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Book Review

Reviewed by Darko Hren

Bradburn N Sudman S Wansink B.
Asking questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design

Field of medicine: Originally social sciences, but could prove invaluable in public health, epidemiology, social medicine, and medical psychology.


Audience: Researchers who intend to use any kind of questionnaire will find this book a must-read.

Purpose: To provide an extensive overview and detailed information of methods for questionnaire design and use.

Content: The book is organized into three parts and twelve chapters. The first part covers strategies for asking questions by examining the social context of question asking. It introduces the reader to questioning as a social process where respondents are viewed as volunteer conversationalists. It also reminds the reader of issues such as socially desirable responding and asking about sensitive topics. Ethical issues related to questioning are also covered, as well as the distinction between a research question and an actual question a researcher may ask respondents in order to get an answer to the research question. Finally, authors give detailed suggestions for beginners in this field.

The second part takes up a main portion of the book and deals with the tactics for asking questions. The first two chapters cover the issues of asking both non-threatening as well as threatening questions about behavior. Accuracy of respondents' recollection and ways of improving it are also addressed here, and insight is given into various response biases and instructions on how to avoid them. The next topic are questions about attitudes and behavioral intentions are covered. Authors discuss basic preparation that should precede writing new questions for measuring attitudes. Special attention is paid to the wording, as it may have a major impact on the distribution of attitude responses in closed questions which are often used. Different estimates of behavioral intentions, likelihood estimates, and frequency estimates are discussed in the context of their effectiveness under different circumstances. The chapter also deals with the usage of the two main question formats, open-ended and closed ended questions. Here, authors offer explanations why, although there are some important uses of open-ended questions, most questions should still be in the closed-ended format. Questions that measure knowledge and performance are covered in the next two chapters. The following chapter on asking psychographic questions may be of special interest to market and consumer researchers, in that it explains how psychographic questions may be used for purposes of profiling and segmenting people based on how they think and act. The last chapter of the second part deals with collecting demographic data. Here, authors suggest and demonstrate the use of standard methodologies instead of wasting time in determining how to gather this type of data.

Part three is a practical guide on how to draft and conduct a questionnaire and do questionnaire research. The appendices offer a list of academic and non-for-profit survey research organizations in the US, Canada, UK, and Germany, as well as three complete surveys as examples.

Highlights: The book abounds in examples of questions and offers parts of different surveys, which makes a less experienced reader especially thankful. Part three “Drafting and crafting the questionnaire” covers many very important issues that can easily be overviewed during questionnaire design. Sections that are especially interesting are those that cover computer assisted interviewing. Glossary at the end makes it a useful resource for quick recollection.

Limitations: Authors may have considered including a few chapters that would introduce a reader to issues important for psychometric evaluation of questionnaires. This, of course, is a topic that demands a book in itself, but it could be useful to offer an introduction on what else to seek in questionnaire design, especially for a readership which is not too familiar with these issues.
Related reading: At the end of each chapter, authors offer extensive information on additional reading related to specific topics covered in the chapter.

Articles from Croatian Medical Journal are provided here courtesy of Medicinska Naklada