

INTERVIEW THE EXPERT

16 Years of "Recent Books and Journals Articles in the Field": An interview with Mario Callegaro and a tribute to Don A. Dillman's contributions to the field of survey research

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In this edition of "Interview the Expert," we are joined by Mario Callegaro, Senior Staff UX Researcher and Survey Scientist on the Google Cloud Platform user experience team. Mario is the author of several influential works on survey methodology, including [Online Panel Research: A Data Quality Perspective](#) and [Web Survey Methodology](#). Known for his understanding of the intersection between technology and survey science, Mario also curates our column [Recent Books and Journal Articles in the Field](#). This column helps us stay up to date with the latest developments and publications in the field.

Mario, thank you for joining us and for sharing your expertise in this interview.

How did the idea for the column on recent books and articles come about, and what was the motivation behind starting it in 2009?

Survey Practice (SP) [started](#) in 2008 as a new, nonacademic journal, with survey practitioners as target readers.

I believe that at an American Association For Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) dinner probably in 2008 with John Kennedy, Bob Groves, and Sandra Berry, we were discussing the kind of articles we could publish in SP. At the time, I was working for Knowledge Panel after my Ph.D., and I experienced the problem of keeping up with the field once you graduate. So that was the idea, create a list of new books in survey research and public opinion so that the SP readers could keep up with the latest knowledge in our field.

The other idea was to have a new type of article for a journal as there is nothing out there (still now). The closest publications to my column are book reviews that are published by many journals including *Public Opinion Quarterly*. These tend to be very in depth, but a journal can only publish a few of them per year.

I started [covering](#) survey research and public opinion research books first and then added new topics such as survey statistics, Big Data, Data Science, and User Experience Research as I see more and more cross pollination on these fields of research and also because of my personal career journey as I move to User Experience Research about seven years ago.

Finally, I started adding special issues in [2014](#) as they are, in a way, edited books on a specific topic, and I find them extremely useful to go deep on a topic.

Over the years, what challenges have you encountered in keeping the column comprehensive and relevant?

The main challenge is that it takes time to create this list as there is no way to automate its creation. I cannot perform a web search as it will miss way too many books. What I do instead is go over every publisher's series on the topics for the column, sort them by year, and find the books published that are relevant for the article.

This is because a book needs to be published in a series, that is how book publishing works. So over the years I created and keep updating a list of publishers' series that I browse when I create the new column for *Survey Practice*. In other words, I am using a *browse strategy* more than a search strategy.

Another challenge is to get the year of publication correct. Very often the year of publication on a publisher's page is not the year that appears in the printed book. What I do then is to look for a preview of the book, and when I see the copyright page, I use that for the year of publication.

The latest challenge I face is to find self-published books. For that I have no choice than to search the [Amazon.com](#) book section with some keywords relevant for the column.

In any case, I do acknowledge that I might miss (and I did miss) some books, and I do apologize in advance to the authors. I also list only English language books.

As the field continues to evolve, how do you see the future of this column? Are there any changes or adaptations you are considering for upcoming editions?

Over the years, I changed and adapted my column adding new topics and adding special issues. What I am considering is adding other media of communication, so I am planning to add a list of podcasts and eventually YouTube channels that can be very useful and educational.

How can readers suggest books or articles for potential inclusion in future editions of your column?

That is very simple, they can email surveypractice.new.books@gmail.com

Since you began the column in 2009, how has the landscape of public opinion, survey methods, and related topics evolved?

I do think our science is getting stronger as the new books published over the past 15 years did follow the topics where we had less knowledge than in the past. One example is the survey weighting area, where we did not have almost any known book until 2013.

Big Data and social media did not replace surveys as some people were predicting, and you can see that from the constant flow of books that are published every year.

What I am saying is that the number of books I list every year tends to be stable, a sign that our field is strong and evolving rather than declining.

I would also say that surveys are used in so many fields that probably the readership for the books in our field is expanding. For example I can see that happening in the field of User Experience Research where surveys are taking a key place in helping product leaders make decisions and shape products and services.

Are there any emerging trends or topics in public opinion and survey research that you anticipate will become more central in the coming years?

With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, we will probably see in a couple of years books where AI assistance will be discussed with its strengths and challenges. Another topic that probably will deserve a book in a few years' time is the topic of synthetic respondents, a very hot topic now especially in the market research community.

