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Dillman's Graphic Language and Negative Worded Statement in Work Related Attitude Measurement

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Abstract

In the study of social science research, there are innumerable of well-established measurement instruments that include a blend of positive and negative worded statements. The purpose of this study is to seek alternative remedy on negative worded statement by using the Dillman's questionnaire principles. A model of Allen and Meyer (1991) were used with two different designs were distributed to two types of samples in present study. The findings reveal that there are differences in the qualities of responds between two samples. Interestingly, by improving the overall features of questionnaire, the respondents' motivation and attention to the questionnaire are improved.

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1.0 Introduction

Questionnaire is one of the important elements in survey research. The quality of survey results depends heavily on the quality of respondents' responses. Moreover, the quality of the responses depends on the designs of the questionnaire (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). The design should be looked at from various positions not only on the text and wording but the layout of the questions as well. The questionnaires carry several objectives such as ability of the respondents to answer the specific set of questions, motivating the respondents to give their responses, and ability to minimize response error (Malhotra, 2010). Thus, in designing the questions, the researchers often include several

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positive and negative statements. The inclusion of negative statements intended to overcome several causes to common method biases in survey questionnaire that has been discussed widely by academic scholars (for example Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003). In order to reduce the errors, a questionnaire should be designed according to the “best practices” (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Nevertheless there is limited literature available to discuss in details about the issue of negative worded statements in measuring instruments. In addition, limited techniques have been proposed by past studies in handling the issue of negative worded statements. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate the respondents’ responses specifically on the negative worded statement by improving the designs of questionnaire using Dillman’s techniques.

Past studies with regard to this issue have tested several approaches to negative statements but were still unable to prove the exact way in handling the issue of negative worded statements properly. It is the aim of this paper to test Dillman’s method in order to improve the use of negative statements in measuring instruments of survey research and discuss its implication to the research.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Graphic Language Method

The understanding on graphic language method in the theory of self-administered questionnaires is very limited. Mostly, the discussion in the literature on the self-administered questionnaires has concentrated on the aspect of wording and language rather than the appearance of the questionnaire (Jenkins and Dillman, 1995). By realizing the importance of the layout and the appearance of the questionnaire, Jenkins and Dillman (1995) developed the idea of improving the self-administered questionnaire on two major aspects that is the verbal and non-verbal language of questionnaire. The discussion of this paper will give much focus on the non-verbal aspects. Fundamentally, Jenkins and Dillman (1995) describe the verbal language as wording and information of a set of questions in the questionnaire. While the non-verbal language refers to the graphic component or the elements of visualisation that are important enough to make the respondents engage to the questionnaire. They believe that the graphic non-verbal language should not be neglected because the appearances of the questionnaire have cognitive and affective effect on the efforts and motivation of the respondents to responds. One should clearly understand that the graphic language took in many forms and does not limit to text, picture, graph, symbol and so on. What they meant by graphic elements in the paper based questionnaire are to the use of colour, shapes, brightness, or a theme to the questionnaires. All of these elements are important to secure the respondents attention as they go through the questions. Furthermore, the visual aspect of self-administered questionnaires play significant role in improving survey response.

The way information is presented in the questionnaires has either positive or negative effect on the perception of respondents. The mental perception in turn will influence the respondents to answer questions. Besides, Jenkins and Dillman (1995) further explain that the graphic language acts as a “channel” of communication that draws the attention of respondents. Poor channel communication would result in unfavourable respondents’ action. Scientifically, the respondents will extract meaning and cues from the way information are displayed on a page. There are several processes that are involved when the respondents process the data in questionnaire. Tourangeau (1984) has developed a model of cognitive process involved in self-administered questionnaires. Firstly, the respondents would observe and receive the questions in all languages, verbally and non-verbally. Then, the respondents would comprehend all languages. Next, the respondent would try to search memories or recall for relevant information. The information would then be integrated and transmitted to mind or cognizance in form of one judgement. The judgement would be translated into action or response by marking the answer. Thus, by creating a good impression at the initial stage of first gaze prior to answering the questions is imperative.

To date, there has been little attention on the study and discussion of graphic language of self-administered questionnaire. Due to the scarcity of the studies in this area, there is limited guideline that could guide the design of the questionnaires. The existing books and articles on research methodology have discussed this topic in general but do not provide a specific and clear example of the graphic non-verbal language as introduced by Jenkins and Dillman (1995) and Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009).

In order to have a clear understanding on the graphic language of self-administered questionnaires, Jenkins and Dillman (1995) introduced a “Navigational Guide Principle” for self-administered questionnaires. The principles

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