorrect or false). When researchers only have answers to questions they have The Problem because it's not possible for them—or anyone else—to know if answers have been skewed into Category One or into Category Two (Beam 2012).

**Social Science Relies on Observation, Experiments, Models, Multiple Sources (of non-asking data), Document/Content Analysis, and Comparison (of non-asking data)**

Observation

Social science is founded on observation. Social scientists don't ask; they acquire data about objective phenomena—as well as subjective phenomena (see below)—by observation (and by experimentation, model building and testing, and so on). When, e.g., the topic of investigation is efficacy of a government agency responsible for economic development, social scientists observe; e.g., physical characteristics of the city or neighborhood in which the agency's policies and programs are, and are not, implemented and, in that manner, acquire data about what the agency has, and has not, done. A nation's policies—foreign and domestic—can be understood by observations of its activities in other countries and at home. Behaviors of

corporations and actions of interest groups can also be observed.

Social science also uses data acquired by observations of “physical traces surviving from past behavior” (Webb, et al. 1966, 2000, 35). Trash cans and garbage landfills contain observable physical traces of what people eat, as well as type and extent of food and drink wasted. Garbage “reveal[s] the intimate details of our lives” (“The garbage project & `The archaeology of us’”; Rathje and Murphy 2001), and “more eloquently” and more “truthfully . . . than the account [people] themselves might offer” (Berg 2008, 269). Population sizes can be estimated from the volume of discarded plastics, and age and sex estimates from toys and feminine hygiene packaging (Lee 2000; Rathje and Murphy 2001).

#### Observation and Subjective Phenomena

The generally accepted view that “[o]pinions’ can be ascertained *only* from respondents’ reports of their subjective states: attitudes, beliefs, and feelings” (Schuman 2008, 116) is not correct. What people believe, their attitudes, and other subjective phenomena can be discovered by observing what they do (Lee 2000; Rathje and Murphy 2001).

As the common phrase has it, “actions speak louder than words”; than answers to questions. Roberts writes that, in contrast to what people say, a “more reliable sense of . . . dispositions “[is] derived by examining . . . conduct. . . .” (Roberts 2009, 772). For example, he continues, it would be “foolish to judge former President George W. Bush’s predispositions about government intervention in the economy . . . without regard to his conduct” (Ibid). When inevitable discrepancies between statements and conduct appear, it’s conduct, behavior, that tells social scientists what’s really going on.

#### Experiments

Social scientists also use experiments to investigate phenomena. An experiment is

making one or more changes to components of a process or system and observing effects of these changes (Montgomery 1997, 2001; McNabb 2002). Typically, in a social science experiment, an investigator administers to one or more samples or groups of people, organizational subunits, or some such, one or more interventions or treatments (such as, various levels of expenditures for a social program, or different degrees of participation in decision making) to measure what effect, if any, the treatment(s) has—in these examples—on program effectiveness or individual productivity; i.e., does the intervention or treatment (independent variable) cause a change of direction—once again in these examples—in effectiveness or productivity (dependent variable)?

Experiments are used to identify interventions in organizational settings that improve retention and, often, productivity (Orphen 1979; Bragg and, Andrews 1973; “Quality Tools”). Also, experiments have been employed to find better ways of developing and delivering education and other social programs (Gorard with Taylor 2004; Rivlin 1971), e.g., “day care for preschool children, social support for disadvantaged families, and peer-led sex education for young people” (Oakley, et al. 2003, 170), and to acquire reliable information about municipal and county government operations and programs (Greenberg and Schroder 2004; Boruch 1977).

### Multiple Sources

Social scientists acquire data from multiple sources because results of any effort to find out what’s really going on may be biased. Even the most highly trained observers under the best conditions may miss at least a few relevant phenomena. Certain activities and/or indicators of behavior may be incompletely perceived and, thus, not properly accounted for in experiments. Moreover, and invariably, all measurements are less than 100 percent accurate.

The well-recognized and required procedure that counters—but can never eliminate—biases inherent in results from any single method or source is generation of data from multiple

sources. Almost a half-century ago, it was asserted: “The most fertile search for validity comes from a combined series of different measures, . . . each pointed to a single hypothesis. When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing, it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the constricted framework of a single method” (Webb, et al. 1966, 2000, 176). More recently, others have made the case for multiple sources, with two researchers commenting that “dissatisfaction grows with . . . mono-method studies” (Gorard with Taylor 2004, vii, 7).

