
Validity on the use of questionnaires as a research tool

4 messages

Etienne-Victor Depasquale <edepa@ieee.org>
To: "Perrin, Sterling" <perrin@heavyreading.com>

Tue, Feb 7, 2023 at 10:10 AM

Hello Sterling,

I've exchanged emails with a critic on the use of questionnaires. This took place last December, while I was seeking assessment of my survey's results.

To understand his perspective, the following extract is an accurate indicator (it's not taken out of context or skewed).

"Questionnaires are collections of problems that are poorly defined, answered by someone who doesn't understand them, and even if they did, they don't really know what their company is doing and is going to be doing going forward"

How would you defend against this kind of statement?

Best regards,

Etienne

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Etienne-Victor Depasquale <edepa@ieee.org>
To: "Perrin, Sterling" <perrin@heavyreading.com>

Fri, Feb 17, 2023 at 1:00 PM

To add a little more background, I sent the results of my surveys to two people who are veterans in network operations.

One of them tends to be cynical, and his views are useful as they're representative of the devil's advocate :)

Cheers,

Etienne

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Perrin, Sterling <perrin@heavyreading.com>
To: Etienne-Victor Depasquale <edepa@ieee.org>

Fri, Feb 17, 2023 at 10:04 PM

Hi Etienne,

I think a well-developed survey mitigates most of what he stated. We spend a lot of time/effort in crafting the questions so that they are not ambiguous and are well-defined (e.g., including specific definitions). The database(s) is important because we solicit responses from people who are directly involved working in the survey topic and have an understanding of their company's plans in the topic area. He is describing a very poor survey. I've described the ideal survey – the reality is probably somewhere in between.

We individually scrutinize each response to remove suspicious and uninformed responses and push the aggregate as close to the ideal scenario as possible. Again, not perfect, but in aggregate I have found survey results a reliable indicator of major market trends and shifts. The more granular we cut the data, the more likely to obtain results influenced by a bad response in the numbers. We aim for 80-100 responses for this reason, and rarely analyze a cut less than 40 (and if so, with a disclaimer that the size is small).

A couple of other observations: 1. consumers don't really plan but businesses do. It's reasonable to ask business employees about their plans for their business, because they spend a lot of time planning for the future. Plans change, but a survey will capture plans at a moment in time. 2. Businesses (and consumers) understand their pain points. This data is very reliable. 3. Businesses also tend to understand the trends influencing their business, so surveys are good indicators here. 4. Surveys (in my experience) have been least accurate in identifying timing. They know what they want, but it takes longer than expected almost always. I rely on timing data least of all.

Hope this helps.

Sterling

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Information Classification: General

Etienne-Victor Depasquale <edepa@ieee.org>
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Sun, Feb 19, 2023 at 11:50 AM

Very good rationale, Sterling, thank you very much.

One factor that I'll be using to strengthen my position is qualitative survey, i.e., interviewing a couple of people from (operations and planning) about the similarity between their perception of trends and those (trends) that emerge from my quantitative survey.

Best regards,

Etienen

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