
The Biggest Hurdle for the Polls is...

Some polls require examining an Asian subgroup and, in those cases, we do take on the extra expense needed for increasing our English-speaking Asian-American subsample. For example, when we polled in the Los Angeles area after the verdict in the Rodney King-beating trial and the riots that ensued, obtaining opinions and attitudes of the Asian community was important. The poll took three extra days in the field. However, when we are on tight deadlines, it is virtually

“ The greatest challenge to the Los Angeles Times Poll is conducting surveys in California that accurately represent the multi-lingual population and yet still maintain the integrity and statistical reliability that deadlines and the LA Times demand. ”

impossible to extend the poll those extra days.

It takes more time because the Asian-American population is not concentrated in one area and oversampling this group produces poor results. Locally, Asian-American communities are less ghettoized than other major ethnic and racial groups. According to the 1990 census, only five of the 756 census tracts in LA contain an Asian/Pacific Islander majority, just 21 are at least one-third Asian, and only 51 are one-quarter Asian. By contrast, there are dozens of majority black, white, and Latino census tracts.

The *LA Times* is sensitive to the needs of southern California and wants to curb some of the Asian-American community's criticism. Thus, the *Times* Poll started a series of surveys to separately interview the top five Asian communities in this region. So far, each survey has been well received and appreciated by the Asian-American community.

As the *Times* Poll continues, we will still be investigating ways to solve this problem locally and statewide.

*Susan Pinkus is director,
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Harnessing the Internet

By John Zogby

The survey research industry has faced a number of challenges over the years, several of which have been technology-related. With the wider dispersion of the telephone in the 1960s and 1970s it became possible (even easier, more time sensitive, and less expensive) to conduct accurate polls by telephone. During the same period, the computer has made it possible to quickly tabulate opinions by a variety of demographics and other characteristics.

While the telephone and computer have dramatically improved the work of survey researchers it has also brought a new set of problems. Are we really speaking to the person self-described? Are we able to capture the same nuances and “body language” as in a face-to-face interview? What about the households without phones or with unlisted numbers? Has the computer made our work too quantitative and less human?

The challenge for the late 1990s is harnessing the Internet for accurate, credible survey research. Currently, the population with Internet access is still too small and ungainly to produce any representative sampling. And while it promises to grow by leaps and bounds, questions about the Internet's usefulness for pure research will linger. Will as many poorer (and not so poor) households be on the Internet as can be reached by telephone? Who will actually answer the survey? Will the respondent be the 36-year-old man as described or will it be his 14-year-old son or daughter? And what about questions of privacy and confidentiality?

Some of these issues ought to be resolved by more technology—for example, identification numbers, blocks to ensure that only one person per household can respond, and barriers to further access to responses from outside groups. And some surveys, including our own at Zogby International, indicate that the Internet may be more widely dispersed across income and racial groups than we previously thought.

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One thing is clear: the Internet will increasingly be a part of our future. We will have to come to grips with it. Will it be the boon to the industry that the telephone and personal computer has been? Or will it actually create more headaches than it is worth?

Continuing effort has to be made to efficiently integrate this new research tool on a trial basis with other methods already in use. Developments are moving rapidly so many of us need to work hard to stay on top of them.

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