

SEC INTERROGATORY #82

INTERROGATORY

[B/6/2, p. 7] Please discuss the alternative response bias, where respondents wish to give the answer that they believe the questioner would like, and so affirm the value of the program by minimizing their free-rider attributes.

RESPONSE

Response bias generally refers to a range of potential cognitive biases that can influence respondents in a such a manner that they do not provide accurate answers. This is always an area of concern in structured self-report survey approaches. The particular response bias referred to in the question seems to concern respondents providing answers that they believe are those the sponsor of the study might like to see. For example, if a utility EE program is being evaluated, respondents might believe that the utility would like to hear that they are not free-riders and thereby provide answers that minimize their likelihood of being identified as program free-riders. This type of bias can occur in self-report studies across a range of applications.

One way to address response bias is to structure a question bank where there are confirming and cross-validation studies. As a simple example, the survey can ask a question about whether the customer would have taken the actions even if the program had not been offered. Cross-validation questions might ask about the role of program incentives and information in their decision. If the customer states that these factors were important in their decision making, that answer may be judged as inconsistent with an answer indicating that they would have undertaken the same actions even if the program had not been offered. This approach makes it less likely that respondents can produce this biased result. They would have to consider their response to multiple questions in different parts of the survey.

A number of different types of response biases are of concern in every self-report survey. The survey professionals that design questions for self-report studies are generally aware of which forms of self-response bias are important threats to the overall validity of the study's findings and develop approaches for reducing these biases. This is also an argument for triangulation approaches where the process incorporates several different viewpoints (e.g., customers, trade allies, and implementers) and methods to enhance validity.

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