Social Media and New Technologies in Survey Research

RTI International is harnessing social media and emerging technologies for the advancement of social research. We offer expertise in survey methodology, advanced technology, and communications and are leading the development of survey methods in this new age. We have conducted more than three million surveys on mobile devices and are studying how new forms of communication and social interaction can best be used to provide answers instantly and efficiently. RTI is developing methods to rigorously evaluate the potential value and possible pitfalls of emerging data sources to turn knowledge into practice.

Overview

Societal and technological changes over the last decade have brought about both challenges and opportunities for survey and social research. With the explosion in popularity of new technologies like social media and mobile devices, it is more difficult to efficiently conduct research using the standard telephone, mail, in-person, and "traditional" Web survey techniques. Survey response rates are in decline, landline telephone coverage is dropping annually, and controlled access and other technologies are limiting our ability to contact respondents. But at the same time, communications are being revolutionized through the proliferation of social networking sites and mobile technology. As the public adapts to new technologies, so too must survey research.

To capitalize on the opportunities afforded by these changes, RTI continually investigates and develops solutions that harness new technologies and methods, including analysis of social media data, development and usability testing of mobile-first survey designs, crowdsourcing platforms, geolocation services, and wearable technology.

These systems have great potential for recruiting respondents, pretesting instruments, conducting and enhancing surveys, and processing and linking auxillary data sources with surveys. "What are people saying about the government's role in health care?" "What drugs are emerging and gaining popularity among youth?" "Can the geolocation and functions of mobile devices be used to vastly improve the efficiency and quality of field data collection?" "Can Tweets be used to fill in missing survey data?" "Can crowdsourcing platforms be used to recruit cognitive interview participants?" These are just a few examples of questions that are being explored in novel ways, and at greater depths, through the lens of social media and new technologies.

Areas of Expertise

RTI's survey researchers focus on the identification and resolution of methodological, measurement, and data collection challenges. Our capabilities in survey methodology and digital design provide survey managers and subject matter experts with a valuable resource to aid in the development of appropriate survey questionnaires, forms, designs, and analyses. As social research expands

Social Media and New Technologies in Survey Research

to use new technologies for analyzing public sentiment, our expertise in opinion capture and measurement allow us to take an informed look at these new forms of communication.

RTI was an early adopter of mobile technologies for collecting survey data, developing handheld screeners in 1999. That expertise has given us the ability to quickly adapt to new data collection platforms. Today, we are developing applications for iPhones, iPads, and Android devices.

Our experts in health communication and health information technology have training and experience in developing, implementing, and evaluating social media communication plans. We use interactive forums, emerging technologies, and Web-related resources to promote and evaluate health communication initiatives.

Research Highlights

Murphy, J., Dean, E., Hill, C.A., & Richards, A. (forthcoming) "New Technologies for Health Survey Research" in *Handbook of health survey methods* (Johnson, T., ed.). New York: Wiley.

Hill, C.A., Dean, E.F., & Murphy, J.J. (Ed.). (2013). *Social media, sociality, and survey research.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Kim, A.E., Murphy, J.J., Richards, A.K., Hansen, H.M., Powell, R., & Haney, C. (2013). "Can Tweets replace polls? A U.S. health-care reform case study." In *Social media, sociality, and survey research* (pp. 61–86). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Dean, E.F., Murphy, J.J., & Cook, S.L. (2013). "Social presence in virtual world interviews". In K. Bredl and W. Bösche (Eds.), *Serious games and virtual worlds in education, professional development, and healthcare* (pp. 117–125). Karlsruhe, Germany: IGI Global. doi: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3673-6

Dean, E.F., Cook, S.L., Murphy, J.J., & Keating, M.D. (2012). The effectiveness of survey recruitment methods in Second Life. *Social Science and Computer Review*, 30, 324–338.

Kim, A.E., Hansen, H.M., Murphy, J.J., Richards, A.K., Duke, J.C., & Allen, J.A. (2013). Methodological considerations in analyzing twitter data. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute, 47,* 140–146. doi:10.1093/jncimonographs/lgt026

Murphy, J.J., Keating, M.D., & Edgar, J. (2014). Crowdsourcing in the cognitive interviewing process. *In Proceedings of the 2013 Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology Research Conference,* pp. H-1:1–11. http://www.fcsm.gov/events/papers2013.html

SurveyPost
RTI experts on the future of social research

blogs.rti.org/surveypost

Follow our blog for the latest on social media, new technologies, and social research.

twitter @SurveyPost

More Information
Joe Murphy
Director, Program on Digital Technology and Society
312.456.5261
jmurphy@rti.org
RTI International
230 W. Monroe, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60606-4901

RTI 7608_R8 1016