

Credocast

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Raising Awareness with Polling Data

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About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communication initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, community engagement, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications and capacity building.

Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns based on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo’s mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

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Introduction

Information gathering, measurement, and understanding public perception can help frame the communication approach and engagement messaging for target groups. Leaders, organizations, academics, researchers, government officials, amongst others, must leverage opinion surveys from target demographics to drive public campaigns and engagement.

This thought piece will highlight the appropriate tools, methods, and strategies for public opinion research as well as how to utilize survey results to facilitate public advocacy and mobilization.



Understanding Opinion Surveys

In the context of public communications, surveys are tools for understanding public opinion and perception of a target population. They gather information and provide insight on thematic and topical issues. When conducted properly across a diverse and representational demographic, the data reflects the general opinion of the population.¹ Proper analysis of the data retrieved provides direction to the messaging required to sensitize the public, counter negative perceptions and opinions and even change behaviour. Surveying also helps create awareness and measure the effectiveness of messages disseminated.

¹ Russell G. Brooker Public Opinion in the 21st Century. Available at <https://www.uky.edu/AS/PoliSci/Peffley/pdf/473Measuring%20Public%20Opinion.pdf>

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Sustaining Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) Plus, a USAID initiative, conducted a survey on family planning among married couples in urban India.² The results showed low awareness of using oral contraceptive pills (OCP) and this helped in developing public campaigns that addressed the disadvantages of short-acting contraceptives.³ As a result, a television advert was designed to address the myths and misconceptions about OCPs.⁴

Survey Types

1

Face-to-face interviews



This is done in person and it gives room to explain questions and answers. Although it is considered as an effective method, some questions may be too sensitive for this setting and may lead to dishonest answers.⁵ A major disadvantage is that it is time-consuming depending on the number of respondents. Based on the resources available, telephone interviews could serve as an alternative as the face-to-face method is costly.⁶

2

Telephone interviews



Here, interviewers call the target sample to ask a set of multiple choice or open-ended questions. It is a common method, faster to implement and much cheaper than face-to-face interviews.⁷ If speed is an important factor, telephone interviews are considered an effective method for surveying as long as questions are concise.

3

Electronic surveys



This method is inexpensive (free in some cases) and is conducted via email or survey tools. These surveys provide some anonymity to respondents and as a result garner more honest responses. Its disadvantage, however, is that the response rate is usually low.⁸

² Jessica Scranton Using data for more effective behavior change campaigns. Available at <https://www.shopsplusproject.org/article/using-data-more-effective-behavior-change-campaigns>

³ Jessica Scranton Using data for more effective behavior change campaigns. Available at <https://www.shopsplusproject.org/article/using-data-more-effective-behavior-change-campaigns>

⁴ Jessica Scranton Using data for more effective behavior change campaigns. Available at <https://www.shopsplusproject.org/article/using-data-more-effective-behavior-change-campaigns>

⁵ Russell G. Brooker Public Opinion in the 21st Century. Available at <https://www.uky.edu/AS/PolSci/Peffley/pdf/473Measuring%20Public%20Opinion.pdf>

⁶ Russell G. Brooker Public Opinion in the 21st Century. Available at <https://www.uky.edu/AS/PolSci/Peffley/pdf/473Measuring%20Public%20Opinion.pdf>

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“To assess public perception through surveys, it is important to understand two key concepts: population and sample.”