### Models

Logical or formal model building and testing is another social science procedure. A model is a simplified description of the object of investigation from which hypotheses are deduced and, then, tested. Support for deduced hypotheses is support for the model’s assumptions. When a computer is used for modeling, it’s called a simulation, a simulation model, or a computer simulation (Gilbert and Troizsche 1999).

Formal modeling occurs “in *all scientific* analysis” (Cohen and Cyert 1965, 17, emphasis added). Thus, model building and testing occur in social science (Taagepera 2008; Fiorina 1975). Models are in constant touch with empirical data and, when new information is acquired, assumptions are updated so that the model more closely approximates essential characteristics of actual situations. As a model’s assumptions and deduced conclusions are empirically substantiated, “the model as a whole” becomes a more complete explanation of what’s really going on (Cyert and March 1963, 1992, 103).

### Document/Content Analysis

Social scientists also use document analysis—or content analysis when maps, voices, and so on are included (Krippendorff 2004)—and, thereby, acquire reliable information about both

objective and subjective phenomena. Computers and specially designed software for coding and analyzing documents—such as, QDA Miner (“Provalis Research”)—help researchers find out what’s really going on via document analysis. With the centrality of electronic texts in all aspects of contemporary life, content analysis is often required for effective investigations (Krippendorff 2004).

Whenever possible, primary, rather than secondary, documents should be used. Primary documents—sometimes referred to as original or primary sources—are records, reports, and the like. Many are in archives; others are on computer discs and electronic files. Secondary documents are summaries, restatements, or interpretations of the originals. The budget of an organization is a primary source or primary document; an executive summary of the budget is not, nor is a pie chart that pictures percentages of an organization’s expenditures. It’s best to use primary, rather than secondary, sources because when initial or primary documents, reports, and budgets are restated, abbreviated or, in other ways, interpreted and presented, data and information often are lost, skewed, and/or misstated.

#### Subjective Phenomena and Document/Content Analysis

Analyses of documents, symbols, and other communications also produce reliable information about subjective phenomena (Krippendorff 2004). For example, public opinions are monitored by examining editorials, articles, and so on, in select publications, and it’s also the case that pictures in magazines, birthday cards, content of TV programs, movies, and the Internet display opinions, as well as deference, demeanor, social approbation, and many other feelings and emotions (Lee 2000); Beniger 1978). Documents with data about book production can be used “to track trends in social attitudes and values”, including changes in religious beliefs (Lee 2000, 71). According to Krippendorff (2004), analysis of documents, newspapers, and electronic

media should be considered an efficient alternative to survey research about opinions of populations and subpopulations.

### Comparison

Social scientists compare: “Basic to scientific evidence . . . is the process of comparison, of recording differences, or of contrast. Any appearance of . . . intrinsic knowledge about singular isolated objects . . . is found to be illusionary upon analysis. Securing scientific evidence involves making at least one comparison” (Campbell and Stanley 1963, 6).

In one type of comparative research, an “ideal type” or “pure type” of the phenomenon investigated—e.g., bureaucracy—is constructed. Then, the ideal type is compared or contrasted with actual instances of the phenomenon and, on the basis of similarities and differences, hypotheses that postulate explanations—causes—for the similarities and differences are constructed and tested.

Another variety of comparative research begins with identifications of similarities and differences between two or more *actual* instances of the phenomenon being investigated. After comparisons are made, causal explanations for differences and similarities are stated, empirical evidence is acquired, and hypothesized causal relationships are, or are not, supported.

### **Social Science Is Behavioral**

Social science is behavioral. The focus is on what individuals, groups, and institutions do; on objective phenomena; on “actually performed . . . activities” of individuals, groups, and institutions (Bentley 1908, 2008, 108). Social scientists are concerned with subjective phenomena only as it relates to objective phenomena, only as it relates to behavior or activities. We’re interested in, say, opinions, only as these subjective phenomena can be inferred from election outcomes, passage of laws, or other objective phenomena. An instance of the

irrelevance of the subjective, except as connected to the objective, is that people from an ethnic group—e.g., white Americans—who hate (subjective phenomenon) those from another ethnic group—e.g., African-Americans—but act (objective phenomenon) as if they do not, are not prosecuted for hate crimes. Individuals with mental and/or emotional deficiencies but control their behavior and appear normal, are not candidates for treatment.

### **Survey Research for Self Expression, Feedback, and Other Purposes**

From a social science perspective, survey research, or asking, is limited to the production of self expression, feedback and, as mentioned below, for other purposes. However, even in these restricted areas, social scientists use data from non-asking sources to check survey research results. In social science, answers to questions are never accepted at face value.

