Why You Can't Ask a Home Buyer What They Want

You walk through an airy art gallery with 50 paintings of varying artistic styles and color pallets for an hour, and just as you are leaving you bump into a friend who asks you if there were one painting you liked more than the others. You could quickly point to that one.

But if that friend asked you why you liked it more than the others you would immediately freeze up and struggle to defend your choice.

You know when you see something you like. But you hate trying to rationalize why you like it.

Reversing this scenario, how much more difficult is it before entering the gallery if you have to define what kind of paintings you like by filling out a ten question survey on the chief characteristics you look for in a painting and rank order their importance on an IPad. You are told by the curator you'll be asked to present your favorite painting as you leave based on how you scored each painting using your own criteria.

Your brain freezes up—maybe you choose not to even enter the gallery.

Yet, even the few home buyer search tools that allow a user to direct their search beyond a simple price range and bedroom count and bathroom count, immediately force the home buyer to define specific physical traits they are looking for then rank their importance—essentially forcing them to define and defend their desires before entering the gallery.

This creates even more stress for the home buyer as they struggle to define and defend their personal feelings. It forces the buyer to move their search style from that of fulfilling subconscious desires and receiving emotional benefits to that of a rationalized, hard-coded, intellectual search strategy.

They'll probably do it since you asked them to, or they may leave your gallery. Both ways the end results turn out poorly with the buyer not finding what they truly like.

The QValue™ Find More Genius allows the home buyer to play around in the neighborhood they desire, quickly view homes in that space, and when they see a home they truly like to click a single button and instantly see all other homes available with similar qualities to the home they like. No questions asked, no forms filled out, no defining or defending of their choices—just point to what you like and instantly see more like it. The Find More Genius is an instant custom search based on the qualities of homes this single buyer most desires.

Below are a series of articles demonstrating why you should not ask a home buyer what they want in a home. There's a lot here—and some of it gets a little scientific. So the yellow highlighted areas will speed you through it, allowing you to pick up the most salient points. You'll be an Einstein on the subject in less than ten minutes.

Why customers aren't good at telling you what they want

http://www.instituteofdecisionmaking.com/why-consumers-arent-good-at-telling-you-what-they-want/

When Steve Jobs was asked if Apple had used consumer research to help design and launch the iPad, he replied "No." And when asked why not, he said, "It's not the consumer's job to know what they want."

While many us might not want, or might not be well advised to trust our guts to the extent that Jobs did, we could learn from his skepticism of asking people what they think and feel and taking their answers as definitive information to drive our marketing to them.

Actually, a better answer for Jobs to give would have been "The consumer isn't very good at telling you what they want." Yet most marketing research is based on asking them what they think about products, brands or ideas, whether it does this by questioning them in focus groups or having them answer direct questions in quantitative research.

There are a number of reasons why people aren't good at telling you what they want, or what may influence them, especially in traditional research situations.

1. Research makes people pay more attention than they do in the real world.

Robert Heath, University of Bath Management School and author of "The Hidden Power of Advertising" has written a lot about the theory that we tend to be in one of two modes when we are processing information. One is High Involvement Processing, which is when we are actively paying attention to something, the other Low Involvement processing, which is when our attention is running in the background. These modes seem to work in quite different ways; high involvement processing enables us to remember logical detail and recall limited amounts of it very accurately, but often only for a short period of time after paying attention. These memories are triggered voluntarily. Low Involvement Processing, on the other hand, seems to seed memories that are triggered by external episodes where there is some association. These are often more emotional, last longer and seem more powerful in terms of evoking action. The evolutionary psychology theory might be that Low Involvement Processing is always running in the background when we are focusing on other tasks. It would have been our way of picking up information in the broader context that helped us form an overall and connected view of our environment, to help us survive and thrive over the long term. As we ambled out foraging we might have subconsciously picked up a sense of the environmental factors that point us towards successful hunting and gathering. High Involvement Processing is more about memory relating to specific tasks. For example, if we found ourselves exploring new territory, we might deliberately have tried to remember landmarks to guide us home.

