

Online surveys are less effective than phone surveys

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Surveys are more than an annoyance. They are also a useful tool for market researchers, who rely on them to understand our attitudes towards products. However, a significant new study in the September issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research* argues that the recent shift from phone surveys to online surveys may have unintended consequences.

Researchers from the London Business School and Duke University find that people respond very differently to the same question when typing an answer as opposed to speaking an answer. Thus, online surveys may not be useful for discerning attitude changes over time.

"We find that speaking and typing recruit different cognitive and motor systems, and activate distinct perceptual mechanisms that result in the encoding of distinct memory traces," write Nader T. Tavassoli (London Business School) and Gavan Fitzsimons (Duke University). "In other words, speaking an attitude activates a different representation in the consumers mind than does typing an attitude, and as a function of this changes later expressed attitudes and behaviors."

The findings in this paper are the first to show that verbal production mechanisms affect attitude retrieval, a crucial difference when assessing attitude changes over time. Your response to a question depends on whether you've ever been asked that question before – constructing a belief is different than remembering a belief, and cognitive processes are bound up the motor processes by which we express thoughts, explain the

authors.

Therefore, if a question is asked the first time in a phone survey and the second time in an online survey, the validity of the results may be compromised.

"If researchers are interested in how attitudes decay over time, then ensuring consistency in response mode is critical," write the Tavassoli and Fitzsimons. "When attitudes are measured in an attempt to predict future attitudes or future behavior, our results suggest researchers should strive to match the mode of initial attitude expression with that of subsequent attitude measurement or behavior."

Source: University of Chicago

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