



NEW BOOKS IN REVIEW

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ASKING QUESTIONS: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN: FOR MARKET RESEARCH, POLITICAL POLLS, AND SOCIAL AND HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRES, Norman Bradburn, Seymour Sudman, and Brian Wansink, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, 448 pages, \$40.00.

Since the publication of the original, successful, and often-cited *Asking Questions* by Sudman and Bradburn (1982) more than 20 years ago, there have been some notable paradigmatic developments that have changed the way people approach the issue of asking questions. One of the notable developments has been the advent of an area that has been characterized as the cognitive aspects of survey methodology. The paradigmatic shift has resulted in a change of focus from the effects of survey errors on measurement (a more statistics-based approach) to the antecedents or causes of certain types of responses in surveys (a more psychology-based approach) in the mind of a questionnaire designer. In keeping with this paradigmatic shift, researchers in the area of questionnaire design and survey methodology have recently relied heavily on research in the areas of cognitive and social psychology to explain why certain kinds of question ordering, wording, and techniques work better than others in eliciting more accurate responses. Thus, this is also something that a current book on questionnaire design needs to address. The new edition of *Asking Questions* does a nice job of integrating some of the new findings as a function of this paradigmatic shift and is a more up-to-date manual for anyone who wants to design a questionnaire. From being a more generic "Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design," as the previous title indicated, this book has now heeded the current developments and has evolved into a more specific guide, as the current title, "The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design: For Market Research, Political Polls, and Social and Health Questionnaires," suggests.

A second notable development is the advances in technology that has contributed to computer-assisted surveys becoming an integral part of the survey process. Computers have entered every stage of the data collection process, beginning with respondent selection to administration of interviews and analyses. In responding to some of these developments, the revised edition takes into consideration some of the idiosyncrasies (e.g., special considerations for

Web-based surveys) that should be given attention when designing a questionnaire.

A book on survey design typically includes issues of defining the research problem, decisions about the target group, considerations regarding selection of a particular design from a multitude of different research designs, mode of administering the study (e.g., telephone, personal, Web, mail), questionnaire construction given mode of administration, sampling technique, analyses technique, and guidelines for presentation of results. The current book exclusively addresses the questionnaire construction phase of survey design and does not address any of the other issues. Therefore, it is focused in its goals. It assumes that the researcher is conducting a survey and needs to ask the appropriate question given the mode of administration with the goal of maximizing accuracy of the results. It provides excellent guidelines for question construction and wording.

The book is carved out into three main parts: (1) strategies for asking questions; here, the authors lay out the social context in which to ask questions and address issues of language, social desirability, and ethics; (2) tactics for asking questions; here, the authors speak to the issues of questions on different topics and the best way to address these topics; and (3) drafting and crafting the questionnaire; here, the authors examine issues related to the questionnaire as a whole and pay specific attention to question ordering and sequencing. Subsequently, I review each of these sections in the context of how the changes in the field have been reflected in the changes in this revised edition. Although all the chapters have been revamped, the focus in this review is only on the new additions.

Part 1 of the book begins by laying down the central thesis of the book: "Question wording is a crucial element in surveys." Therefore, this part makes a case for why it is important to pay attention to how questions are asked. It discusses the effects of question wording changes on responses (e.g., the role of loaded questions, politically charged issues), the social nature of a questionnaire (e.g., stimulating interaction between interviewers and respondents, the sensitivity of topics to respondents, the role of social desirability), and the ethical aspects of the process (e.g., the respondent's right to privacy and anonymity, informed consent, the increasing important role of institutional review boards). It concludes by discussing how to

convert research questions into actual questions and has some tips for beginners.

The essence of the book lies in Part 2. In discussing the tactics for asking questions, the book covers a host of topics, with chapters dedicated to nonthreatening and threatening questions about behavior, attitudes, and behavioral intentions; open-ended and closed-ended question formats; measuring knowledge; evaluating performance; and collecting psychographic and demographic information. The contribution of the book lies essentially in this part, and the authors have included new topics that have surfaced in the past 20 years.

Chapter 4 on measuring attitudes and behaviors includes a discussion of measuring behavioral intentions, presumably because of the developments in the literature on how behavioral intentions are a prime way to measure the translation of attitudes into future behavior. This chapter goes on to discuss other ways to predict future behavior, such as frequency-related questions, and includes a discussion of when they may be more appropriate than asking intention questions. It also includes a discussion of issues to consider, such as when to use unipolar or bipolar questions, the use of question filters, the use of a scale with a midpoint, and double-barreled questions. It discusses the recent work on question order effects, that is, when general to specific effects might occur, and vice versa.

The previous edition included a chapter on recording responses to attitude questions. This revised edition instead treats open-ended versus closed-ended questions as a separate chapter (Chapter 5), acknowledging that these question formats affect not only attitudes, as discussed in the previous edition, but also behaviors. Recent research suggests that behavioral information may also be subject to similar biases as attitudes, and Chapter 5 reflects the changes in thinking that have occurred.

An important addition is the chapter on asking psychographics questions (Chapter 8). This chapter addresses the value of going beyond the more traditional demographic classification of respondents and using psychographic and individual difference measures to predict people's behavior. This chapter discusses the evolution of psychographic segments and the VALS segments and profiles. Furthermore, it

provides a checklist of action steps to consider when generating psychographic questions.

Part 3 of the book moves away from the specifics of question wording to one of questionnaire organization. The issues addressed here are those that pertain to how to order questions within a questionnaire after the questions themselves have been formulated. This section begins with general formatting issues pertaining to typefaces, interviewer instructions, question numbering, preempting data analyses, and so forth. In Chapter 10, the authors pay specific attention to the advances in technology and discuss issues related to fitting questions on a computer screen, if the questionnaire is being conducted on the Web or through some computer-aided mechanism. This chapter also discusses other new technologies, such as PDAAI (personal digital assistant–assisted interviewing). This part concludes with a discussion of the importance of pretest (Chapter 11), and Chapter 12 is devoted to some of the frequently asked questions about questionnaire design.

Appendix A is particularly useful because it includes a list of academic and not-for-profit survey research organizations in the United States. This list also includes Web addresses for these institutions, which makes tracking information on these organizations easy.

Overall, this revised edition lives up to the high standards that the original book set. True to its name, it is an excellent handbook for any researcher interested in designing a questionnaire for market research, political polls, or social or health issues. It presents all the information in a readable and accessible manner and is full of examples and anecdotes that help illustrate the points the authors wish to make.

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REFERENCES

- Sudman, Seymour and Norman Bradburn (1982), *Asking Questions: A Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.