



Don't Do This

We have recently received a couple of questionnaires in the mail from non-profit sources that illustrate a number of brain-dead research practices. One even had the imprimatur of a major university, which is discouraging.

One question asked for ratings of several attributes of our neighborhood with check boxes. Then there was a final blank line—with more check boxes. Anyone could come up with several more attributes, and could rate each one differently. What were they thinking? It's OK to ask for other attributes that are important.

Another asked for opinions about the effectiveness of various measures in reducing crime. Whether, say, horseback patrols reduce crime is an empirical question—not a matter of public opinion. What were they thinking?

Another question was phrased in terms of importance but then offered a scale of agreement-disagreement. What were they thinking? Unfortunately we see the same kind of mismatch between questions and scales in business studies all the time.

A questionnaire about student life asked how common certain practices were on a campus today. Not having set foot on said campus in many years, we were in no position to answer yet there was no provision for indicating as much.

We could go on, as could many of you. The shame of it is that the basic tool for gathering so much of the data upon which highfalutin statistical analysis and significant managerial

decisions are based—the humble questionnaire—is often seen as something that anyone can throw together. However more sophisticated our data collection and analysis are today, we as an industry continue to tolerate mediocre questionnaire writing.

Perhaps it is because good writing defies routinization and technological fixes. A bad questionnaire for an online survey that is written and turned around in two days is still a bad questionnaire.

None of us is guiltless, but we at Action Marketing Research take pains to compose questions that people can answer in a way that will provide the results the client needs.

When Are Ads Really Entertainment?

Efforts to promote brands continue to cross the borders of what is conventionally known as advertising. Product placement (e.g. in movies) is a booming industry, for instance. The award-winning BMW Films series led the way for similar non-media based efforts.

There are those who say these new methods are "not really advertising" and thus not eligible for traditional advertising awards.

Be that as it may, such definitional tussles are academic. In the consumer's brain, the distinction between (paid, media) ads and entertainment is irrelevant. A brand impression is a brand impression; a neural link is a neural link. Any stimulus that creates a denser network of memory associations around a brand matters, whether it derives from a print ad, an ill-behaved CEO, David Letterman's jokes, or what ad purists sniff is "merely entertainment."

Where Company Reputation Matters

An article in the May *Journal of Marketing Research* by Gürhan-Canli and Batra shows that a company's reputation for innovation and trustworthiness influences buyer decisions in high-risk situations. No significant effects were found in the low-risk situations tested.

Conversely, a company's reputation for social responsibility did not seem to make a difference in brands chosen.

These were experimental studies with students (always!), but the results are consistent with a lot of what we think we know about purchase behavior. "Familiarity" is a cornerstone of brand equity, and it matters because consumers use that information to reduce their risks. In the absence of other information, consumers will quite naturally lean toward known entities. Brand extensions may, in time, flop on their own merit, but an established brand will always have an initial advantage.

2004 ART Forum

This is our last opportunity to shill for this singular event, sponsored each year by the American Marketing Association. The initials stand for "Advanced Research Techniques", so the spirit of Paul Green is much more evident than that of Paul Gauguin. The location—Whistler, British Columbia—promises to be very scenic however.

Assuming your passport is in good order, consider attending. Information is available at <http://ecommerce.ama.org/evsystem/art.htm>. And did we mention that Paul Riedesel is on this year's program committee?



Is This Us?

We "borrowed" these indications that it is time to get out of the consulting business. How many apply to researchers in general?

- You refer to dating as test marketing.
 - You can spell "paradigm."
 - You write executive summaries on your love letters.
 - You believe the best tables and graphs take an hour to comprehend.
 - None of your favorite publications have cartoons.
 - You insist that you do some more market research before you and your spouse produce another child.
 - You know every single piece of clip art in PowerPoint.
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A Statistical Moment

The term "correlation" is often used in both technical and non-technical writing. Most understand that it refers to a relationship between two factors.

In the context of statistics, however, the term has a more precise meaning. It always involves a set of observations (e.g. survey respondents) for which you have values for two variables (e.g. annual income and annual spending on movie DVDs).

The correlation coefficient between two variables will fall in the range of -1.00 to $+1.00$. The two extremes are equally strong, indicating that one variable perfectly predicts the other. A value near 0.00 means that the variables are uncorrelated and of no use in predicting each other.

There are many versions of correlation coefficients, depending on whether your variables are continuous (e.g. income), categorical (e.g. state of residence), or binary (e.g. own/not own). But if you understand the underlying logic, they all mean essentially the same thing.