Passive data collection is also an emerging topic that can help collect many behavioral and health metrics that do not need to be collected anymore relying on survey questions and the respondent's memory. With all the necessary ethical, privacy, and confidentiality best practices to be followed, passive data collection is already showing its potential to augment surveys and replace/augment some sections of the questionnaire.

For new researchers and practitioners in the field, what are some specific books or articles from the past 15 years that you would consider "must-reads"? For those who are not new in our field, what strategies would you suggest to stay up-to-date?

A great start is to read the list of AAPOR book award winners. The AAPOR book awards started in 2004 (Berry 2004).¹ I compiled the full list at the bottom of this article.

In terms of staying up to date, reading my column is definitely a way to stay up to date 😊, but also following a few journals in the field and just looking at their table of contents (TOC) is a great way to stay up to date. Many journals have a mailing list you can subscribe to (such as [Survey Practice](#)), so you can get the latest straight into your mailbox. You can also follow many journals on LinkedIn and other social media platforms for their new content.

Then I do suggest being a member of research associations such as AAPOR as a way to stay up-to-date, especially if you could participate in their conferences. Attending conferences is one of the best ways to be on the cutting edge of knowledge.

Associations such as AAPOR also have many webinars throughout the year that do cover emerging topics. AAPOR [reports](#) cover emerging topics with the state of the art knowledge and resources and are a great way to get up to date on a new emerging topic.

Finally, we do have new podcasts such as this one (the AAPOR Public Opinion Podcast or [POP](#)) and the podcast of our colleagues from the European Survey Research Association (ESRA) called Podcast series on [Survey Research](#).

What books do you feel are missing in the landscape and you would like to see written?

I do think we do miss at least four books, specifically handbooks that I would love to see written and or help write. Half of them are not books on new topics, but rather up- to-date books on major topics as the field evolved in terms of knowledge in the past few years.

The first one is a general survey methodology handbook. This is a book that can be read by anybody conducting surveys and public opinion polls in every field. As surveys are used more and more in multiple fields, having few subchapters for such fields will also be a great addition, for example a chapter on political polling, one on surveys in medical research, one for user experience research, one for marketing research...

The second book is a questionnaire design handbook as the questionnaire is still the main instrument of data collection for our science and we do know so much more about questionnaire design. This book should bring

¹ Berry, Sandra H. 2004. "Annual Membership Meeting." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 68 (3): 481–486. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfh032>.

the latest research on questionnaire design and questionnaire translation and adaptation as well the latest on visual design of the questionnaire as we are fielding more and questionnaires online than ever.

The third one is a book on survey data quality that is highly needed. We now have published lots of data quality articles and we have great data quality frameworks that can be used in writing such a book. More than Total Survey Error, I am thinking about all the new studies comparing the data from different samples and modes of data collection to benchmarks data in terms of univariate and multivariate distributions.

Finally, I mentioned above "passive data collection." I just learned that there is a book in the works on this topic titled *Data Collection with Wearables, Apps, and Sensors*. It is being written by Florian Keusch, Bella Struminskaya, Stephanie Eckman, and Heidi Guyer and will be forthcoming from Chapman & Hall/CRC. For now, there is an initial open access version available at this [URL](#).

I also believe that the authors of these key books should consider having an open access version of them, so anybody in every field and in every country can benefit from this knowledge.

The survey research community has recently experienced a great loss with the passing of Professor Don A. Dillman, whose thinking has deeply shaped the landscape of survey practice. Mario, having known him personally, could you share your thoughts about his contributions and the impact of his work?

This was an incredible loss for the survey research community.

I did get to know Don Dillman when I was a student in the Survey Research & Methodology program at the University of Nebraska and while attending my first AAPOR conferences in the early 2000s. Don helped shape the Nebraska curriculum and was visiting it often. We have been in touch since then.

Given the topic of this interview, I will focus on his most widely recognized influential books starting from his seminar 1978 one: "Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method." I want to quote some paragraphs from its preface that are, in my opinion, very important to understand the book.

"The approach to surveying described in this book is called the 'Total Design Method' (TDM). That term is a result of the premise on which it is based, namely to maximize both the quantity and the quality of responses, attention must be given to every detail that might affect response behavior. The TDM relies on a theoretically based view of why people do

and do not respond to questionnaires and a well-confirm belief that attention to administrative details is essential to conducting successful surveys." (p. vi-vii)

Don kept working on the TDM by publishing the second edition in 2000 called "Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method". In its preface, Don states

"Ink on the first edition of this book was barely dry before people began asking me questions for which I had a few answers" [...] "Each of these questions provided grist for experimentation and other research. Although I was only vaguely aware of it at the time, the process of converting to a tailored design approach for self-administered surveys, from the one-size-fits-all approach of the Total Design Method, had begun.

