

PSYCHOMETRIC METHODS WITHIN THE HOSPITAL IMAGE LITERATURE

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While a body of empirical literature addressing Hospital Image is rapidly developing, the investigations conducted thus far demonstrate little cross-study agreement. These disparities may be the result of any number of largely uncontrollable factors (history, geographical differences, etc.). However, the confusion may also be partly due to certain aspects of the methodological tradition which has evolved within this portion of the health care literature. This paper will investigate the literature's departures from accepted psychometric development procedure.

The process of psychometric development may be divided into four steps: definition of the construct's domain (a statement of what is to be studied), item generation procedures (development of questions designed to tap the domain), a priori specification of dimensions (hypotheses concerning the cognitive factors which underlie the domain), and investigation of dimensionality (empirical assessment of the cognitive factors) (Peter and Churchill, 1986, pp. 3).

THE HOSPITAL PREFERENCE LITERATURE; METHODS

Domain

As is the case within many application areas, it has not been traditional for researchers within the health care area to specifically state the domains of their studies. However, one may still conclude that all six of the reviewed studies centered on large institutional entities concerned with physical health care. The mental constructs considered by these studies are more eclectic. Frequency counts of stated choice criteria and importance ratings of hospital attributes were the most common.

Item Generation

The dominant procedure for item generation has been the literature review: four of the investigations cite this approach. Three of the studies state that, in addition to the review, input was obtained from physicians; three studies sought consumer input.

A Priori Specification of Dimensions, And Dimensionality

Hypotheses concerning the nature of factors are a rarity in Marketing, and the Hospital Preference literature is no exception. Only one of the cited studies (Wolinsky and Kurz, 1984) presents a factor analysis of the results, indicating that the field of Hospital Preference is still in the "discovery of

factors" era. The one factor analysis yields the following factors: Quality, Knowledge of the Hospital, Recommendations and Cost/Location.

Conclusions Regarding Methods in the Hospital Image Literature

An exciting statement of concept studied would help to simplify application of published research by defining precisely what the results do and do not address. Careful exploratory procedures have not been part of the tradition in the hospital image literature. While several of the studies do obtain consumer or physician input, no study mentions the implementation of critical incident interviews, focus group interviews, or any other established exploratory research technique as part of the process of obtaining this input. Only one of the cited studies has made use of factor analysis, so this literature must still be thought of as in Kerlinger's (1973) "discovery of factors" stage, with the true nature of the factors still considered an unknown.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps it is simplest to view the evolution of the cited literature in three steps. First, Boscarino and Steiber (1982) and Hirsch and Peters (1982) established that certain aspects of the hospital itself (Quality, Reputation) influence the consumer's hospital selection. This finding was not so trivial as it may appear today—patients selecting their own hospitals is a recent phenomenon. Second, Scammon and Kennard (1983) and Okorafor (1983) provided some idea of what attributes might constitute "Quality" within the consumers mind. Third, Malhotra (1983) and Wolinsky and Kurz (1984) introduced sophisticated data analysis to the field.

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