We have seen aspects of this through the work of Christopher Chabris, who has been one of our advisors at the Institute of Decision Making. Chris conducted the very famous "Invisible Gorilla" research while at Harvard, and subsequently published a book with the same name. Without spoiling the book or experiment, his research shows that if people are primed to pay attention to a piece of film, and given a memory task, they will recall detail but have a very high chance (up

to 50%) of missing non-related events that may be more significant and more emotionally loaded. We seem to pick up emotions better when we aren't actively paying attention.

The two major things Robert Heath points out that are important to marketers are:

(i) Nearly all consumer research puts respondents in a high involvement processing mode and gives them high involvement processing tasks like detail recall, while the nature of much of the media exposure that our brands get is likely to be consumed via low involvement processing. (ii) For many brands, entering memory through Low Involvement Processing may be more helpful for marketers, as it allows the brand to forge emotional connections, and external associations can trigger these memories at a later date.

2. We're not as rational as we think

Gerald Zaltman Joseph C. Wilson Professor Emeritus at Harvard Business School and the author of *How Customers Think* (2003) and *Marketing Metaphoria* (2008) believes that 95% of decision-making is unconscious; Gary Klein, whose research pioneered the field of Naturalistic Decision Making, and whose findings led to significant changes in military training, estimates that 90% of the critical decisions we make is based on our intuition; and Daniel Kahneman tells us our intuitive system "is more influential than your experience tells you, and is the secret author of many of the choices and judgments you make".

Dan Ariely (who has been a great friend to the Institute) dissects this in his excellent books "Predictably Irrational" and "The Upside of Irrationality." We hate to see ourselves as irrational, which is why respondents in research will often choose a more rational approach or one which is easy to rationalise when asked to make a choice. But the fact is that the reasons we attribute to decisions that we've made are very often not the reasons at all. Most rational reasons are post-rationalizations of emotional or instinctual decision making processes, which were not understood even by experts 50 years ago, and which have their roots in evolutionary psychology. Even people who are aware of the fundamentals of Behavioral Economics often find it hard to explain their own behavior in the heat of the moment. Yet we spend billions of dollars asking respondents in our research to do exactly that.

3. If people think they are going to have to explain a choice, it affects the choice they make

In a famous study by Timothy Wilson and Douglas Lisle at the University of Virginia, two cells of respondents were asked to choose a poster from a range that went from representative (let's say a photograph of two puppies playing) to abstract (modern art). Both cells were told that they could return their poster if they didn't like it. But before they made their choice, one cell was told that they would be asked to explain why they liked the poster they chose. Two very interesting things happened. The first was that there was a notable difference in the types of posters chosen by each cell. The cell that didn't have to give their reasons chose, on average, more abstract posters. The cell that did have to give their reasons chose posters that were more representative. The need to explain leads us to make choices that we can explain – two puppies can be explained as "I used to have dogs as a kid," whereas a preference for print of a Modigliani is more difficult to put into words.

The really interesting finding was when the respondents were contacted three weeks later to see if they were happy with their posters and whether they wanted to change them, *the respondents who had been asked to give their reasons were significantly less satisfied with their choice.* As the abstract of the research states:

"When people think about reasons, they appear to focus on attributes of the stimulus that are easy to verbalize and seem like plausible reasons but may not be important causes of their initial evaluations. When these attributes imply a new evaluation of the stimulus, people change their attitudes and base their choices on these new attitudes. Over time, however, people's initial evaluation of the stimulus seems to return, and they come to regret choices based on the new attitudes."

So, it's not just that people can't tell you why they might make a certain choice, if they know that you are going to ask them why, they may make a different choice, and that choice may be one that they will be less happy with!

4. What people say they like can change.

What people say in a research setting is dictated by their mental and physical state at the time. Neuroscience shows that when people are hungry, they respond differently to images of food than when they aren't. A bland research room with office furniture may be more stressful than your couch at home, but less stressful than the weekend shop. Behavioural research shows our levels of stress affect how we respond to information.

But it doesn't stop there. Sheena Iyengar, author of 'The Art of Choosing' describes an experiment where people were shown pictures of two attractive women – one blonde, one brunette.