Self Expression. It's usually a good idea to ask people about this and that as a way to provide opportunities for them to express themselves. For example, asking citizens, organizational personnel, stakeholders, customers, and so on for their opinions, makes them feel better, and that's almost always beneficial for both askers and answerers. Those who've had their say (respondents)—even when they do not have their way—feel better than those who've not been asked and haven't expressed themselves. Askers benefit because asking people to say something about what interests them puts askers in a more pleasant and productive relationship with answerers than is possible when asking doesn't occur.

Feedback. In asking for feedback, it's important to keep in mind two different varieties of feedback. (1) As naturally occurring physical phenomena, feedback is the *process* in which part of the output of a system is returned to its input in order to regulate its further output. In contrast, (2) survey research feedback is a *statement* (either spoken or written) that's an answer/resonse to a question and, as such, unreliable. Information in answers to questions

requesting feedback may, or may not, regulate, or even be relevant, to the larger system of which the feedback is a part. Of course, when we're investigating, for instance, an organization's budget making procedures, or effects of a program, relevant personnel should be interviewed or in some other way asked to say something about budget making procedures or effects of a program. Advantages of self expression are thereby acquired, and it's always possible relevant and correct information will be obtained. However, the only way to know if action should be taken on survey research feedback answers is to check or verify them with information from two or more non-asking sources. Ask for feedback, but do not rely on it.

Participation. Commonly, it's thought survey research—asking questions—produces participation (Verba 1966). By answering questions, respondents are said to participate in politics, organizational decision making, team projects, and so on.

In assessing the ability of survey research to produce—in addition to answers—participation, the difference between a *sense* of participation and *actual* participation must be considered. Survey research can generate a sense of participation (subjective phenomenon) to the extent answerers *feel* or *believe* what they say will have (from their perspective) a salutatory effect on the topic queried: gun control legislation, proposals to reduce regulations on air and water pollution, and so on. It's also true that asking can generate actual participation (objective phenomenon); this occurs when answerers stated views *do affect*—in desired ways—policies, programs, or whatever else is the question topic. Obviously, those who have a sense of participation do not necessarily have actual participation. Those who have actual participation—and know they do—also have a sense of participation. It's also important to remember that actual, and often determinate, participation in most instances (including government policy making) is not by respondents but, rather, by key elected officials and their staffs and appointees,

executive branch career administrators and experts (civilian and military), corporations, interest groups, and so on.

Although actual participation occasioned by survey research is, overall, appreciably less than its engenderment of a sense of participation, asking instruments that induce a sense of participation can be beneficial to both answerers and askers. Because participation tends to be highly valued, respondents who believe they're actually participating, even when they're not (which is most often the case), feel better about themselves because they think they're doing something influential and important; something that they and others value. And they tend to have a more positive attitude about the asking individual or organization that has generated in them a sense that they're doing what they value. Answerers who actually participate and know they're having desired effects are, of course, pleased their priorities are advanced. And it's possible that an asker—say, a legislator or manager—will benefit from respondents' sense of, and/or actual, participation when answers contain information that can, from—in this case, the legislator's or manager's point of view—improve a policy or program.

This is to say, asking as a way to generate participation—as is true for feedback—is usually beneficial to both askers and answerers. And also similar to feedback, you should ask for participation, but not rely on it. As Juran remarks, asking rank and file organizational personnel to suggest improvements “provide[s them] with an opportunity to participate in creative activity” (Juran 1989, 283), but they are only “*potentially* a useful source of nominations for [improvement] projects” (Ibid., 51). Upper management does not *ipso facto* implement these answers. Rather, these suggestions, he continues, “compete with other nominations” for improvement projects from evaluators of programs and with other data and information: “the work force [does not] decid[e] which projects the managers . . . tackle”; managers decide (Ibid.,

52).

Another instance in which asking produces participation but not askers' reliance on obtained answers is when members of Congress ask at hearings. Congressional hearings are mostly, when not completely, staged events in which previously scripted and known questions and answers are recited by designated officials and their invitees. The real work of Congress, the actual participation that's the basis of Congress' part in policy making (frequently subsidiary in relation to corporate, military, and other influences), are formal meetings and informal collaborations, negotiations, deals, and payoffs by subcommittees, staffers, executive branch specialists, and lobbyists. Also, asking generates participation without askers' dependency on answers when planning commissions and municipalities ask residents, doctors ask patients, teachers ask students, professional associations ask members, and when elected officials and those campaigning for elected offices ask constituents for their opinions about policy, current issues, and so on.

