

Asking the Right Questions

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Questions and Answers

- Answers to direct questions treated as data
- Assume people are able to access accurate information
- Assumption is false

Outline of session

- Going to ask you to respond to some questions
- Explore process for developing answers
- What does it mean for designing interviews and questionnaires

Trivia

- On your seat there is a sheet of paper
- Answer the Questions labeled 'Trivia Questions'

Trivia Answers

- How many pillars are there in the Muslim faith?
 - 5 (Faith, Prayer, Charity, Fasting, hajj)
- Which two countries beginning with 'D' have a land border with only one other country?
 - Denmark (Sweden) and the Dominican Republic (Haiti)
- Which war in 1900 was named after a Chinese secret society?
 - Boxer Rebellion
- Which one-word US state has 13 letters in its name?
 - Massachusetts
- Which country's name contains the word 'love'?
 - Slovenia

Trivia thought processes

- How many did you get right?
- How many did you almost get?
- How many did you recognise when you heard the answer?

Interpretation

- Some answers in memory but not accessed
- For 3 of 5, could have worked out answers by searching memory
- Generally rely on implicit knowledge to answer questions

Cognitive science

- very limited capacity to hold information in our awareness
 - estimate only aware of four bits of information at a time
- access to information is by association
 - partly from information already in consciousness
 - partly from perceptions
- heavily influenced by context

Catch

- Did you calculate the trajectory?
- Focus on the ball
- Brain processes information about trajectory without you being aware of it
- Implicit thinking
- Procedural thinking

Kahneman's calculation

- What is 17×24 ?
- Is it 568?

Interpretation

- Suggestion
- Plausibility

Three Phenomena

- We use short cuts, “heuristics”, to estimate answers
- Most of our responses are based on what seems plausible
- the power of peers in decision-making and judgements.

Schwarz & Hippler

- Question on back of Trivia sheet
- Choose the closest answer

Results

- Two different ranges on the sheets
- Did the range affect the answers?

Cognitive process

- How did you work out your answers?
- How many counted hours?
- How many did something else?

Original Experiment

- Self assessed self against others
- Located self on scale based on self assessment
- Same results with masturbation and sex
- Manipulate results by manipulating range in preceding questions

Implications

- Answering a different question
- Question about self-perception of social positioning
- AND Carry over self-perceptions to later questions
- Yes Prime Minister

Context

- Context of previous questions informs answers
- Limited capacity for awareness of information
- What people say is based on limited current awareness
- Generally not aware of how we use self-perception to answer

Haire experiment

- Constellation of negative attributes associated with instant coffee
- Respondents unaware of implicit knowledge
- Rationalised aversion as flavour

Descartes Error

(apologies to Damasio)

- Much of our behaviour is derived from
 - copying the behaviour of others
 - what we have done before, habits and routines
- Better predictors of behaviours and decisions than answers to questions (Earls).
- “Human’s are to thinking as cats are to swimming” (Kahneman).



Implicit and Procedural thinking

- Most of our 'thinking' is implicit
- Procedural knowledge
 - expressed in routines or habits
 - NOT part of our declaratory knowledge
 - Unaware of procedural knowledge except in the act

Say v Do

- La Pierre - Asian couple and racism
- Krosnik - more people say they vote than actually did
- UK health survey - number of heterosexual partners

Conclusion

- Answers to direct questions based on
 - self-perception
 - semantic associations with previous questions
 - Heuristic thinking patterns
- Rationalise behaviour or answers

Conclusion cont'd

- What people SAY is good information about what they SAY to evaluators
 - How they articulate social norms
 - How they rationalise and explain things
- May be resource for behaviour change

Lessons for Design

- What lessons should we take?

Lessons from the session

- Test the questions before hand - check understandings
- Give people the opportunity to DO
- Interview the same person more than once
- Triangulate with other data and methods (e.g. admin data, observation)
- If questions require recall or calculation
 - Structure questions to encourage and facilitate
 - Give people time
 - Ask fewer questions

Some lessons from literature

- Avoid direct questions about self-behaviour or attitudes
 - unless you want to analyse how people report their behaviour
- Recognise that people will look for and find social context information from the questions
 - you will influence the responses even in an online setting
- Try to reveal the implicit concepts that inform behaviour, judgement and decisions

Some lessons from literature cont'd

- Create a context and use stimuli that are
 - congruous with the situation you wish to explore
 - plausible to the participants
- Consider using impoverished stimuli that require the participants to add constructs. If so work on
 - clarity and comprehensibility of the task
 - limit explicit processing to avoid self-presentation