"... (participants) were shown a whole set of different pairs of female pictures, and asked which ones they thought were prettier. They were then shown the pictures they chose again and asked why they picked them. In some cases though, unbeknownst to the respondent, the images were switched – if they had chosen the brunette they were sometimes shown the blonde. What did they do? 87 per cent of the time they didn't even notice. They simply said, "Oh, I prefer blondes"... even though they had actually chosen the brunette!"

All of this is to really say that we now know enough to know that asking people to reveal how they make decisions, and what may influence them isn't going to help us make the best decisions as to how to market to them.

What might lead us to better research, then?

The prime purpose of the Institute of Decision Making is to stay at the forefront of discoveries and emerging thinking in the field of decision sciences. In doing this we are becoming increasingly knowledgeable in three areas:

1. ==Cognitive biases and heuristics== that ==drive the unconscious aspects of decision-making.== Much of this falls under the area of Behavioral Economics. We have worked with some respected behavioral economists and have connections with many others. The key here is to use a sound understanding of these principles to diagnose the underpinnings of existing consumer behavior, and what these principles suggest could lead to changes in that behavior.

2. Neuroeconomics, which is the application of neuroscience and other biometric measures to understand cognitive load and arousal whether as reactions to stimuli, or during a choice test. We have become reasonably fluent with the main methods, and have an advisor at Stanford who helps us understand the real science rather than taking the sales pitches at face value, and we were one of the groups that ARF sought input form for their 2010 review of neuroscientific approaches to measure advertising. This is a field where many wild claims are made; we remain convinced there is value here but it may be at its greatest in areas outside of neuro-copytesting.

3. Implicit Association. This covers a range of techniques where the time in which it takes to respond is used to understand the real feelings of the respondent about stimulus. A straightforward implicit association test shows the strength with which people agree with or feel affinity towards something from the speed with which they respond (faster meaning stronger or more instinctual), while a variation called a Stroop test shows when a thought causes dissonance or requires an inhibited response, resulting in slower responses.

None of these techniques is a silver bullet, and there is some evidence that many work best in conjunction with more traditional research. But all of them go beyond asking people what they think and taking those answers at face value. Our aim is to keep pushing the envelope in understanding what is new and interesting in these areas, so that we can help marketers understand what consumers can't tell them. Not because it's not their job, but because they are poorly equipped to do so.

http://beyondphilosophy.com/people-say-vs-really-think/

What People Say vs What They Really Think

by Beyond Philosophy on February 12, 2014

If you are like most organizations, you have done a lot of research on the rational side of your customer experience. You may use surveys so your customers can tell you what they would like you to do in the future. But a new study by Young and Rubicam (Y&R) shows that what people say they want and what they actually want are two *very* different things.

The Secrets and Lies study used a survey that asked consumers to rank their values in a list followed by an Implicit Association Test (IAT) that measured what they really value in another list. The study revealed that the two lists are quite different.

At Beyond Philosophy, we have long-believed that the emotional and subconscious parts of the experience are driving at least half of the decisions your customers make. But the thing about subconscious is that customers are not necessarily aware of it and thus won't tell you about it in a typical survey. It is, after all, subconscious.

In the Y&R study, researchers studied the responses of consumers in the US, China and Brazil. Most respondents in the US said that helping people was most important to them, but the truth was maintaining their safety was most important, followed closely by sexual satisfaction. In both China and Brazil, however, sex took the subconscious top spot.

The implications of these findings for marketers are twofold. First, consumers can't tell you exactly what they want in a survey, because they don't know. The second is that it is absolutely essential that you incorporate the subconscious drivers of value in the design of your experience.

My Real World Examples

I like this study by Y&R because it is yet another confirmation of something we've been preaching for a long time here at Beyond Philosophy, but also because I can support it with real world stories of my experiences with clients. Here are two examples that I have encountered in my work recently:

Example #1: A Global Charge Card Organization

A part of a customer experience project we did for a Global Charge Card included conducting customer focus groups. I was in the room and at the beginning the customers of our client introduced themselves. Most of them have had their charge card for 15, 17 and even 20 years. Yet, when we asked them, what the client should improve on they said that they want the card to be accepted by more merchants across the globe. But the reality was that the card has never been more widely accepted then it is now. If this was the most important for them, why have they been customers for 20 years?! We also conducted Emotional Signature® – a customer research

that uses advanced statistics (Structural Equation Modelling) to model the various aspects of the customer experience the company provides, the emotions those evoke and their combined effect on the bottom line – i.e. likelihood to recommend to a friend, to renew their annual membership, share if wallet etc. We learned through that research that the *real* reason they had the card was the prestige they felt for having it. The problem was that prestigious feeling wasn't as strong as it had once been. Occasionally a customer would slip a comment like "it used to be that I take my card out and say "I'll take the dinner check, have you guys seen one of these" but now I take my card out and everyone else has one. In short, customers said they wanted the card accepted at more places, but what would really drive value for the company was to elevate again the feeling of prestige of having the card.

