

Series Editor
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Measurement in Marketing

Operationalization of Latent Constructs

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Foreword

Truth may perhaps be veiled. But it may reveal itself. And if it does not reveal itself, it may be revealed by us. Removing the veil may not be easy. But once the naked truth stands revealed before our eyes, we have the power to see it, to distinguish it from falsehood, and to know that it is truth.

Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*
Routledge, London, 2004

It is a great honor for me to write this foreword at the request of my former doctoral student in management sciences at the University of Rennes I where I was teaching. It did not take me long after reading it to be sure that this book would become a landmark in marketing research methodology books and I immediately lamented that it did not exist when my students were trying to successfully complete their investigations into psychosocial issues related to consumer behavior. Indeed, at one time or another, they were confronted by this inevitable question – the operationalization of a construct – the object of study chosen for their research but also a psychological or social object of a latent nature, therefore rarely identifiable and not directly observable: what do we mean, for example, by consumer loyalty, exploratory behavior, willingness to pay, feelings of personal effectiveness, anxiety about death or even *akrasia* when spending?

To understand this, it is always necessary to use the theoretical construction of relatively complex concept structures and relational models. It is in this space, that of the implementation of these schemes and their intrinsic value, that Mrs Azza Frikha has elaborated this important work. She

chose to place major emphasis on reflective measurement models (the construct exists independently of the chosen indicators, the latter being only the reflection of it) which are the most represented in marketing literature, without ignoring the particularities of formative measurement models (the construct consists of a panel of several indicators). She did so step by step, knowing how to apply the pedagogical principle of reinforcement appropriately whenever the importance of the subject becomes clear. The rigor in the presentation of each principle is accompanied by a judicious choice: not to develop statistical tools, which already benefit from numerous manuals and dedicated software, but to recall their reading methods and limitations.

Further discussion is needed here regarding the links between the social sciences and consumer behavior. This field of marketing is a young discipline at the crossroads of the market and non-market economy within the social sciences. Much of its methodology stems from the latter, while also focusing on human behavior, but within the specific context of consumption. Explaining the psycho-sociological drivers of consumption requires seeking information from people by subjecting them to interviews, questionnaires, etc. It is therefore natural that the procedures developed and enriched by social psychologists (L. Guttman, L.L. Lazarsfeld, C.E. Osgood, etc.) are found in the very first line of methods adopted by researchers in consumer behavior. Since attitude is, according to current usage, a body posture and, by extension, a manifestation of opinion, perception or intention, the development of attitude scales has obviously acquired a major place in the toolkit used when creating reflective measurement models.

The reasons for this success are well known:

- the first is the belief that attitude, the antechamber of intention, reveals future behavior, hence the constant attempts to measure them better;
- the second is theoretical: all schools of social psychology have adopted it, hence the many definitions identified. Thus, behaviorists, realizing that an individual's responses within the "stimulus-response" scheme do not always lead to a constant learning outcome, look for a mediating concept to explain fluctuations in behavior: namely attitude as the *body's preparation to react* (Allport, Newcomb, Katz, etc.). For Lewinian field psychologists, the problem to be overcome is the opposite: since the psychological field is in constant evolution because the forces acting on it are multiple and changing, the attitude, taken this time as a *sustainable organization of the intervening*

processes, will explain the regularities observed in behaviors (Krech, Crutchfield). It is essentially this last perspective with which consumer behavior researchers are concerned, as marketing action requires a certain identified permanence of behavior.

This book published by Mrs Azza Frikha certainly appears to be a guide to good practices for students in marketing, but also more broadly in the social sciences (social psychology and sociology). But at the same time, it imposes itself on the reader through its scholarship, significantly informed by research, which makes it an original methodological manual for the university book market. Based on a review of the published literature, the author provides a scientific basis for the advice and recommendations she establishes regarding the measurement methodology. Mrs Azza Frikha makes this a reference text for any young novice student in research or for a doctoral student, confronted from the outset with scientific rigors and the constant questioning of the validity of their practices and knowledge.

Writing a book is always a personal investment that is justified by a particular context and need:

- the context is the use of scales in almost all research conducted in the field of consumer behavior. This observation is based on the design, by researchers, of structural models that link many latent variables to better understand detailed consumption behavior. This has been made possible by advances in computer science and statistics, for example in structural equation programs;
- the particular need responds to the necessity to draw up an inventory of the whole measurement system involved in the use of scales in these complex models and to propose a reading that allows reliable and valid scientific research.

This approach is all the more justified since many students, at the beginning of their research, take a utilitarian approach to statistical tools, which obscures any reflection on the ontological nature of the underlying construct. It is at this level that Mrs Azza Frikha's manual is of great value.

The economics of the book therefore follows the logic of the questions and activities that the student researcher must implement in order to advance their work on attitude scales. From this point of view, it is action-oriented.

After an initial chapter that determines the scope of the attitude scales and their measurement, the next chapters follow in perfect coherence:

- Is it necessary to build a new scale or can we adopt an existing one?
- How can we design a measurement system?
- How can we build a scale?
- What design should it be given?
- How can we purify it and measure its reliability?
- How can we ensure the validity of a scale?

Each chapter ends, for educational purposes, with one or more boxes that highlight the main elements to memorize and a knowledge test that allows the student to self-assess their absorption of the content of the chapter.

From this enriching and synthetic reading of a very technical subject, it seems that the procedure for implementing a scale is long, time-consuming and often iterative in its construction stages. It is often used by the conscientious researcher while always respecting the principles listed in this book. Ultimately, the researcher will be able to claim a scale is valid if it actually measures what it is supposed to measure, that is if it establishes a correspondence between the way in which the subject describes his or her attitude via the measurement scale and his or her manifest behavior. But can they be sure of this correspondence, even after technically checking its reliability and internal validity, since the obvious behavior is only an extrapolation of the respondent's verbal statements? The essential and fundamental question is therefore to question, once again, their real level of sincerity, great or small, when they engage in the investigation: any experimental subject can distort their words as well as their actions.

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Introduction

Scientific truth, according to the positivist mode of reflection¹, is achieved by making theoretical hypotheses, that is proposals built on the basis of rigorous reasoning, ideas organized according to an original scheme and then verified, validated either by experience in the experimental sciences or by field research in the social sciences. This is the structure of the scientific method defined as hypothetico-deductive. These hypothetical ideas are expressed in words or expressions that refer to concepts (or constructs) that are rarely directly observable or measurable (for example, in marketing: brand loyalty, satisfaction, impulse buying, price acceptability, well-being, etc.; in social psychology: altruism, attribution, conformism, deviance, etc.).

The quality of quantitative research, particularly when it attempts to investigate the causes of a phenomenon, depends on a set of factors such as the field of study, the design of the questioning, the nature and size of the sample, the method of administration, the measures selected, etc. Although these aspects are complementary and therefore interrelated, this book deals particularly with the specificities and methodological choices relating to measurement scales, which are very important and lead to a multitude of reflections, conditioning the very quality of investigations.

Indeed, the research is largely based on respondents' responses to questionnaires using evaluation tools (scales) that allow them to express

¹ Positivism is a philosophical system (conceived by Auguste Comte) that seeks to distinguish between knowledge resulting from experience and observation, considered as the only kind of universal (positive) value, and knowledge under the influence of metaphysics.