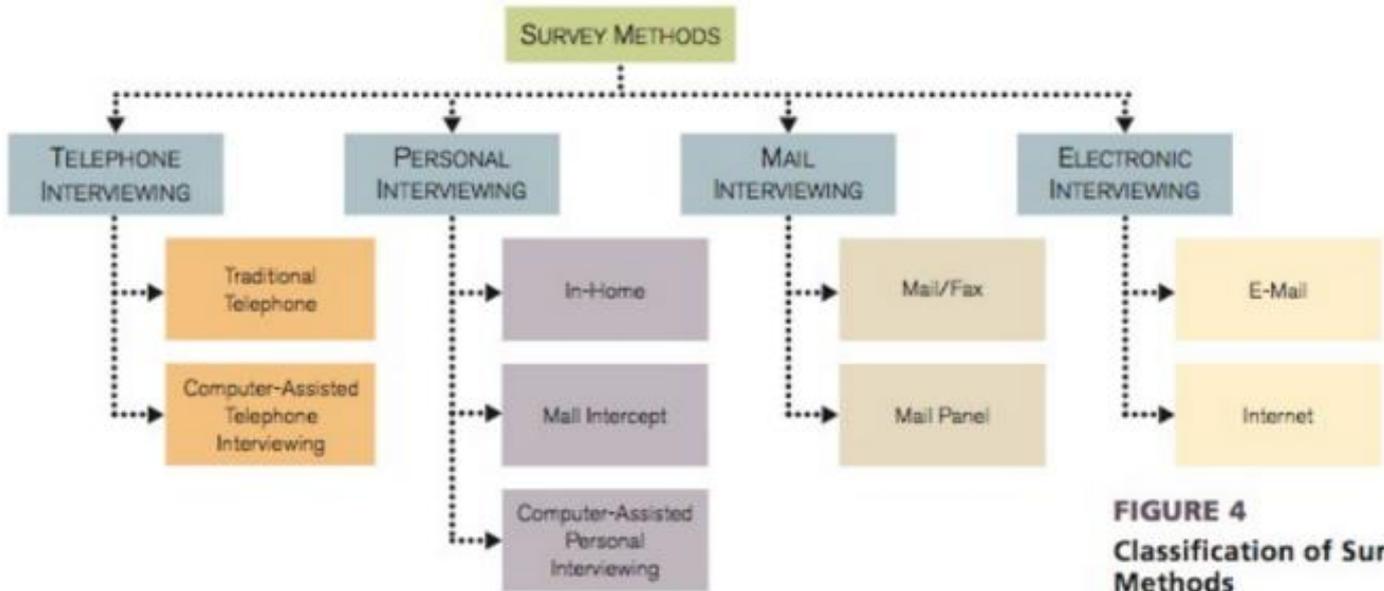


Chapter 7: Descriptive Research Design (Survey & Observation)



**FIGURE 4**  
Classification of Survey Methods

**Survey Method:** a structured questionnaire given to a sample of a population and designed to elicit specific information from respondents

- Can be conducted in person, by telephone, through a mailed questionnaire or electronically via computer
- **Advantage:** relatively easy to administer (ease); using fixed response like multiple choice questions reduces variability in its results which can be caused by differences among interviewer, and enhances the reliability of response (reliability); and simplifies coding, analysis and interpretation of data (simplicity)
- **Disadvantages:** respondents might be unable or unwilling to provide the desired information or they are unwilling to respond if the information requested is sensitive or personal  
 E.g. Consider questions about motivational factors. Respondents might not be consciously aware of the real reason they prefer one brand over another. The subconscious nature of their motives might make it impossible for them to answer questions accurately  
 E.g. Consider questions about religious beliefs. Some respondents might view this topic as very personal and might be unwilling to answer any questions related to it

**TABLE 1** Relative Advantages of Different Survey Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Mail	Mail Panel	Electronic: E-mail	Electronic: Internet
<b>Telephone</b>	Fast Good sample control Good control of field force Good response rate Moderate cost	No use of physical stimuli Limited to simple questions Low quantity of data	No field-force problems No interviewer bias Moderate/high quantity of data Low social desirability Low cost	No field-force problems No interviewer bias High quantity of data Low social desirability Low/moderate cost Good sample control	No interviewer bias Low cost Low social desirability High speed Contact hard-to-reach respondents	No interviewer bias Low cost Low social desirability Very high speed Visual appeal and interactivity Personalized, flexible questioning Contact hard-to-reach respondents
<b>In-Home</b>	Complex questions can be asked Good for physical stimuli Very good sample control High quantity of data Very good response rate Longer interviews can be done	Low control of field force High social desirability Potential for interviewer bias Most expensive Some samples (e.g., high-crime areas) may be difficult to access May take long to collect the data	Limited to simple questions Low sample control for cold mail No control of environment Low response rate for cold mail Low speed	Limited to simple questions No control of environment Low/moderate speed	Low sample control No control of environment Low response rate Moderate quantity of data Security concerns	Low sample control No control of environment Low response rate Moderate quantity of data
<b>Mail Intercept</b>	Complex questions can be asked Very good for physical stimuli Very good control of environment Very good response rate	High social desirability Potential for interviewer bias Moderate quantity of data High cost				
<b>CAPI</b>	Complex questions can be asked Very good for physical stimuli Very good control of environment Very good response rate Low potential for interviewer bias	High social desirability Moderate quantity of data High cost				

