



Item Sampling in Service Quality Assessment Surveys to Improve Response Rates and Reduce Respondent Burden: The LibQUAL+(R)-Lite Experiment

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Many libraries are engaged in collecting data on service quality perceptions and expectations from their users systematically both through locally developed surveys as well as through standardized survey protocols like LibQUAL+®. Survey protocols, and especially web surveys, have suffered from relatively low response rates due to perceived respondent burden. Some researchers have also suspected possible response bias as a result of low response rates.

Survey researchers often develop large pools of items about which they seek participants' views. As a general proposition, library users cannot reasonably be expected to respond to lengthy service quality assessment protocols when invited to participate to web based surveys. Especially with web surveys, response rates have historically been low and even a ten minute survey seems like a century to the participants.

To test whether a 'short' version of a survey results in higher response rates and whether it was completed in less time than the lengthier version of the survey, and whether it produces comparable results scores, we randomly presented two versions of the survey to survey respondents invited to participate to the web version of the survey. A survey method called "matrix sampling" was used (a) to collect data on all survey items (b) without requiring every participant to react to every survey question.

A series of randomized control trial experiments were set up so that each library presented a predefined proportion of the surveys to participants in the 'short' form. The long form of the LibQUAL+® survey includes the 22 core items that measure three dimensions: (a) affect of service, (b) information control, and (c) library as place. The short form, known as LibQUAL+® Lite, asks each participant to complete 8 core items. LibQUAL+® Lite is a survey methodology in which (a) all users answer a few, selected survey questions (i.e., 3 core items), but (b) the remaining survey questions (i.e., 5 core items randomly selected within dimensions) are answered ONLY by a randomly-selected subsample of the users. Every participant completes the same single Service Affect, single Information Control, and single Library as Place items, plus two of the remaining eight (i.e., 9 - the 1 core item completed by everyone) randomly-selected Service Affect items, two of the remaining seven (i.e., 8 - the 1 core item completed by everyone) randomly-selected Information Control, and one of the remaining four (i.e., 5 - the 1 core item completed by everyone) randomly-selected Library as Place items. Fixed randomization took place at determining the order of the dimension slots, and dynamic randomization took place at assigning the items in the dimension slots.

Preliminary analysis indicates that participation rates are higher, completion times are shorter, and that the results across the two administration protocols -- the short and the long versions -- are slightly different. Differences across (a) user groups, (b) disciplines, and (c) other demographic categories are explored for this paper. The matrix sampling procedure can be usefully applied with a variety of service quality assessments, including locally developed surveys involving numerous assessment items.

Keywords: LibQUAL+®, LibQUAL+® Lite experiment, Randomized-trial experiment, Matrix sampling, Response rates, Survey methodology, Web-based surveys