Overall, asking produces minimal and, mostly ineffective, citizen participation in society, politics, and organizations. The more important goal is not to increase or rely on participation via survey research but, rather, to integrate concerned citizens into decision making processes of networked organizations. What's required is co-production with networked government and corporate administrators/managers, budget specialists, technologists, engineers, and the like who, increasingly, make the modern world.

Support. Survey research is used by organizations and individuals to generate support for themselves and for policies, programs, and issues they espouse (Converse 1987, 2009). Local governments ask residents their opinions about a proposed program to identify those who might be willing to assist in its implementation. Regularly, askers are hired to design and administer

instruments with bribes, probes, prompts, and props to produce desired statements and beneficial behaviors. The American Society for Quality asks its members to take surveys “to . . . help . . . raise the voice of quality” (Email Aug. 30 2011). Government departments and agencies use survey research “to maintain . . . good public relations” and, in that manner, generate support for the government, as a whole, as well as for specific programs and policies (Beniger 1983, 483; Miller and Kobayashi 2000). This is called public sector marketing. Planning commissions and municipalities market themselves as concerned and caring by asking residents how they feel about city programs and interactions with city officials (Melkers and Thomas 1995).

Elected officials ask constituents for their opinions as a way to target those most likely to support particular policies and/or candidates at the next election. “[C]ampaign polls [for instance] . . . are instruments for figuring out how to win elections, not how to observe them. And for that reason, many of the questions are designed not to learn what’s on your mind but to determine how you will respond to a few narrow lines of attack already selected and crafted by the candidates. The unspoken motto of the campaign industry is: Ask not how your candidate can respond to you, but how you will respond to your candidate” (Saletan 2011). And, suppose a mayor wants a poll to indicate support for a city’s spending policies on garbage collection. He hires a survey researcher who phrases questions to produce the desired support; e.g., Do you think the city is spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on garbage collection? “Clearly the response ‘about the right amount’ is an endorsement of the mayor’s present policies, and its inclusion as an explicit response alternative will provide a portrait of public opinion more supportive of the mayor’s policies” than if the question did not include this alternative (Asher 2004, 50).

Some asking instruments—e.g., frugging surveys—are designed and administer to solicit

funds (“Frugging” 2011). A few years ago, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee mailed in an attention-grabbing large envelope, a questionnaire that asked, among other things, Do you favor or oppose the privatization of Social Security?, and included an appeal for contributions. Another asking-instrument for generating support—in this case, indirectly—is a push poll that pushes potential voters away from an opposing candidate (Asher 2004).

Interest groups ask as a way to foster the power of the businesses they sponsor or, more specifically, to garner backing for particular policies or issues. A case in point is the International Council of Shopping Centers that asked in order to support local businesses, including shopping centers, in their competition with Internet enterprises. The Council’s questionnaire prompted respondents (by telling them, prior to filling out the survey, that not taxing Internet purchases weakens “Main Street” retailers) to say they favored collecting sales taxes on Internet purchases. The Committee against Government Waste generated support for its main objective by “mail[ing] extremely biased literature and then ask[ing] respondents for their opinions” (Asher 2004, 9). U.S English, Inc. mails questionnaires and uses the answers to pressure Congress to declare English the official language of the United States. Other interest groups that use survey research to advance particular policies, programs, and ideas include New York Business Group on Health, Transparency International, and Traffic Injury Research Foundation (Canada).

Also, support for governments, political parties, candidates for elected offices, interest groups, and other organizations, groups, and individuals is generated by deliberative polls. In this form of asking, people are queried after they have been brought together, given information about, and discussed, the topic or issues at hand. PBS and By the People Program used this asking instrument to promote topics related to the 2004 elections. Deliberative polls were used

in Australia to generate support “for several important local and national issues, including the referendum on becoming a republic in 1999” (“Applications” 2011). A Greek political party used a deliberative poll “to elect the party’s candidate for [a] municipal” government (Ibid). A local Chinese government used a deliberative poll and acquired answers that supported its preference (Ibid).

Selling. Survey research for selling is most obvious in market research (“Basics of Market Research” 2011; Converse 1987, 2009). Corporations and others with products for sale hire market research firms and individual survey researchers to ask (via online surveys, focus groups, and other asking instruments) customers and potential customers in order to generate answers from markets that enable sellers to “better control [market] behavior” (Converse 1987, 2009, 2, quoting Beniger 1983, 482); i.e., to produce more buyers; to increase profits. Survey research for selling is survey research for control; for manipulating purchasing behavior of individuals in the market.

