

IDENTIFICATION ERRORS IN IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT RESEARCH: A THEORETICAL REVIEW OF QUESTION WORDING AND DESIGN

*Kenneth R. Bartkus, Department of Business Administration, Utah State University,
3510 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-3510, 435-797-3891, ken.bartkus@usu.edu*

*Stacey Hills, Department of Business Administration, Utah State University,
3510 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-3510, 435-797-8201, stacey.hills@usu.edu*

ABSTRACT

What does it mean if a finding is significant or that the ultimate statistical analytical techniques have been applied, if the data collection instrument generated invalid data at the outset? – Jacoby (1978)

Specifying the primary domain of a construct is the logical first step in developing a valid measurement instrument. In this regard, impression management has been identified as a set of interpersonal behaviors that are influenced by an individual's motives to achieve a desirable image and/or avoid an undesirable one. As such, the primary domain of impression management includes a relevant set of behaviors and their respective motives. With this foundation, scholars have developed a variety of impression management scales. Prior research evaluations and theoretical rationale reveal, however, that many of these scales contain identification errors, both in the wording and design of the questions. Specifically, the scales exhibit one or more of the following errors: (1) under-identification, resulting from an omission of motive, (2) misidentification, resulting from the measurement of ability rather than behavior and motive, (3) implied identification, resulting from the measurement of purportedly "unlikely" behaviors and an inferred reference to motive, and (4) confounded identification, resulting from the use of double-barreled questions. To date, a detailed analysis of these errors is still forthcoming. As such, this study examines these issues and provides theoretical clarification on the use of impression management scales.