Example #2: A Middle East Telecom

The customers said "network coverage" and "network problem resolution" was most important. And this is what executives were used to hear. As a relatively new telecom (5 years since market launch), network coverage was something executives had been focusing on for years. However, five years down the line the network was already there. What we learned was that the customers really wanted the company to keep their promises. For example, if they say that they'd fix their issue or say that they'll turn up at 4pm to install their TV, Broadband and phone that they should really do it. Typically, in their first years in business, most companies focus on acquisition, getting to the market fast and worry about problems later. That had created a big back-log of complaints and issues and a less customer centric culture. The customers said "network coverage" because that was the easiest thing to say. After all without network the phone is useless. But things like "keeps its promises", builds relationship etc. were not on top of customers mouth but nevertheless would provide the biggest return on investment.

Wal-Mart's $1.85 Billion Mistake

Wal-Mart are one of the most notorious victims of this deception. Wal-Mart believed that they needed to "de-clutter" their stores. They wanted to clear the aisles and lower the top shelves so as to not overwhelm their customers. They conducted a survey asking customers if that is what they want and customers said yes. Wal-Mart then spent a fortune overhauling their stores to meet this expectation. However, their sales went down, and some experts say they ended up losing $1.85 Billion in sales alone.

Wal-Mart's $1.85 Billion Mistake is a classic example of what happens when you just listen to what customers say instead of digging deeper to find out what they really want. What Wal-Mart discovered is that customers say they want less cluttered stores, but what they really want even more is a wide-selection of discount products. Much like respondents to Y&R's survey said they wanted to help other people, but really they wanted to maintain their safety …or their love life.

What We Would Do Differently:

One of the reasons it took so long for customers experience to take off was that classic customer satisfaction programs have long been focusing on what customers say they want and that led to wasting a lot of resources without improving customer satisfaction at all. To avoid this problem

and take into account the customers emotions and the subconscious drivers we use the following customer research methods:

- **Emotional Signature** – Based on our extensive research, we believe most emotions can be boiled down to 20 that either drive or destroy value. Every company has an emotional signature, which measures the amount of emotional engagement their experience creates with their customers. We would discover exactly what emotions are driving the most value for the organization and what aspects of the companies experience (conscious or subconscious) are the biggest drivers of emotional engagement and value for the company as a whole.
- **Implicit Attitude Test** –We believe strongly that customers cannot always tell you what is most important to them because they don't know themselves. So we like to measure customers' attitudes towards brands and their instinctive reaction to stimuli using this method. It may be controversial, but we find it effective. Incidentally, so did Young and Rubicam. The method was first used at Harvard. If you would like read more, check out: Project Implicit.
- **Customer Mirrors** – In this program, we walk the experience in the customers' shoes and use our experience psychology checklist to capture the subconscious clues and psychology principles that may be in play. When we can't be the customer (as is the case with big B2B organizations), we conduct interviews again using our experience checklist and try to "peel the onion" to get to what's not in the top of customer's mind.

If you rely on your surveys to get some insight to what your customers are thinking you are only getting part of the story. Instead of getting real insight into what is driving your customers buying decisions and what they want from you going forward, you are only getting what's easy to verbalize. What is easy to verbalize isn't necessarily what drives customer's behaviour. Wal-Mart learned this by losing almost $2 Billion.

How much are you willing to lose to learn this for your organization?