Conducting Surveys

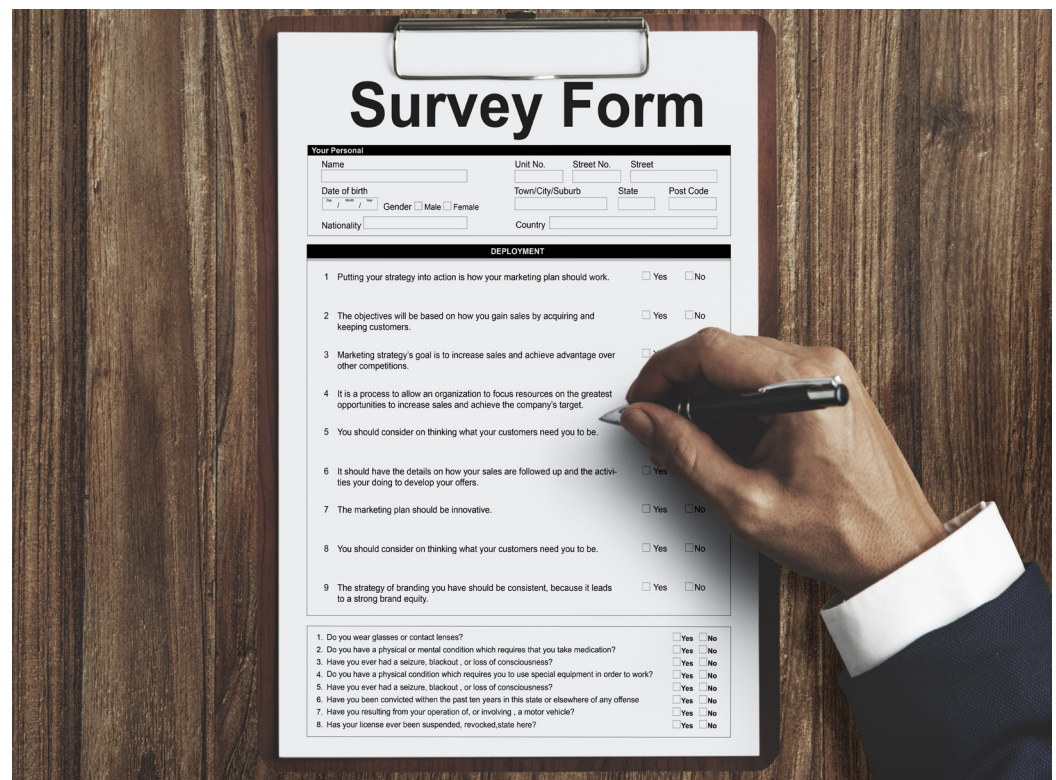
To assess public perception through surveys, it is important to understand two key concepts: population and sample. “Population” refers to the target group for information gathering, while “sample” refers to the number of respondents that represent general perception.⁹ For accurate results, the survey sample must be selected randomly. When conducting surveys to assess public opinion on a particular issue (subsidy removal, social safety nets, poverty alleviation, COVID-19, etc.), researchers must:

- **Identify topic of interest**

Identifying a topic that is relevant to a specific population is the first necessary step. A defined subject helps to streamline the objective of the polling.¹⁰ It is easier to do this with a clear objective of what the drafted questions aim to achieve. For example, a COVID-19 awareness questionnaire (survey instrument) centered around disbelief of the virus, awareness of symptoms, testing, preventive guidelines, etc. could reveal that majority of respondents doubt the existence of the disease. Therefore, survey results would necessitate the need to run a campaign to counter the disbelief and emphasize the existence of the virus.

- **Frame questions**

To avoid influencing survey responses, questions must be easy to understand and structured in an unbiased manner; as this determines the accuracy of results. For instance, using the COVID-19 awareness survey example, the following questions can be framed: How worried are you about the spread of COVID-19? How do you protect yourself? Do you think COVID-19 is real?



⁹ Russell G. Brooker Public Opinion in the 21st Century. Available at <https://www.uky.edu/AS/PoliSci/Peffley/pdf/473Measuring%20Public%20Opinion.pdf>

“ Effective campaigns must have clear messages that address the problem and provide solutions. ”

- **Test questions**

This examines the accuracy and efficacy of the sampling frame, data collection method, survey instrument, polling instructions, general organization, and capacity of the interviewer.¹¹ A test survey targeted at undergraduates of different departments could be tested with a smaller size of students, to ensure that the drafted questions are easy to read, understand, and interpret. The data collected here could serve as indicators for survey results and likely response rates.¹²

- **Collate results**

The next step is to examine the data by taking into consideration the most common responses, most impactful responses, and the most affected group of respondents.¹³ This phase can also uncover misrepresentation of some demographics when interpreting results.¹⁴ One must adjust the data to be more accurate to reflect general perception.

In another survey conducted by Sustaining Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) Plus, results revealed that 92% of respondents understood that tuberculosis (TB) is transmitted through the air, highlighted the prevalence of stigma towards people with TB and belief of misconceptions like; transmission through utensils and shared meals.¹⁵ To address this, the team is working with the Central Tuberculosis Division of the Government of India to execute a campaign to improve awareness on transmission and address discrimination against people with the disease.¹⁶

Raising Awareness with Polling Data

¹⁰ Step One: Select a Topic. Available at https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/48560_Machi_The_Literature_Review_2e__ch1.pdf

¹¹ (2018) Survey Testing. Available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Basic+Survey+Design++Survey+-+Testing#:~:text=There%20are%20two%20main%20types,dress%20rehearsals%20are%20quantitative%20tests.>

