Mail and telephone sample surveys have been con-
sidered undesirable means of collection to be avoided
for most social research. The procedures described
here, based upon social-exchange theory, demon-
strated that high quality and quantity of response
could be obtained by means of such surveys, paving
the way to their greater use for social-science research. [7] The SSCP® indicates that this book has been cited
in over 340 publications.

Using the Principles of Social Exchange in
Surveys

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In 1969, as a new PhD trained to address socio-
logical issues with data collected through sample
surveys, I accepted a faculty position at Washington
State University in far eastern Washington. At that
time conducting high-quality research surveys was
symptomatic with collecting data by means of face-
to-face interviews. My desire to conduct statewide
general public surveys projects in this way was thus
frustrated, however, by the fact that the Cascade
Mountain range and nearly 300 miles separated me
from three-fourths of the state's population; the cost
of mounting the desired face-to-face interview studies
would have been enormous.

I shared my frustrations with Professor Walter L.
Slocum, who encouraged me to consider mail sur-
veys as an alternative, despite the low response rate
expectation (20-30 percent) usually given in research
methods texts. He provided me with an article he
had published that suggested high response rates
were possible.1

The existing mail survey literature was voluminous
but not very helpful. Individual studies had showed
cover letters, follow-ups, even stamps, could make
a difference, but the studies provided no sense of
how to combine procedures to get response rates up
to an acceptable level. Regular morning coffee with
an ardent advocate for social-exchange theory
(which emphasizes that people are likely to engage
in behavior they find rewarding and avoid those they
find costly) led to my utilizing that framework for
deciding how to combine dozens of potential pro-
cedures together in a way that would get high re-
sponse rates and acceptable data quality.

Even the earliest trials, first in Washington and
then in other states,2 showed that 70 percent or
higher response rates to general public surveys were
obtainable. Needing a convenient descriptor for this
comprehensive approach, I chose the "Total Design
Method" to convey the importance of considering all
visible elements of the survey contact and ma-
 nipulating them in concert to create a positive
social-exchange situation. Later research confirmed
the importance of attention to such detail.3

Shortly after beginning the mail survey work, I was
asked to establish a telephone survey facility for the
university—an outcome of student protests that
closed down the university and led to an admin-
istrator's suggestion that a telephone laboratory could
do quick surveys to help resolve any future discrep-
tions. Somewhat to my surprise, I discovered nearly
a complete void of literature that would offer ideas
on how telephone surveying should be done. Lacking
such guidance, I chose to follow the principles of
social exchange in much the same way they had been
utilized for the development of mail survey proce-
dures.

This book was the first one to provide detailed,
step-by-step procedures for getting high quantity
and quality of response to both mail and telephone
surveys. And, it provided the evidence that the
methods worked. It was published at a time when
societal demand for surveys was increasing dramat-
ically and costs for face-to-face interviews were
escalating.

Many disciplines rely on surveys, and the high
count of citations can be expected primarily by the
book's multidisciplinary appeal. Its most significant
impact was to encourage researchers to take mail
and telephone methodologies seriously. It has enhanced
the ability of individual scientists and graduate stu-
dents, employed outside of national survey centers,
to collect high-quality survey data that they
otherwise could not get. It has also contributed to
the development of survey centers that rely solely
on telephone or mail surveys in dozens of colleges
and universities throughout the US.

The telephone procedures published in the book
rapidly became dated as technologies changed, e.g.,
development of computer-assisted telephone inter-
viewing, and the volume of research rapidly ex-
panded.4 The mail procedures, on the other hand,
have changed relatively little. Both the social-ex-
change framework and procedures for mail surveys
described in the book remain widely used in the US,
Europe, and other developed countries throughout
the world.5

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