

FIELDWORK IN CATI SURVEYS: HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE DATA QUALITY

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Introduction

We consider the interviewers' opinions of an interview to be reliable indicators of the quality of the conversation. However, in a growing body of the literature few research refer to this problem. Although many analyses have been conducted that pertain to the influence of different CATI interviewers' characteristics (e.g. sex, age, beliefs) on the quality of survey data (e.g. Biemer & Lyberg 2003), few papers examine the interviewers' opinions of their work.

This presentation focuses on selected results of the methodological research that was carried out among CATI interviewers in Polish survey organizations.

Research questions

- What level of satisfaction do CATI interviewers derive from doing their job?
Employee dissatisfaction can affect interviewers' interaction with respondents (→ non-response & measurement errors) (Malhotra & Mukherjee 2004).
- To what extent are various CATI studio duties stressful for CATI interviewers?
Employee stress has negative impact on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance (Goolsby 1992).
- What kind of difficult situations can arise when conducting telephone interviews?
What are CATI interviewers' opinions on these situations?

Materials & Methods

The study was conducted between November 2009 and August 2010, as well as in January 2013. Twelve major Polish commercial survey organizations participated in the project:

- * 4P research mix * ASM * ARC Rynek i Opinia *
- * Expert Monitor (at present: Kantar Media) *
- * GfK Polonia * IMAS International *
- * IPSOS * IQS * MillwardBrown SMG/KRC *
- * PBS * Pentor RI (at present: TNS Polska) *
- * TNS OBOP (at present: TNS Polska) *

Each of these companies has CATI facilities, and each carries out telephone interviews on a regular basis.

Research tools

2009-2010 main study

- Self-Administered Questionnaire for CATI interviewer (846 cases)
- In-Depth Interview with CATI interviewer (32 interviews)
- Self-Administered Questionnaire for CATI studio manager (12 cases)

2013 follow-up study

- In-Depth Interview with CATI studio manager (8 interviews)

Results

Job satisfaction level

A job satisfaction questionnaire presented 18 statements concerning CATI interviewers' job. The interviewers were asked to what extent they agreed with each item.

The statements comprised six scales – partially taken from Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss et al. 1967) – that represent different dimensions of job satisfaction.

In Table 1, the obtained results are presented. The range of responses was 1-4 (the higher the mean, the more satisfied the interviewer).

Table 1

Scale	Mean	Cronbach's alpha
SUPERVISION	3.26	.680
RECOGNITION	2.46	.851
COWORKERS	3.38	.497
ADVANCEMENT/VARIETY	2.45	.770
WORKING CONDITIONS	2.94	.652
COMPENSATION	2.59	.733
OVERALL SATISFACTION LEVEL	2.84	.921

Job satisfaction level is associated with age and work experience. Younger (up to 22 years old) and older (29 years old and older) individuals, as well as interviewers who have worked in CATI studio for a short period of time appear to be more satisfied with their jobs than other interviewers.

Stressful situations

A Likert-type scale presented 11 interviewer duties. The interviewers were asked to what extent they found each item stressful.

Exploratory factor analysis was employed to examine the structure of the data. The detailed results are presented in Table 2. Scale of 1 (not stressful at all) to 4 (very stressful).

Interviewers' stress levels were more closely associated with CATI interview break-offs than interviewers' cognitive difficulties. Women, older persons, interviewers with longer work experience, and with higher workload levels appeared to have rated situations as more stressful than the other participants.

Table 2

Factor	Mean
ACTIVITIES WHICH MAY CAUSE A BREAK-OFF	2.64
Introducing an interview with an aggressive respondent; refusal conversion; conducting a long interview; conducting an interview with a respondent who complains about the research tools	
ACTIVITIES WHICH MAY CAUSE COGNITIVE DIFFICULTIES TO THE INTERVIEWER	2.03
Conducting an interview with a hard of hearing respondent/with a respondent who has a serious speech impediment; writing down a respondent's very long answer to an open-ended question; conducting many different projects within a single shift	

Determinant = 0.027; K-M-O = 0.854; factors extracted based on screen plot; Varimax rotation

Results

Difficult situations

During in-depth interviews, we wanted to identify unpleasant situations that can occur when talking to respondents over the phone. One situation was considered to be particularly troublesome – handling

respondents who have difficulty in understanding the questions

A majority of interviewers claim that they sometimes deviate from interviewing rules when respondents do not understand a particular question. In the interviewers' opinions, the questions used in CATI scripts are often formulated using complicated vocabulary and syntax. The questions have not been adapted to suit the intellectual skills of an average respondent.

Sometimes questions are so horrible that even I don't know what the matter is. So how can those poor respondents with elementary education understand such questions? (...) No researcher, no supervisor who didn't work as a CATI interviewer knows things that we – the interviewers – know.

Sometimes questions are so long that when I finish reading them I don't understand what the beginning is. The respondent – without written text – all the more.

Some questions are just too clever. Even when I look through them I have to really get into them. (...) The questions are not designed for ordinary people but for the ones better educated.

Conclusion

The interviewers are not satisfied with their job based on the idea that they lack recognition, opportunities for career advancement, and variety. A lot of interviewers claim that no one at work is interested to hear their opinions on different topics concerning procedures used by the company. Such conduct may result in

deprivation of essential information on the methodological value of research tools

Being under stress is typical of CATI interviewer's job. However, it would be advisable that survey managers enable operators to work in a more relaxing manner. They might try to instruct the interviewers how to handle uncooperative respondents; they could also consider implementing call center relaxation programs.

The interviewers sometimes deviate from the prescribed protocol to ensure respondents complete the survey. This strategy is used when respondents experience difficulties understanding the questions asked. It would be advisable that survey researchers

pay more attention to the language and syntax while designing CATI questionnaires

They might also consider

creating a standardized set of rules regulating interviewers' behavior

in the event that an interviewer faces situation of problem respondents.