Sources:

"Sex, Lies, and Our Secret Motivators." www.neurosciencemarketing.com. 4 October 2013. Web. 11 November 2013. http://www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog/articles/sex-lies.htm

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Response_bias#cite_ref-Fischer_2003_11-0

Response bias

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

==A survey using a Likert style response set. This is one example of a type of survey that can be highly vulnerable to the effects of response bias.==

Response bias is a general term for a wide range of cognitive biases that influence the responses of participants away from an accurate or truthful response. These biases are most prevalent in the types of studies and research that involve participant self-report, such as structured interviews or surveys.[1] Response biases can have a large impact on the validity of the questionnaire or survey to which the participant is responding.[1][2] This bias can be induced or caused by a number of factors, all relating to the idea that human subjects do not respond passively to stimuli, but rather actively integrate multiple sources of information to generate a response in a given situation.[3] Because of this, almost any aspect of an experimental condition may be able to bias a respondent in some form or another. For example, the phrasing of questions in surveys, the demeanor of the researcher, the way the experiment is conducted, or the desires of the participant to be a good experimental subject and to provide socially desirable responses may bias the response of the participant in some way.[1][2][3][4] All of these "artifacts" of survey and self-report research may have the potential to damage the validity of a measure or study.[2] Compounding this issue is that surveys affected by response bias still often have high reliability.[5] This insidious combination can lure researchers into a false sense of security about the conclusions they draw.[5] The effect of this bias means that it is possible that some study results are due to a systematic response bias rather than the hypothesized effect, which can have a profound effect on psychological and other types of research using questionnaires or surveys.[5] It is therefore important for researchers to be aware of response bias and the effect it can have on their research so that they can attempt to prevent it from impacting their findings in a negative manner.

Contents

History of research

Awareness of response bias has been present in psychology and sociology literature for some time because self-report usage features significantly in those fields of research. However, while these types of biases have been known about, researchers were initially unwilling to admit the degree to which they impact, and potentially invalidate research utilizing these types of measures, questionnaires surveys.[5] This is because some researchers believe that the biases present across a group of subjects cancel out when the group of subjects is significantly large.[6] Essentially, this argument states that the impact of response bias in research is random noise and that the biases present in experimental participants would wash out if enough participants included in the study.[5] However, at the time this argument was proposed, effective methodological tools that could test this hypothesis were not available.[5] Once more modern methodologies were developed, researchers began to investigate the impact of response bias.[5] From this renewed research, two opposing sides arose.

Arguments against response bias

The first argues and supports the hope belief espoused by Hyman, believing that no large steps need to be taken to mitigate response bias, since it does not contribute a significant effect[5][7][8] These researchers hold that although there is significant literature identifying that response bias may play a major role in influencing the responses of study participants, these studies do not in fact provide empirical evidence that this is the case.[5] They subscribe to the idea that the effects of this bias wash out with large enough samples, and that it is not a systematic problem in mental health research.[5][7] These studies also call into question earlier research that investigated response bias on basis of their research methodologies. For example, they mention that many of the studies had very small sample sizes, or that in studies looking at social desirability, a subtype of response bias, the researchers had no way to quantify the desirability of the statements used in the study.[5] Additionally, some have argued that what researchers may believe to be artifacts of response bias, such as differences in responding between men and women, may in fact just be

actual differences between the two groups.[7] Several other studies also found evidence that response bias is not as big of a problem as it seems. The first found that when comparing the responses of participants, with and without controls for response bias, their answers to the surveys were not different.[7] Two other studies found that although the bias may be present, the effects are extremely small, having little to no impact towards dramatically changing or altering the responses of participants.[8][9] In sum, this side argues that although response bias exists, it often has minimal effect on participant response.

Arguments for response bias

The second group argues against Hyman's point, saying that response bias has a significant effect, and that researchers need to take steps to mitigate and reduce response bias in order to conduct sound research.[1][2] They argue that the impact of response bias is a systematic error inherent to this type of research and that it needs to be addressed in order for studies to be able to produce accurate results. There are many studies that represent this argument in psychological literature, exploring the impact of response bias in multiple different settings and with many different variables. For example, some studies have explored and found effects of response bias in the reporting of depression in elderly patients.[10] Other researchers have found that there are serious issues when responses to a given survey or questionnaire have responses that may seem desirable or undesirable to report, and that some responses to certain questions can be biased by the Culture of the participant in the study.[2][11] Additionally, there is support for the idea that simply being part of an experiment can have dramatic effects on how participants act, thus biasing anything that they may do in a research or experimental setting when it comes to self-report.[3] One of the most influential findings for those arguing that response bias is a significant factor was a study conducted by Nederhof, where he found that social desirability bias, a subset of response bias, can account for as much as 10-70% of the variance in participant response.[2] Essentially, because of several findings that illustrate the dramatic effects response bias has on the outcomes of self-report research, this side supports the idea that steps need to be taken to mitigate the effects of response bias to maintain the accuracy of research.

