



March 26, 1999

MEMORANDUM FOR Michael McMahon
Chief, Survey of Program Dynamics Branch
Demographic Surveys Division

From: Terry DeMaio *TDM*
Center for Survey Methods Research
Statistical Research Division

Subject: Report of Cognitive Testing of SIPP Internet Usage Questions

Introduction

A series of questions has been proposed for addition to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Wave 11 questionnaire. These questions focus on access to the Internet and willingness to complete future SIPP interviews through the Internet. A very limited test of these questions was conducted among expired SIPP respondents. This memorandum presents the results of that testing.

Methodology

To test these questions, cognitive interviews were conducted with respondents who had completed the SIPP battery of questions. This was necessary to provide a context for respondents when asking them whether they would be willing to participate in future SIPP interviews through the Internet.

Since the 1992-93 panel of SIPP became the universe for the still-ongoing Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD), there was not a large base of potential respondents to draw from for recruiting purposes. DSD provided CSMR with a list of 20 names and addresses of expired rotation respondents in Maryland and Virginia. These were among the addresses had been dropped from the SPD sample when the sample size was reduced for cost reasons. Working with this limited number of outdated addresses proved to be a challenge. We were unable to establish contact with the majority of the households. Messages left on answering machines were not returned, and it was not possible to determine whether this was in fact the SIPP sample household. Some households had moved and could not be tracked, and several households refused any further involvement with the survey. A couple of willing respondents could not be interviewed due to the short time frame for pretesting. The actual number of interviews conducted does not reflect the amount of time that was spent in trying to recruit respondents.

In the end, three interviews were conducted between March 17 and 24, 1999. All the respondents were male, and all the interviews took place in Maryland (Montgomery and Calvert Counties). Two respondents were retirees, and one appeared to be in his late thirties or early forties. The interviews were very different and all of the response paths were followed in at least one interview. Nevertheless, care must be exercised in evaluating the results of this pretesting because of the extremely small number of interviews conducted.

Results

Question 1. Is there a computer in this household?

None of the respondents had any trouble with this question. Everyone understood the question to be asking about personal computers. One respondent who had a laptop as well as a personal computer included only his PC, since he thought the question was asking about desktop systems that stay in the house.

Recommendation: No changes.

Question 2. Does anyone in this household use the Internet from home?

None of the respondents had any trouble with this question. One of the respondents did not use the Internet because he did not have a modem, but he knew what it was.

Recommendation: No changes.

Question 3. Is anyone in the household able to use the Internet for non-work purposes from another location?

The one respondent who answered this question did not have a problem with it.

Recommendation: No changes.

Question 4. Would your household be willing to respond to future SIPP interviews over the Internet?

The two respondents who answered this question did not have a problem with it.

It should be noted that an "yes" response here does not guarantee that a respondent would, in fact, answer using the Internet. The characteristics of the computer system may be a factor. One respondent who reported being connected to the Internet has a DOS 3.1 Operating System. This may affect his ability to respond over the Internet.

One might argue the direction of causality– perhaps if he were more inclined to use the Internet, he would have a more modern operating system. Nevertheless, in interpreting the results of the question, this should be taken into account.

Recommendation: No changes.

Question 5: If this questionnaire was available through the Internet, we expect it would work like this:

- you could answer the questionnaire at your convenience;
- an interviewer would not directly administer the questionnaire;
- it might take longer to complete the questionnaire than the current procedure;
- everyone in the household would be asked to fill in parts of the questionnaire for themselves.

Under these conditions, would your household be willing to respond to future SIPP interviews over the Internet?

One respondent answered this question. Despite the length of the question, he listened intently throughout. He did not have a problem in understanding it. He questioned why it would take longer by computer than in person, but decided that if he could do it at his convenience that wouldn't be a problem.

Recommendation: No changes.

Miscellaneous

A couple of topics unrelated to the purpose of the pretesting surfaced during the interviews and seem worthy of note here.

1. Although there was a deliberate intent not to probe on the issue of confidentiality regarding response over the Internet, the topic was brought up by respondents. One respondent was particularly sensitive in this area, and said he would feel more comfortable providing the kinds of information that SIPP asks to an interviewer rather than to a computer. Another respondent didn't refer to the survey specifically, but said he buys airline tickets through the Internet and has to provide all kinds of information in order to do that.
2. The one respondent willing to respond to SIPP over the Internet noted that if he were to do that, one of the things that would matter to him would be not having to start all over again if the Internet connection gets lost. If he had to start over again, he would stop participating in the survey.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this quite limited testing, we do not recommend making any changes to the questions.

cc:

D. Boteler (DSD)

K. Bauman (POP)

T. Wright (SRD)

J. Moore (SRD/CSMR)