Chapter 1
Basics to Branching Logic in Self-Administered Online Surveys

ABSTRACT

Essentially, the "branching logic" feature enables survey developers to create one survey and deploy it in different ways to different respondents; this enables survey developers to create one survey with variant question elicitations among different respondents, based on a wide variety of variables. This chapter provides a basic overview of some common types of branching logic in self-administered online survey design, development, and deployment, and highlights some considerations in effective branching logic and some precautions related to survey taker trajectories and experiences, proper survey setups for desired data collection and data analysis, survey pilot testing, and other aspects.

INTRODUCTION

Online survey systems have expanded the reach of many researchers who engage with people—their perceptions, their experiences, their attitudes, their preferences, their thinking—through a wide range of enablements:

- geographical distributions of respondents
- integrations with social media platforms for crowd-sourcing "human intelligence"

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8563-3.ch001

- uses of digital resources (text, audio, video, slideshows, simulations, multimodal objects, and others) to elicit questions
- types of data collected (closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, file upload question types, screen captures, audio collection, video collection, and others)
- ability to use high-level computer languages for scripted behaviors
- ability to set triggers for information collection and survey monitoring
- security features to try to prevent malicious responses and "ballot box stuffing"
- delivery on a variety of digital devices, operating systems, web browsers, and applications
- respondent behavior tracking (on the survey)
- efficient digital data collection
- coding and recoding of values based on particular closed-ended question responses
- scoring to enable totaling of "performance" by survey respondents
- built-in data analytics (textual, cross-tabulation analyses, variable creation),
- efficiencies of automation, and much more.

Of the many advanced affordances and enablements of online survey systems, one of the most important capabilities affects possible (1) data collection in self-administered surveys for the researcher and (2) the self-administered survey experience for the respondent: branching logic.

Branching logic enables survey developers to create one survey to capture data from a wide variety of respondents. "Branching logic," in the online survey context, refers to conditionals that determine the paths of respective survey respondents. [Other tools enable survey takers of the same survey to have different experiences. These include piped text for unique information to be used in salutations and prompts and directions and questions. There is "display logic," which enables some survey respondents to see some contents—questions, sections of questions (blocks), and other contents—but others not. From the survey respondent side, branching logic enables a different range of customized survey experiences. (Table 1)

Table 1. Some enablements of branching logic for survey developers and researchers… and survey respondents

Survey Developers and Researchers	Branching Logic	**Survey Respondents**
• Wide range of data collection		• Customized survey experiences

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