




PUBLIC OPINION: PROBLEMS OF QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY METHODOLOGIES USING THE COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES OF THE MEDIA

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Abstract: The development of media and the internet has profoundly influenced the emergence and advancement of new and non-standard methods for studying public opinion, particularly through the communication capabilities of professional media resources. However, in the Central Asian region, the use of online tools in conducting questionnaire surveys does not ensure the relevance of the results due to a complex of specific factors: digital inequality (rural residents have significantly less access to the internet than urban ones), age differentiation, lack of open statistics, and a low level of computer literacy. Given these factors, the optimal strategy is to blend online and offline methods. The study examines in detail the advantages and disadvantages of various methods of studying public opinion, including questionnaire surveys (polling), interviews, observation (including the “solicited diaries” method), emoji (smilies), focus groups, talk shows, and frame analysis. It is concluded that it is necessary to combine different methodologies to obtain the most accurate and relevant research results.

Keywords: public opinion, questionnaire survey, polling, interview, observation, emoji, smilies, focus groups, talk show

1. Introduction

For a long time, the empirical method of questionnaire surveys (polling) has been used to study public opinion on a wide variety of issues. Surveys are used to identify social attitudes, political positions, levels of well-being, and the general mood among different population categories.

It is commonly held that in Western history and culture, the questionnaire method first began to be used in the 5th century BCE in Ancient Greece during elections to governing bodies, since the very institution of elections can be regarded as a form of “mass polling.” Thus, the author of the scientific study “Polling in Sociology: History, Alternatives, and Prospects,” V.A. Asonov, argues that the case of elections in Ancient Greece essentially represents “the first widely known mention of a mass sociological survey” (Asonov, 2022).

Naturally, the systematic and scientific study of public opinion began to take shape much later. For instance, at the end of the 19th century in the United States, so-called “straw polls” became widespread when newspapers organized unofficial, non-

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representative questionnaire surveys to gauge “which way the wind was blowing” in public opinion (Kuznetsov, 2015). The results of such polls were often far from reality. A striking example is the 1936 postal survey conducted by The Literary Digest magazine in the United States: the magazine predicted a convincing victory for Republican Alf Landon over incumbent President Franklin Roosevelt, yet Roosevelt won in 46 of 48 states (Doktorov, 2013).

Nevertheless, despite their non-representativeness, “straw polls” effectively contributed to popularizing methods of studying public opinion through the capabilities of the media and facilitated the development of a scientific approach to questionnaire surveying. At the same time, from a scientific perspective, the questionnaire method has always occupied an interdisciplinary space between journalism, sociology, and political science. Thus, I.S. Dushakova, in her study, notes that polls were originally not a scientific tool, as they assumed public circulation of the results (2020). This means that from the very beginning, polling was more of an editorial practice and less of a research procedure.

An example of a scientific approach to identifying the true contours of public opinion was the methodology used by the future founder of the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup Inc.), George Gallup (1901–1984), during the 1936 U.S. presidential election: Gallup employed quota sampling of respondents, surveying small population groups differentiated by gender, age, income level, and place of residence. Unlike The Literary Digest, which sent questionnaires mainly to its wealthier subscribers, Gallup’s method gathered opinions from the poorer layers of society, which is the actual majority of voters. Since then, the period of application of such methodologies has been referred to as the “Gallup” stage.

Technological progress and the development of media space, in turn, paved the way for the transition to the “post-Gallup” stage (Doktorov, 2013), when internet surveys became widespread, big data and computer forecasting models were utilized. At the same time, the issue of trust in survey results emerged

2. Methods

The primary methods employed in this study were theoretical methods of comparative analysis of works by other researchers devoted to the examination of various approaches to collecting and processing public opinion, as well as the method of comparative analysis of the methodologies themselves for collecting and processing public opinion.

The classical method of gathering public opinion involves interaction between the researcher and the respondent. The polling process typically proceeds as follows: one person poses a

question, and the other provides an answer, with the questionnaires containing the questions being prepared in advance. In this way, the researcher obtains information about public opinion (Dushakova, 2020).

For a long time, the questionnaire (or “survey sheet”) remained the main instrument for studying public opinion. Respondents were presented with a series of questions, either open-ended or closed-ended, and their opinions were recorded on paper for subsequent analysis. This polling methodology was dominant throughout the 20th century and continues to be one of the primary approaches to the present day.

