Researchers love to put their survey responses through elaborate steps of numerical processing, preferably via complex statistical models. It endows their work with an aura of technical sophistication that they believe impresses clients. Whether it improves the conclusions drawn is another question.

Actually, even the simplest numerical manipulations can introduce serious risks of misinterpreting results. Averaging data—a simple, nearly universal practice—makes good practical sense in analyzing quantitative data. But many of the projects I deal with use qualitative responses in terms of rating scales, either tracking trends or comparing competitors. To my dismay, many clients want to see the results reported in terms of “rating means.”

A mean is an index, a reductionist device to compress a set of data into a single number. Irrespective, some of the information is lost in the reduction process. Aside from the information loss inherent in any index, using the mean to reflect a set of scale ratings requires great faith in the universal validity of arithmetic—a faith that is misplaced in this instance.

Arithmetic works on real numbers. Abraham Lincoln supposedly once asked, “If you call a horse’s tail a leg, how many legs does a horse have?” He answered his own question, correctly: “Four. Calling the tail a leg doesn’t make it one.” Similarly, labeling the positions on a scale with numbers like “5, 4, 3, 2, 1” does not endow those positions with the properties of real numbers. Successive real numbers always differ by the same amount: one. All arithmetic processes are dependent on that fact, which does not apply to the value of scale ratings in most cases. Generally, the difference between the top rating and the one just below it is far more important than the difference between the bottom rating and the one just above it. Averaging the ratings treats them as equivalent differences.

Here are imaginary results, based on five-point rating scales for products A and B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Mean" 3.55 3.55

Presenting the results in terms of means indicates no difference between A and B.

DONATH / From page 7

Workers respond to brand message

- Acquisitions, mergers and spin-offs create identity crises that spur employer-branding efforts.
- Only about a fifth of respondents say they have metrics for measuring employer branding.

Just as customers and prospects will always have perceptions about a supplier whether it actively promotes a brand image or not, so, too, will employees have attitudes about their employers no matter how they’re ignored or fussed over. The trick is influencing those perceptions by word and deed.

What effects will the GE acquisition of Honeywell (née AlliedSignal), the anticipated quartering of AT&T, or many other changes to come on the corporate brand landscape have on employee perceptions of their job satisfaction, mission, place in their industries and commitments to their customers? What corrective actions will those companies take? We’ll see, and growing numbers of managers will be watching as recognition for the powerful internal benefit of branding spreads through corporate suites.

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- RCA’s Performax
- Sandoz’s Dynacirc
- Honda’s Freedax ATV
- OMC’s UnibSource
- Travelers’ Primorta
- Toshiba’s Teableight
- Isuzu’s Oasis & Hombre
- Taylor Made’s Swing-Ring
- Toshiba’s Equinox & Magnie
- GMC’s Yukon
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That wrong conclusion is due both to the index's loss-of-information feature and the inappropriate arithmetical process used. The averaging process assumes not only that the differences between successive positions are constant, but also that a reduction in low ratings offsets a similar increase in high ratings. In arithmetic, a double negative is equivalent to a positive, in real life (including marketing), that is usually not true. The increase in positive ratings is more valuable than a similar decrease in negative ratings.

Aside from its reliance on inappropriate arithmetic, the mean has a practical, conceptual flaw: it is an aggregate measure. Marketing depends on the decisions of individual households or business consumers. It is convenient for analysts and strategies to think of markets in terms of totals or segments, but these are post facto summaries, not operating realities. A market segment may be identified as a high-potential group, but the segment itself never buys anything; buying is done by the individual units in it. For that reason, disaggregated information, such as the incidence of high ratings, is a more valid type of information than aggregates. —Thomas T. Semon

WORLD ● Roma to N.Y.

Italian team to join Yanks deal

Italian soccer league leader AS Roma may soon join the Manchester United-NY Yankees business and marketing link-up to possibly boost its revenue from merchandise.

Franco Sensi, the president of the high-spending Roman club, says that negotiations with English and U.S. sport officials are in progress. "One can hardly imagine the results of such a link-up in terms of merchandising," Sensi says.

"At present, our revenue (from merchandising) ranges between EB 18 and 20 billion lire ($8.5 million to $9.5 million). That's nothing if compared with sales of English clubs.

"We are going toexploit this sector more and more." Sensi did not give details about terms of the possible link-up with the English soccer club and the U.S. baseball team. —The Associated Press

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San Francisco - Nichols Research, Inc
San Francisco - Concern - Nichols Research, Inc
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