

Social Desirability Bias and the Validity of Indirect Questions



Robert J Fisher

The author lengthily speaks about the social desirability tendency of people according to which they provide answers that would help them gain the approval of others, however, when asked directly they would never admit that. The reason is that people are inclined to present themselves in a way that is consistent with social norms, and independent is a highly ranked value...

When are asked directly (and not in anonymity), respondents are engaged with impression management and feel greater pressure to make their responses consistent with social expectations.

By asking indirect questions – in a projective manner (i.e. "the typical consumer would ...", instead of "I will..."), the social desirability bias is reduced. The respondents project their own beliefs and evaluations when answering indirect questions.