

Building Trust: THE ESSENTIALS OF SURVEY VALIDITY

ALUMNI

By : Mr. Mohd Shah Rezan bin Hamzah

Ensuring the rigour and quality of survey instruments is paramount in research, particularly during their development. Two fundamental processes that underpin this rigour are content validity and face validity, which represent the initial, yet critically significant, assessments in establishing an instrument's appropriateness and utility [1,2]. While distinct in their methodological approaches, both are indispensable for ensuring that a survey instrument accurately and comprehensively measures its intended construct. As part of my Master's degree project, I undertook these crucial steps, which ultimately contributed to the successful publication of my findings.

Content Validity: The Expert's Endorsement of Relevance

Content validity examines how well the items within a measurement instrument correspond to or reflect a specific domain [3]. This is not a statistically derived measure but rather a systematic, often expert-driven, evaluation. A questionnaire that neglects any salient dimension would possess diminished content validity, thereby providing an incomplete or skewed representation of the study objectives. Its significance is multifaceted. Primarily, content validity bolsters the credibility and scientific rigor of research findings.

When expert panels systematically review and endorse an instrument's coverage, they provide a strong theoretical and empirical basis for claiming that the questionnaire genuinely measures its intended construct. In my own Master's research, engaging a panel of leading experts for content validation was instrumental in refining the questionnaire's items and ensuring its comprehensive coverage of the study's core variables. This systematic approach helped minimize bias by preventing the omission of crucial elements and ensured my data truly reflected the study objectives.

Face Validity: The Initial Impression of Clarity and Comprehension

After the content validity was established, I conducted face validity to ensure the questionnaire's items were clear, comprehensible, and free of ambiguous statements in relation to the study objectives, from the perspective of non-experts or the target respondents [2,4]. The accuracy of the questionnaire's items relies on the raters' understanding and interpretation of them [2]. Despite its non-statistical nature, face validity holds considerable practical significance. Primarily, it plays a crucial role in respondent engagement and cooperation.

A questionnaire lacking face validity might appear irrelevant, confusing, or even nonsensical to participants, leading to decreased motivation, higher non-response rates, and potentially superficial or inaccurate responses [5]. Conversely, an instrument with strong face validity is perceived as relevant and legitimate, thereby fostering greater respondent buy-in and encouraging more thoughtful completion [6]. During the pilot testing phase of my Master's questionnaire, I specifically sought feedback on face validity from a small group of target respondents, whose insights were crucial for enhancing clarity and perceived comprehension before full-scale deployment.

Conclusion

The significance of performing both content and face validity cannot be overstated. Together, they contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Content validity ensures that the data collected is relevant and truly reflects the construct under investigation, while face validity enhances clarity, comprehensibility, and the overall interpretability of the instrument. Neglecting these fundamental steps can lead to the development of flawed instruments, yielding unreliable and invalid data, thereby undermining the entire research endeavor. Therefore, for anyone embarking on the development of survey instruments for their projects, prioritizing content and face validity is not merely a procedural step but a cornerstone for robust and meaningful research. Applying these methodologies in my Master's research, resulting in a peer-reviewed publication, confirmed their indispensable role in creating valid, high-quality research instruments [7]. Together, these two forms of validity establish the preliminary, yet critical, evidence for an instrument's appropriateness, paving the way for more rigorous empirical validations such as construct and criterion-related validity. Their meticulous consideration is paramount for developing questionnaires that yield meaningful and actionable data.

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About the author

Mr. Mohd Shah Rezan bin Hamzah, an alumnus of the Master's in Pharmacy Practice UiTM (2023) program, currently serves as a drug procurement pharmacist at the Kuala Langat District Health Office. In this role, he is responsible for purchasing drugs and supplies for the entire district.

