

Some Further Uses of Survey Methods

Here we give further examples of uses of survey methods, supplementing the discussion in Section 1.1.5.

Opinion polls. We won't dwell on these. You see them all the time asking political and social questions ranging from "Who would you vote for?" to whether you favor banning experimentation on animals.

Government agencies. Information collected from surveys conducted by government agencies has a huge influence upon the ways our lives are regulated. Some examples are: labour force surveys for monitoring the extent of unemployment, and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) which is based on a survey of prices. (The weightings used to combine the prices are obtained by a survey of patterns of expenditure.)

Marketing research. Market researchers conduct formal surveys and informal polls to try and determine consumer demand for new products and services, future demand for existing products and services, consumer satisfaction with the same, and the impact of advertising campaigns. Estimates of demand are necessary for planning production runs and these, in turn, affect the total number of jobs in an industry.

Acceptance sampling. Many manufacturers sample from batches of components and raw materials being brought in. If the sample is not up to specified standards the batch will be sent back.

Accounting data in auditing. Accounting auditors cannot check all the accounts of a company in fine detail. Instead they sample invoices or accounts and check just these carefully.

Economic forecasts. Business confidence is a very important ingredient in determining whether the economy grows or contracts (a recession). Surveys of business opinion play an important part in economic forecasts.

Ratings for TV/radio audiences. These are based upon the viewing or listening habits of a sample of people. They determine the price of advertising and thus the income to be spent on programming.

Royalties for radio play of songs. In the US, the organization of composers ASCAP charges stations a license fee for the right to play members' songs. Division of the money among the 20,000 odd members is done on the basis of a sampling of the fare from local radio stations (Neter [1989]).

Sociological research. Investigations are carried out into the way we live, the way society is organized, and the use of local and national facilities (e.g. national parks). This information can be a basis for government policy decisions.

Tax collection. In many countries a sample of people have their tax returns audited in detail. This tends to be in addition to a regular rotation in which everyone is audited every 5 years, say.