Conclusion

While both sides have support in the literature, there appears to be greater empirical support for the dangers of response bias.[1][2][3][11][12][13] To add strength to the claims of those who argue the importance of response bias, many of the studies that reject the significance of response bias report multiple methodological issues in their studies. For example, they have extremely small samples that are not representative of the population as a whole, they only considered a small subset of potential variables that could be affected by response bias, and their measurements were conducted over the phone with poorly worded statements.[5][7]

Types

Acquiescence bias

Main article: Acquiescence bias

==Acquiescence bias,== which can also be referred to as ==yea-saying,== is a category of response bias in which respondents to a survey have a tendency to agree with all the questions in a measure.[14][15] This bias in responding may represent a form of dishonest reporting because the participant automatically endorses any statements, even if it results in contradictory responses.[16][17] For example, a participant could be asked whether they endorse the following statement, "I like to spend time with others" but then later on in the survey also endorses "I like to spend time alone," which are contradictory statements. This is a distinct problem for self-report research because it does not allow a researcher to understand or gather accurate data from any type of question that asks for a participant to endorse or reject statements.[16] Researchers have approached this issue by thinking about the bias in two different ways. The first deals with the idea that participants are trying to be agreeable, in order to avoid the disapproval of the researcher.[16] A second cause for this type of bias was proposed by Cronbach, when he argued that it is likely due to a problem in the cognitive processes of the participant, instead of the motivation to please the researcher.[13] He argues that it may be due to biases in memory where an individual recalls information that supports endorsement of the statement, and ignores contradicting information.[13]

Researchers have several methods to try and reduce this form of bias. Primarily, they need to make balanced response sets in a given measure, meaning that there are a balanced number of positively and negatively worded questions.[16][18] This means that if a researcher was hoping to examine a certain trait with a given questionnaire, half of the questions would have a "yes" response to identify the trait, and the other half would have a "no" response to identify the trait.[18]

==Nay-saying is the opposite form of this bias. It occurs when a participant always chooses to deny or not endorse any statements in a survey or measure. This has a similar effect of invalidating any kinds of endorsements that participants may make over the course of the experiment.==

Demand characteristics

Main article: Demand characteristics

==Demand characteristics== refer a type of response bias where participants alter their response or behavior simply because they are part of an experiment.[3] This arises because participants are actively engaged in the experiment, and may try and figure out the purpose, or adopt certain behaviors they believe belong in an experimental setting. Martin Orne was one of the first to identify this type of bias, and has developed several theories hoping to address their cause.[19] His research points to the idea that participants enter a certain type of social interaction when engaging in an experiment, and this special social interaction drives participants to consciously and unconsciously alter their behavior[3] There are several ways that this bias can influence participants and their responses in an experimental setting. One of the most common relates to the motivations of the participant. Many people choose to volunteer to be in studies because they believe that experiments are important. This drives participants to be "good subjects" and fulfill their role in the experiment properly, because they believe that their proper participation is vital to the success of the study.[3][20] Thus, in an attempt to be good, the participant may attempt to gain knowledge of the hypothesis being tested in the experiment and alter their behavior in an attempt to support that hypothesis. Orne conceptualized this change by saying that the

experiment may appear to a participant as a problem, and it is his or her job to find the solution to that problem, which would be behaving in a way that would lend support to the experimenter's hypothesis.[3] Alternatively, the participant may be volunteering for the experiment as part of a requirement for a college course, or have some other reason. In this case, the participants may try to discover the hypothesis simply to provide faulty information and wreck the hypothesis.[20] Both of these results are harmful because they prevent the experimenters from gathering accurate data and making sound conclusions.