Tailored design refers to the development of survey designs that use common procedures grounded in a social exchange perspective on why people do or do not respond to surveys, similar to the TDM. However, it goes further to describe the additional shaping of procedures and techniques for particular surveys based on more precise considerations of cost, rewards and trust associated with specific populations, sponsorship, and/or content." (p. xii)

The tailored design method was born.

In 2007, an updated version of the 2000 book was published where Don added a 56 pages appendix called "Recent developments in the design of web, mail and mixed-mode surveys."

The third edition of the book came out in 2009, this time with co-authors Jolene D. Smith and Leah Melani Christian. The title was *Internet, Mail and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. This was

"a nearly complete rewrite of the second edition. We begin by discussing how surveying has developed and changed in the past 75 years and explore the trajectory of each survey mode. [...] This edition also places front and center the design and implementation of mixed-mode surveys that combine internet, mail and sometimes telephone, interactive voice response, and face-to-face methods. Moreover, this edition thoroughly integrates into the discussion the substantive knowledge gained in recent years about applying visual design principles to communicate more effectively with survey respondents both within and across modes." (p. ix)

Five years later, a 4th edition of the book was published. In the preface, the three authors state

"The most significant change in this edition is bringing the telephone back into the book after leaving it out for the 2000 and 2009 editions. This decision might seem curious at a time where most surveyors are moving away from the telephone mode. But it is apparent to us that the telephone is still necessary for certain types of surveys, and perhaps more importantly, that there are many ways it can be used in mixed-mode designs to overcome the weakness of single contact and/or response mode surveys." (p.xiv).

The book also has an instructor and student online website with real world example survey materials, questionnaires, cognitive interview reports, and color versions of selected images.

I hope I gave the readers some flavor of Don's research journey and a starting point to interpret these books. I invite you to have a look at these prefaces to better understand Don's passion for collecting high quality surveys and his relentless work in keeping up with the technological and societal changes that impact survey data collection methods. A 5th [edition](#) is in the works as well.

To know even more about Don's journey, I want to point the readers to his 2024 memoir titled: *You Have Been Randomly Selected. A Life Dedicated to Turning Research Findings into Practical Applications* (Washington State University Press). I cannot wait to read this book.

Finally, given that you wrote 16 articles about books in *Survey Practice*, published a book and edited one, do you have any advice for writing a book?

This is a great question, and I did a lot of thinking in the past few years about it.

I actually want to answer it citing some correspondence I had with Don Dillman about our book *Web Survey Methodology*. Don picked up a copy at the European Survey Research Conference, and after reading it, sent us an email.

During the exchange, I told him that the book took longer to write than we expected.

This was Don's reply

"I smiled when I got to the part about under-estimating the time the book would take. Everyone underestimates! And, there are more books that don't get finished and published than do get published.

Occasionally, when people have asked me about a book they planned to do I have suggested that they not do it because the process is so difficult and at times painful. And, there are a lot of folks who will immediately say, "But, they didn't cover such and such." People will say that about your book (as they have about mine and everyone else's) but I consider that as somewhat of a compliment, inasmuch as the unwillingness to leave things on "the cutting-room floor" is what turns good movies (and books) into bad ones. Maybe the hardest, but most essential part of writing a book is to intentionally leave out certain things and maintain focus on the issues that fit the theme of the book."

A more conversational version of this article will be published in the form of a podcast in the AAPOR series Public Opinion Podcast [[POP](#)].

List of AAPOR book awards

Bobo, Lawrence D., and Mia Tuan. 2006. *Prejudice in Politics: Group Position, Public Opinion, and the Wisconsin Treaty Rights Dispute*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carpini, Michael X. Delli, and Scott Keeter. 1998. *What Americans Know about Politics & Why It Matters*. New Haven, CO: Yale University Press.

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Verba, Sidney, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

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List of Survey Practice “Recent Books and Journals Articles in Public Opinion, Survey Methods, Survey Statistics, Big Data, Data Science, and User Experience Research” by year

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