¹² (2018) Survey Testing. Available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Basic+Survey+Design++Survey+-+Testing#:~:text=There%20are%20two%20main%20types,dress%20rehearsals%20are%20quantitative%20tests.>

¹³ Agi Marx (2019) How to analyze survey data: best practices for actionable insights from survey analysis. Available at <https://getthematic.com/insights/analyze-survey-data-survey-analysis/>

¹⁴ Rachel Macreadie (2011) Public Opinion Polls. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270453761_Public_Opinion_Polls

¹⁵ Jessica Scranton Using data for more effective behavior change campaigns. Available at <https://www.shopsplusproject.org/article/using-data-more-effective-behavior-change-campaigns>

¹⁶ Jessica Scranton Using data for more effective behavior change campaigns. Available at <https://www.shopsplusproject.org/article/using-data-more-effective-behavior-change-campaigns>

¹⁷ UN Women (2012) Key elements of the campaign message. Available at <https://www.endvavnow.org/en/articles/1238-key-elements-of-the-campaign-message.html>

¹⁸ UN Women (2012) Key elements of the campaign message. Available at <https://www.endvavnow.org/en/articles/1238-key-elements-of-the-campaign-message.html>



- **Develop tailored messaging**

Effective campaigns must have clear messages that address the problem and provide solutions. Messages should be comprehensible, attention-grabbing, and relatable. Pretesting drafted messages with fresh eyes and ears helps to confirm interpretation from a different perspective.¹⁷ The messages should include key elements like; what the campaign aims to change, why it is important, what is at stake, and a call-to-action.¹⁸

“ Using a short engaging slogan also helps the message retain a lasting impression and enhances the visibility of the campaign. ”

Using a short engaging slogan also helps the message retain a lasting impression and enhances the visibility of the campaign.¹⁹ An ongoing campaign called #TakeResponsibility by the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 in Nigeria highlights a call-to-action for the public to practice COVID-19 prevention practices to curb transmission of the virus. The campaign also urges Nigerians to comply with government-approved health and safety measures.

- **Determine appropriate channels**

Communication channels strongly determine how far the public campaign will go. Understanding your target audience and identifying mediums with the highest chances of capturing their attention decides the success of a campaign.²⁰ These may include; television or radio programs, text messaging, billboards, social media platforms, etc. So, with survey analysis demonstrating belief that only a specific demographic is susceptible to COVID, it would warrant a billboard or video portraying the varying faces of COVID along gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic lines.

- **Measure impact**

This stage reveals the impact of the communications - if the message has been heard, stimulated a positive or negative reaction, and has caused the audience to act on an issue.²¹ This would entail doing follow up surveys to determine message recall, behaviour change, or a shift in perception or belief. Additionally, measuring the quantity and quality of media exposure, website hits, telephone or email contacts, contributions, and actions relevant to the communication also helps to measure campaign impact.²²

Credo Experience

At Credo Advisory, we understand the importance of public opinion research for public engagement purposes. Our risk communications support includes the provision of communications advisory and technical assistance to the COVID-19 response in Nigeria and specifically through surveys. Credo also facilitates the development and implementation of nationwide polls and subsequent development of campaign messaging and strategies in other African countries. Based on survey results and analysis, Credo develops messages to sensitize target areas as well as identifies communication interventions as part of the public awareness campaigns. Some of the initiatives include leveraging third party advocates, aggressive social media campaigns, grassroots sensitization and mobilization, etc.

Conclusion

Public opinion research through surveys are best practice tools for successful public campaigns. Partnerships with research firms to help design and implement surveys at strategic intervals is crucial. Survey results will inform campaign messaging, guide public sensitization planning and goals as well as identify key initiatives within a measurable framework. Once a baseline survey is conducted, surveys should be effected through the lifecycle of the campaign to gauge and/or validate campaign efficacy and outcomes.

¹⁹ UN Women (2012) Key elements of the campaign message. Available at <https://www.endvavnow.org/en/articles/1238-key-elements-of-the-campaign-message.html>

²⁰ UN Women (2012) Determining communication channels. Available at <https://www.endvavnow.org/en/articles/1243-determining-communication-channels.html>

²¹ Belden Russonello & Stewart (2004) Using Survey Research to Evaluate Communications Campaigns. Available at <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/1339/1339.pdf>

²² Belden Russonello & Stewart (2004) Using Survey Research to Evaluate Communications Campaigns. Available at <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/1339/1339.pdf>