3. Literature Review

The present study draws on published results of scientific research from both Russian-language and English-language academic spaces.

A significant contribution to understanding the transformation of polls in media space is provided by the research of I.S. Dushakova. The author examines media and questionnaire surveys as “two framing machines.” The study demonstrates that poll results in media space do not constitute neutral empirical information but are subject to interpretation, emphasis, and strategic presentation (Dushakova, 2020). In particular, the frame analysis method serves as a tool for identifying and enhancing the level of trust in questionnaire survey results, which, in turn, contributes to the further development of polling methodologies utilizing media capabilities.

Substantial contributions to the study of questionnaire survey methodologies have been made by the works of B.Z. Doktorov, including the monograph “From Straw Polls to Post-Gallup Polling Methods” (2013). In the book “Advertising and Public Opinion Polls in the United States,” B.Z. Doktorov focuses on the dynamics of polling methodologies: the author conducts an analysis of the conditions and circumstances prevailing during the conduct of polls, as well as the mechanisms by which methodologies evolved in response to such circumstances relevant to specific periods. B.Z. Doktorov emphasizes the dual nature of polls: on the one hand, they are a tool of scientific analysis; on the other, an element of public and media-political practice (2019).

Additional insight into the transformation of communicative forms in the digital era is offered by research on emoji (smilies) as a tool for measuring consumers’ emotional reactions: some authors regard emoji as an instrument for analysing public opinion, which illustrates the shift from traditional, standard methods toward visually emotional formats (Jaeger, 2021).

4. Discussion. Results of Other Studies

During the second half of the 20th century and throughout the 21st century, the methodology of studying public opinion, including in media environments, has undergone considerable expansion. Increasingly flexible and complex polling techniques are gaining greater popularity. The advancement of media and the internet has likewise had a profound impact on the emergence of novel and unconventional approaches to questionnaire surveying.

4.1. Interviews

One of the primary and most popular methods for studying public opinion in contemporary times is the interview. It belongs, in turn, to qualitative research methods, which enable a deeper and more nuanced exploration of the respondent's opinion.

At the end of the 20th century, so-called telephone interviews were particularly widespread. This method continues to be used in public opinion research to this day because it requires a smaller financial investment, does not demand constant internet access (which is especially valuable in developing countries), and is simple to implement. However, in modern society, the telephone interview method is being used less and less frequently; it is gradually being replaced by interviews conducted via video calls in messengers and social networks (Sharypova, 2022). The example of telephone interviews illustrates, among other things, the dynamic nature of the field: certain methods are, over time, supplanted by others that are more modern and convenient.

Returning to the topic of classical interviews, the following three types should be noted:

— A structured interview is conducted based on a strict, predefined questionnaire.

— An unstructured interview consists of a personal conversation without any questions prepared in advance.

— A semi-structured interview partially comprises questions prepared beforehand and partially consists of a free personal conversation. It should be emphasized that the semi-structured interview represents a balanced qualitative polling method that combines a standard questionnaire with free conversation, thereby allowing the collection of more information that remains hidden behind emotions and verbal behaviour.

4.2. Combining Methodologies to Obtain the Most Accurate Research Results

In scientific practice, to achieve the highest quality results, the questionnaire survey method is widely used in combination with interviews, focus groups, and other methods that will be discussed below.

As an example, consider a study conducted in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The research incorporates a combination of qualitative polling methods, including 20 individual semi-structured interviews as well as 14 focus group discussions. The study was carried out in the Russian language and involved women from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan aged 18 to 72 years; it relied exclusively on qualitative survey methods (Dall'Agnola, 2025).

Another example of the application of such an approach is a study conducted in Karakalpakstan, which involved activists, politicians, and academic experts. Between January 2023 and February 2024, 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted following a prepared guide but allowing respondents to clarify and expand on their answers. In addition, the study included approximately 20 unstructured interviews with taxi drivers and entrepreneurs. Such interviews enable a more detailed analysis based on spontaneous reactions and unfiltered narratives (Horák, 2024).