Outside of participant motivation, there are other factors that influence the appearance of demand characteristics in a study. Many of these factors relate to the unique nature of the experimental setting itself. For example, participants in studies are more likely to put up with uncomfortable or tedious tasks simply because they are in an experiment.[3] Additionally, the mannerisms of the experimenter, such as the way they greet the participant, or the way they interact with the participant during the course of the experiment may inadvertently bias how the participant responds during the course of the experiment.[3][21] Finally, prior experiences of being in an experiment, or rumors of the experiment that participants may hear can greatly bias the way they respond.[3][20][21] Outside of an experiment, these types of past experiences and mannerisms may have significant effects on how patients rank the effectiveness of their therapist.[12] Many of the ways therapists go about collecting client feedback involve self-report measures, which can be highly influenced by response bias.[12] Participants may be biased if they fill out these measure in front of their therapist, or somehow feel compelled to answer in an affirmative matter because they believe their therapy should be working.[12] In this case, the therapists would not be able to gain accurate feedback from their clients, and be unable to improve their therapy or accurately tailor further treatment to what the participants need.[12] All of these different examples, may have significant effects on the responses of participants, driving them to respond in ways that do not reflect their actual beliefs or actual mindset, which negatively impact conclusions drawn from those surveys.[3]

While demand characteristics cannot be completely removed from an experiment, there are steps that researchers can take to minimize the impact they may have on the results.[3] One way to mitigate response bias is to use deception to prevent the participant from discovering the true hypothesis of the experiment.[22] Researchers use deception so that it is more difficult for participants to discover the true hypothesis of the experiment, and then debrief the participants.[22] For example, research has demonstrated that repeated deception and debriefing is useful in preventing participants from becoming familiar with the experiment, and that participants do not significantly alter their behavior after being deceived and debriefed multiple times.[22] Another way that researchers can attempt to reduce demand characteristics is by being as neutral as possible, or training those conducting the experiment to be as neutral as possible.[20] For example, studies show that that excessive one-on-one contact between the experimenter and the participant makes it more difficult to be neutral, and go on to suggest that this type of interaction should be limited when designing an experiment.[18][20] Finally, a last way to prevent demand characteristics would be to use blinded experiments with placebo or control groups.[3][18] This prevents the experimenter from biasing the participant, because the researcher does not know in which way the participant should respond. Although not perfect, these methods can significantly reduce the effect of demand characteristics on a study, thus making the conclusions

draw from the experiment more likely to accurately reflect what they were intended to measure.[20]

Extreme responding

Extreme responding is a form of response bias that drives respondents to only select the most extreme options or answers available.[1][17] For example, in a survey utilizing a Likert scale with potential responses ranging from 1 to 5, the respondent may only give answers as 1's or 5's. Another example would be if the participant only answered questionnaires with "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" in a survey with that type of response style. There are several reasons for why this bias may take hold in a group of participants. One example ties the development of this type of bias in respondents to their cultural identity.[17] This explanation states that some cultures are more likely to respond in an extreme manner as compared to others. For example, research has found that those from the Middle East and Latin America are more prone to be affected by extremity response, whereas those from East Asia and Western Europe are less likely to be affected by extremity response.[17] A second explanation for this type of response bias relates to the education level of the participants.[17] Research has indicated that those with lower intelligence, measured by an analysis of IQ and school achievement, are more likely to be affected by extremity response.[17] Finally, one other way that this bias can be introduced is through the wording of questions in the survey or questionnaire.[1] Certain topics or the wording of a question may drive participants to respond in an extreme manner, especially if it relates to the motivations or beliefs of the participant.[1]

The opposite of this bias occurs when participants only select intermediate or mild responses as answers.[1] In this type of bias, a participant would highly prefer to select a 3 in a scale ranging from 1 to 5, or the most mild response in a survey asking for their feelings on a topic, such as "Neutral," "slightly agree," or "slightly disagree."