Survey research for selling also occurs when asking instruments are used for public relations and advertising (Beniger 1983, 483); i.e., self promotion or publicity. In these instances, the purpose is not to find out anything but, rather, to promote a positive image of the asking organization, counter a developing negative image, or advertise a new or improved product by asking about it and, in these ways, increase sales or reduce a decline. This is called, “sugging” (“Sugging” 2011). Many newspaper, magazine, and TV polls constructed of “interesting”, “enjoyable”, and “engaging” questions are of this sort. These asking instruments are impression management efforts to induce readers and viewers to begin, or continue, to subscribe and listen. For example, in 2009, *Vanity Fair* asked readers to fill out its online survey at FVAGENDA.COM. The *Chicago Tribune*, tapping in to a “hot” topic at the time, asked

readers: “Should there be a cap on medical malpractice awards?” (“What’s On Your Mind?” 2009). CareerBuilder, paid by businesses to help them hire the people they need, advertises itself via catchy answers to its polls about why personnel call in sick—e.g., “my foot was caught in the garbage disposal”, “Mom was attacked by a chicken”—and concerning actions taken by management; e.g., “15 percent of suspicious bosses said they drove by the employee’s residence” (Podmolik 2010, 3).

Interviewees use questions to sell themselves. Career advisor, Kador, has a list of what he calls the “best questions” for them to ask; not to find out what’s really going on in the organization in which they are seeking employment but, rather, to sell themselves and, thereby, increase their chances for an offer (Kador 2002).

Useless Information and Entertainment. Survey researchers produce a lot of useless information that becomes filler and/or entertainment in newspapers, magazines, TV, and other media. Polls by television stations asking listeners to phone in or text their opinions on an issue or topic are “just entertainment” (Rosenthal 2010). Such polls, says Greg Caputo, news director of Tribune Co.’s WGN-Ch. 9, “belong in a category with newspapers’ daily horoscopes”: “It’s a way for viewers to have a little fun” (Ibid.).

Some polls are used to “simulate conversation”, producing useless information that might be entertaining (“‘Abortion poll’ author says vote just for talk” 2010; “Miss Maud kicks off bean poll” 2011; “My Polls” 2011). A man who put up a website asking visitors to help him and his wife decide whether to have an abortion “said he wanted to stimulate conversation about the politically charged subject. . . . and that they never intended to terminate the pregnancy” (“‘Abortion poll’ author says vote just for talk” 2010).

Political opinion polls about presidential candidates, this or that policy reform, and so

on, are nothing more than talking points, stuffing, for TV programming, newspapers, blogging, texting, and other media; electronic and otherwise. As a consequence of media promulgation of survey-research generated useless information, there's hardly more than one half hour of TV, two sheets of print, 3 websites, or 4 blogs that's not padded with interviews, Q&A sections, Poll of the Day, Take the Survey and Tell Us How We Are Doing, or some such. To the extent media content is consumed, "pollsters . . . [are] fill[ing] our heads with needless 'factoids'—like 59 percent of all Americans think 'Ed' is an OK name" (Huffington, A. (1989, 29A). Who needs, or can use, this information about a given name? or information produced when survey researchers, newspaper reporters, book writers, and others ask residents of China to identify their heroes (Link 2005), South Africans to rank the nation's problems (Goering 2004), Tibetan nomads, Where is the Dalai Lama? (Lev 2004), shepherds in the high hills of Transylvania about bears that eat sheep (Mills 2004, citing Quammen 2003), if it's fair for retailers to increase the price of shovels after a snow storm (Gray 2009), what country do you believe is the greatest threat to peace? or information in countless interviews of celebrities (national, international, past, and present), local stand-up comics, and other notables. Useless information can be entertainment, and there's nothing wrong with entertainment, per se; however, survey researchers who produce useless, albeit entertaining information, need to recognize, as do readers of this type of survey research, that it's not information about what's really going on.

### **Conclusion**

Social science will optimize its potential to improve human life in varied and changing regions, nations, societies, organizations, neighborhoods, families, and other formal and informal groupings only as it relies on observation, experimentation, multiple sources (of non-asking data), models, document/content analysis, and comparison (of non-asking data) to investigate

both objective and subjective phenomena. At best, survey research produces self expression, feedback (that may or may not be used), a sense of participation (that may or may not also be actual participation), support, sales, and useless information that may be entertainment.

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