**Structured Data Collection:** use of a formal questionnaire that presents questions in a prearranged order

**Sample Control:** the ability of the survey mode to effectively and efficiently reach the units specified in the sample

**Response Rate:** the percentage of the total attempted interviews that are completed

**Social Desirability:** the tendency of the respondents to give answers that might not be accurate but that might be desirable from a social standpoint

**Interview Bias:** the error due to the interviewer not following the correct interviewing procedures

**Fax Survey:** a survey for which the questionnaire is transmitted by a fax machine to respondents and the respondents can then return the completed questionnaire by faxing it to a designated (toll free) number or sometimes by mail

**Mail Panel:** a large and nationally representative sample of households that have agreed to periodically participate in mail questionnaires, product tests and survey research

**Nonresponse Bias:** bias that arises when actual respondents differ from those who refuse to participate in ways that affect the survey results

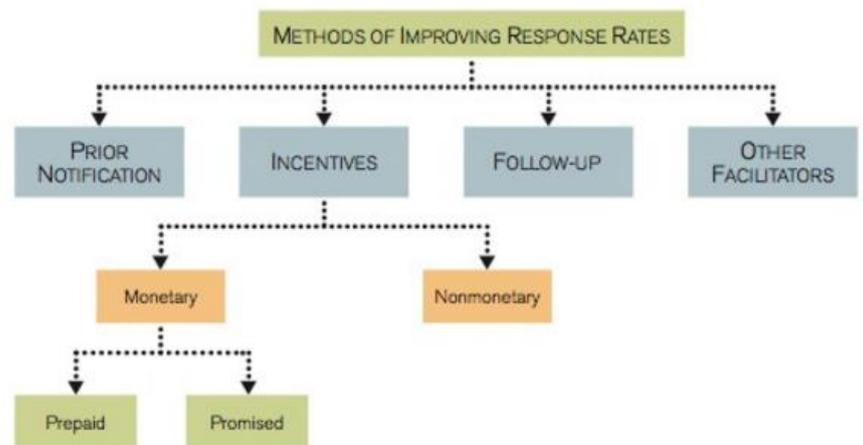
**Prior Notification:** consists of sending letter or e-mail or making a telephone call to potential respondents, notifying them of the imminent mail, telephone, personal or electronic survey

**Prepaid Incentive:** coupons, money or some other incentive to participate that is included with the survey or questionnaire

**Promised Incentive:** coupons, money or some other incentive to participate that is sent only to those respondents who completed the survey

**Follow Up:** contacting nonrespondents periodically after the initial contact by sending a postcard or letter to remind nonrespondents to complete and return the questionnaire

**Other Facilitators of Response:** personalisation or sending letters addressed to specific individuals



**Observation Method:** the recording of behavioural patterns of people, objects, and events in a systematic manner to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest

- **Advantages**

- Doesn't require conscious respondent participation which minimises nonresponse errors
- Interviewer bias resulting from interaction with the respondent or subjective interpretation of the questionnaire is minimised because the observer only has to record what is occurring
- The errors inherent in self-reported behaviour are eliminated given that the observer only record actual behaviour; the observer does not have to ask any questions of the respondent
- Useful in situations investigating unconscious behaviour patterns or behaviours that individuals might be unwilling to discuss honestly
- Best applied to phenomena that occur frequently or are of short duration, which might cost less and be faster than survey methods

- **Disadvantages**

- Provides insight into what behaviour is occurring, but not why
- Attitudes, motivations and values are all lost to the observational method
- Highly personal behaviours related to personal hygiene or intimate family interactions aren't available for observation
- Individuals have a tendency to selectively observe only what they want to and that might cause an observer to overlook important aspects of behaviour (perceptual differences among observers threatens the integrity of the approach)
- Can be adopted only for frequent behaviours of short duration, hence, behaviours occurring infrequently or spanning a long period of time (E.g. individual car purchases over time) are too expensive to record using this technique