It should be noted that questionnaire surveying (polling) serves not only as a tool for studying public attitudes but is also frequently employed as a means of analysing ethnic identity and the dynamics of attitudes toward state policy. For instance, in the work of A. Sadvokassova, a large-scale public opinion study is analysed that combines methods such as questionnaire surveying itself (involving residents of 17 regions, three cities, and 12 ethnic groups) with semi-structured interviews as an additional method (involving 250 respondents) (2026). This research serves as an excellent example of intergroup comparison, where the same questions are posed to different respondent groups, allowing the identification of differences and similarities among them. It also provides a clear illustration of the combination of quantitative and qualitative polling methods.

In addition to the standard methods of studying public opinion described above, the observation method is also applied. Within this method, the researcher does not question respondents but observes them in one form or another, analysing their behaviour, opinions, and actions. For example, the method called “solicited diaries,” in which researchers purposefully ask respondents to keep diaries. Such diaries are often kept by hand and describe ordinary everyday life, including work, emotions, health, opinions, and so on: in the study by A. Kangas, precisely this method was used, with respondents specifically requested to maintain diaries in Russian or Uzbek over periods ranging from two weeks to two months (2025). This research method can be classified as a prolonged qualitative method that ensures the collection of a large volume of information, whereas conventional standard questionnaire surveying involves a fixed set of questions that do

not account for the context of events or respondents' emotions. Furthermore, this method does not require an internet connection, allowing respondents to keep their diaries in any place and at any time.

The theme of emotions experienced by respondents in a specific event context has, with the advent of the World Wide Web, found expression in emoji (smilies): researchers quickly recognized the possibility of using them yet another tool for studying public opinion. Such a study was implemented by S.R. Jaeger in 2021: respondents were asked to use emoji instead of words when answering questionnaire questions. This unique experience, in turn, demonstrated not only the expanding range of methodologies for studying public opinion but also provided an alternative to classical methods (2021).

One of the modern methods associated with questionnaire surveying is frame analysis, which is used not for the traditional study of public opinion, but for the analysis of media texts and various other content. In addition, this method can be applied to the analysis of results from previously conducted questionnaire surveys (Dushakova, 2020).

It should also be noted that semi-formal and experimental polling techniques are used, designed to increase the accuracy and openness of responses. These include the randomized response method, proposed in the post-Gallup period to anonymize sensitive questions. The essence of the method lies in the fact that the respondent answers one of two randomly selected questions. It is only known that one of the questions is the target question, while the second is neutral. This approach preserves the confidentiality of responses.

It is also worth mentioning opinion-enrichment surveys. In such surveys, respondents are provided with information for reflection, or a preliminary discussion is organized before answering. These techniques, as reported by B.Z. Doktorov, are aimed at eliminating the shortcomings of traditional surveys and are employed as part of the post-Gallup arsenal of methods (Doktorov, 2013).

4.3. Talk Shows as a Realization of the Method of Studying Public Opinion Using the Capabilities of Media Resources

The talk show is a conversational media genre that simultaneously makes opinion public and constructs its visibility through the selection of topics, participants, questions, and modes of interaction. Talk shows should be distinguished as a tool for observing which topics become publicly significant and what reactions they elicit in the media space.

The mechanisms for eliciting opinions in talk shows include

reactions from the studio audience, calls/SMS/online voting, and integration with social networks as a “second screen.” This approach ensures high operational efficiency and scale, but it relies on the selection of participants and editorial control, which systematically increases the risk of bias in the results (Kardanova, 2022). A practically productive strategy for the researcher in this case is to treat the talk show as a source of media data (discourse, frames, emotional registers, “cues” of collective reaction). At the same time, it should be noted that talk shows do not measure individual deep-seated attitudes but rather record group positions. Moreover, talk shows typically reveal value-based and generational differences (Matskevich, 2009). In academic practice, the talk show is described as a borrowed format of “talk + show” (talk + show).

The process of implementing the talk-show method involves a host, guests (experts/heroes), and a studio audience; at the same time, the creation of the effect of a “live” conversation is combined with noticeable structuring. Frequently, the host controls the sequence of remarks and the framing of questions, while the studio audience signals approval/disapproval (Kardanova, 2022). It should also be noted that the “presence effect” and “dialogue effect” can contribute to changing the opinions of individual people, since during the discussion, the audience may come under the influence of “collective thinking” (Rogozin, 2005), and the tendency toward “collective thinking,” in turn, can have a negative impact on survey results. The researcher may obtain not an actual picture of opinions, but rather an opinion influenced by external factors such as other people in the audience, the setting, and so on.