Social desirability bias

Main article: Social desirability bias

Social desirability bias is a type of response bias that influences a participant to deny undesirable traits, and ascribe to traits that are socially desirable.[2] In essence, it is a bias that drives an individual to answer in a way that makes them look more favorable to the experimenter.[1][2] This bias can take many forms. Some individuals may over-report good behavior, while others may under-report bad, or undesirable behavior.[1] A critical aspect of how this bias can come to affect the responses of participants relates to the norms of the society in which the research is taking place.[2] For example, social desirability bias could play a large role if conducting research about an individual's tendency to use drugs. Those in a community where drug use is seen as cool or popular may over-inflate their own drug use, whereas those from a community where drug use is looked down upon may choose to under-report their own use to better conform to the societal norm. This type of bias is much more prevalent in questions that draw on a subject's opinion, like when asking a participant to evaluate or rate something, because there generally is not one correct answer, and the respondent has multiple ways they could answer the question.[4] Overall, this bias can be very problematic for self-report researchers,

especially if the topic they are looking at is controversial.[1] The distortions created by respondents answering in a socially desirable manner can have profound effects on the validity of self-report research.[2] Without being able to control for or deal with this bias, researchers would be unable to determine if the effects they are measuring are due to individual differences, or from a desire to conform to the societal norms present in the population they are studying. Therefore, it is important for researchers to employ strategies aimed at mitigating social desirability bias so that they can draw valid conclusions from their research.[1]

Several strategies exist to limit the effect of social desirability bias. In 1985, Anton Nederhof compiled a list a of techniques and methodological strategies that researchers can use to mitigate the effects of social desirability bias in their studies.[2] Most of these strategies involve deceiving the subject, or are related to the way questions in surveys and questionnaires are presented to those in a study. A condensed list of seven of the strategies are listed below:

- **Forced-choice items:** This technique hopes to generate questions that are equal in desirability to hopefully prevent a socially desirable response in one direction or another.[2]
- **Neutral questions:** The goal of this strategy is to use questions that are rated as neutral by a wide range of raters so that socially desirable responding does not apply.[2]
- **Randomized response technique:** This technique allows participants to answer a question that is randomly selected from a set a of questions. The researcher in this technique does not know which question the subject responds to, so subjects are more likely to answer truthfully. Researchers can then use statistics to interpret the anonymous data.[2]
- **Self-administered questionnaires:** This strategy involves isolating the participant before they begin answering the survey or questionnaire to hopefully remove any social cues the researcher may present to the participant.[2]
- **Bogus-pipeline:** This technique involves a form of deception, where researchers convince a subject through a series of rigged demonstrations that a machine can accurately determine if a participant is being truthful when responding to certain questions. After the participant completes the survey or questionnaire, they are debriefed. This is a rare technique, and does not see much use because of the cost, time commitment and because it is a one-use only technique for each participant.[2]
- **Selection interviewers:** This strategy allows participants to select the person or persons who will be conducting the interview or presiding over the experiment. This method hopes that with a higher degree of rapport, subjects will be more likely to answer honestly.[2]
- **Proxy subjects:** Instead of asking a person directly, this strategy questions someone who is close to or knows the target individual well. This technique is generally limited to questions about behavior, and is not adequate for asking about attitudes or beliefs.[2]

The degree of effectiveness for each of these techniques or strategies differs depending on the situation and the question asked.[2] In order to be the most successful in reducing social desirability bias in a wide range of situations, it is suggested that researchers utilize a combination of these techniques to have the best chance at mitigating the effects of social desirability bias.[1][2]

Related terminology

- [Non-response bias](#) is not the opposite of "response bias" and is not a type of cognitive bias: it occurs in a [statistical survey](#) if those who respond to the survey differ in the outcome variable.
- [Response rate](#) is not a cognitive bias, but rather refers to a ratio of those who complete the survey and those who don't.

Highly vulnerable areas

Some areas or topics that are highly vulnerable to the various types of response bias include:

- alcoholism[23][24]
- sexual violence[citation needed]
- self-report in mental illness, especially depression[10]

See also

- [Total survey error](#)
- [Compound question](#)
- [Heckman correction](#)
- [Loaded question](#)
- [Misinformation effect](#), similar effect for memory instead of opinion.
- [Opinion poll](#)
- [List of cognitive biases](#)

External links

- [Estimation of Response Bias in the NHES:95 Adult Education Survey](#)
- [Effects of road sign wording on visitor survey - non-response bias](#)

Notes

1.

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