The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Digital Methodologies in Sport, Leisure and Recreation Management Research

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Research/statistical methodology
Abstract 2010-049
June 3, 2010
2:55 PM
75-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop (White IBIS)

Online research is a growing market. Research indicates that the patterns of response to data collected through online surveys continue to rise and the patterns of response for telephone and mail survey methodologies remain stagnant, or in some cases, fall (Best Practices for Online Research - A White Paper from InsightExpress, Insight Express, September 2002). Literature supports the use of the electronic survey method (as compared with pencil-and-paper, postal mail surveys). Shannon, Johnson, Searcy, and Lott (2002) queried 62 experienced survey researchers. Overall, the researchers were in agreement on the benefits afforded by the electronic survey method, including reduction of costs (postage, phone), the use of e-mail for follow-up with initial non-respondents, and compatibility with existing software programs. Shannon et al. (2002) further reported that the respondents made some suggestions to improve or maximize the use of the electronic method such as pre-sampling the population to determine interest in participating, making the survey easy to access and complete (given a potential wide-range of technical abilities among the sample), and making sure that the sample population comes from group(s) that have access to the Internet, such as professional organizations. All of the aforementioned suggestions were incorporated into a recent study regarding practitioner perceptions of an academic degree program in public assembly facility management with 845 IAAM and SMA participants; the results of using the online research will be showcased in the presentation through this study and others (Riordan, 2009; Bryan-Wunner, 1991).

The substantial 39% rate-of-return on Questionnaire 1 and 73% rate-of-return on Questionnaire 2 indicated that the respondents were comfortable using the electronic survey method. The use of the SNAP software system allowed for built-in instructions, consent forms, and questionnaires on a single, easily-navigated platform. The study participants remained engaged in the modified Delphi process in part due in large part to the electronic method. Participants were quick to respond and required minimal follow-up. The use of the electronic format provided a means to keep the respondent engaged in the study without the normal time delay due to preparation of instruments and the use of mailed questionnaires.

Other digital methodologies such as online interview and online focus groups are also gaining popularity (Oringderff, 2004). A number of studies in sport and leisure management conducted in recent years employed the online focus groups technique in solving their research questions (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dattilo, Estrella, Estrella, Light, McNaughton, & Seabury, 2008). It was suggested (Kenny, 2005, p. 414) that online focus groups can “capitalize on technology to bring together a group of people separated by distance in an online environment that encourages interactive discussion”.

This session will address how the online technologies can be used in collecting data to inform, educate, seek consensus and assist with decision-making as well, through focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and electronic surveys using a host of technologies. The use of a modified Delphi Technique with Snap Survey Software, the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences with the online survey data, the use of Atlas.Ti with focus group data, the use of Clicker Systems and electronic polling with Elluminate, and other programs will be threaded through the discussion. Session will also explore how these technologies are evolving into a hand-held environment that has both action research and field work applications. In addition, the session will highlight the “good, bad and the ugly” of using the digital methodologies related to assurance of ethical issues, the costs, the accuracy, the speed of data collection and analysis, and the reliability.

The session will also relay how the digital technologies are used to collate and analyze the data so the responses can be synthesized into a usable format that provides easily accessible and conclusive results for both quantitative and qualitative data sets.