5. Discussion.

Specifics of Implementing Methods for Studying Public Opinion in Central Asia

The study of public opinion requires a combination of methods such as questionnaire surveys, observation, and comparative analysis. In politically sensitive regions, relying solely on the questionnaire method is insufficient, as the obtained results may not reflect respondents’ genuine opinions. In this regard, attention should be drawn to the study conducted by N. Qoraboyev, which employed an online questionnaire method using the Yandex Forms platform. The survey involved 1754 participants from across Uzbekistan: the author emphasizes the importance of broad territorial coverage (2021). However, it should be noted that the surveying was conducted in an online format, meaning its results are relevant only to respondents who have access to the internet and are able to use online sources. Rural residents are forced to travel to urban centers to access services, which highlights the

imbalance also reflected in survey data: urban populations are more actively engaged in media space and participate in surveys more frequently (Anvarxonov, 2025). Taking this circumstance into account, it should be noted that the use of online tools for conducting questionnaire surveys is not fully accurate, since “digital inequality” in Uzbekistan and in Central Asia persists to a greater or lesser extent. For this reason, it appears advisable to employ a combination of online and offline methods.

Another survey conducted within the boundaries of the Central Asian region was carried out by the researcher K.T. Kabdesov in Kazakhstan and had a pilot character (N=102): the author employed the convenience sampling method combined with the “snowball technique.” In the analysis of the results, the author directly points to the absence of official statistics on pendulum migration in Kazakhstan, which complicates the identification of quantitative data (Kabdesov, 2021). This also reflects a regional specificity: the lack of open statistical data forces researchers to rely on pilot studies and small samples. As a result, such studies more often take on an exploratory character rather than a large-scale representative one.

Another study considered in our work was conducted within the boundaries of Tajikistan: the survey was carried out in the format of focus groups, in which a total of 138 respondents participated, predominantly from younger age categories. The author identified a low level of digital skills among a significant portion of the participants: more than 50% of those surveyed did not possess basic internet usage skills (Babadzhanov, 2021). This, in turn, radically affects the principle of data collection, since under conditions of limited digital literacy, online surveys are not always feasible, and in such circumstances, only face-to-face formats should be applied.

Yet another study, the results of which are taken into account in the present work and also conducted in Tajikistan, revealed age-based differentiation in respondents’ preferences depending on their age group affiliation (Saydulloyeva, 2024): the results of the questionnaire survey demonstrate that it is precisely the age factor that substantially influences the structure of responses, particularly in questions related to media consumption and quality of life

6. Conclusions

As noted in the Introduction, polling methodologies have historically formed in an interdisciplinary space, at the intersection of journalism, sociology, and politics. As a result, questionnaire surveying serves simultaneously as a research procedure and as a media practice for the public presentation of opinions.

The structure of questionnaire methodologies has been formed and transformed, beginning with “straw polls” in the mid-19th century and culminating in the online surveys used today, demonstrating a gradual transition from intuitive practices to more complex, combined, and technologically advanced ways of measuring public attitudes. As demonstrated during this study, questionnaire surveying was initially non-representative, and its results could be erroneous. However, ultimately, as N.F. Kudryavtseva points out that the erroneous forecast by The Literary Digest contributed to the formation of scientific procedures for selecting respondents (2009). As a result, in the 20th century, polls gradually acquired scientific contours, primarily due to the activities of G. Gallup. At the same time, as B.Z. Doktorov notes, polls possess a dual nature: “on the one hand, a tool of scientific analysis, on the other an element of public and media-political practice” (2019). In the digital environment, this acquires even greater significance, since poll results not only record opinion but also participate in its formation.

The comparative analysis of contemporary questionnaire methods conducted in the present study demonstrates that the best strategy for studying public opinion is methodological pluralism, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, for example, integrating surveys with focus groups. The observation method can also prove highly useful for understanding the context in which responses are formed, as evidenced in studies employing diary entries (Kangas, 2021). Convincing results can likewise be achieved through the application of frame analysis.

Analysis of studies conducted in the countries of Central Asia reveals several factors that affect the reliability of the obtained data. All factors, including digital inequality, age differentiation, differences between urban and rural populations, the lack of open statistics, and a low level of computer literacy, limit the representativeness of the sample. Taking these factors into account, it should be concluded that online surveys are not a universal tool for studying public opinion, and in the case of Central Asian states, they must be supplemented with offline methods.

The talk-show format should also be considered as a method for studying public opinion, but with the understanding that its results reveal not so much individual attitudes as they record public group positions and emotional registers.

It should be noted that quantity, figures, and big data do not always ensure the representativeness of the sample. A combination of several methods applied simultaneously will provide the most accurate results, considering the context and the emotional component of responses. The level of transparency in procedures and respondents’ trust also become important factors influencing

the outcome. In the context of the transformation of the media environment, the key task of the researcher is not only to measure opinion but also to critically analyse the conditions of its formation and public representation..

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ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЕ МНЕНИЕ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ МЕТОДОЛОГИИ АНКЕТИРОВАНИЯ

Аннотация: Развитие медиа и интернета оказали огромное влияние на появление и развитие новых и нестандартных методов изучения общественного мнения во взаимодействии с использованием коммуникационных возможностей профессиональных медиаресурсов. Однако в регионе Центральной Азии использование онлайн-инструментов при проведении анкетирования не обеспечивает релевантности результатов в виду комплекса специфических факторов: цифрового неравенства (сельские жители в заметно меньшей степени, чем городские, обеспечены доступом к интернету), возрастной дифференциации, недостатка открытой статистики, а также низкого уровня компьютерной грамотности. По этой причине представляется целесообразным использовать комбинацию онлайн- и офлайн методов. В исследовании подробно изучены преимущества и отрицательные стороны таких методов изучения общественного мнения, как анкетирование (опрос), интервью, наблюдение, в том числе метод “солицитированные дневники”, эмодзи (смайлики), фокус-группы, ток-шоу, фрейм-анализ. Сформулирован вывод о необходимости сочетания различных методологий для извлечения наиболее точных и релевантных результатов исследований.

Ключевые слова: общественное мнение, анкетирование, опрос, интервью, наблюдение, эмодзи, смайлики, фокус-группы, ток-шоу

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JAMOATCHILIK FIKRI: MEDIA KOMMUNIKATSIYA
IMKONIYATLARIDAN FOYDALANGAN HOLDA ANKETA
O‘TKAZISH METODOLOGIYASI MUAMMOLARI

Annotatsiya: Media va internetning rivojlanishi professional media resurslarining kommunikatsiya imkoniyatlaridan foydalangan holda jamoatchilik fikrini o‘rganishning yangi va nostandart usullari paydo bo‘lishi hamda rivojlanishiga ulkan ta‘sir ko‘rsatdi. Biroq, Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasida media kommunikatsiya imkoniyatlaridan foydalangan holda anketa o‘tkazish natijalarning dolzarbligini to‘liq ta‘minlamaydi. Bunga bir qator o‘ziga xos omillar: raqamli tengsizlik (qishloq aholisining shahar aholisiga nisbatan internetga kirish imkoniyati sezilarli darajada kamligi), yosh guruhlari o‘rtasidagi farq, ochiq statistikaning yetishmasligi hamda kompyuter savodxonligining past darajasi sabab bo‘lmoqda. Shu sababli, tadqiqotda onlayn va oflayn usullarni birlashtirib ishlatish maqsadga muvofiq deb topildi. Ishda jamoatchilik fikrini o‘rganishning quyidagi usullari: anketa (so‘rov), intervyu, kuzatuv (jumladan, “solitsitirlangan kundaliklar” metodi), emodzi (smayliklar), fokus-guruhlar, tok-shou va freym-tahlilning afzalliklari hamda salbiy tomonlari batafsil o‘rganildi. Tadqiqot natijalarining eng aniq va ishonchli variantlarini olish uchun turli metodologiyalarni sintez qilish zarurligi haqida xulosa chiqarildi

Kalit so‘zlar: jamoatchilik fikri, anketa, so‘rov, media kommunikatsiya imkoniyatlari, raqamli tengsizlik, emodzi, fokus-guruhlar, tok-shou, freym-tahlil

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