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EVERYBODY LIES: BIG DATA, NEW DATA, AND WHAT THE INTERNET CAN TELL US ABOUT WHO WE REALLY ARE

Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, Dey Street Books, 2017, 352 pp. Available in hardcover, softcover, ebook, audiobook.

The world is changing. We're using data, yet distrusting data; we're acquiring products, yet acquiring services to avoid getting stuck with products. These changes are happening so fast that we're missing their significance.

One of the challenges with interviews and surveys is the risk that the person responding is not honest. Statistics provide us with tools to help deal with minor variations in responses and with applying a small number of samples to a large group. But until recently, statistics could not resolve the problem of respondents lying. That's what *Everybody Lies* discusses.

What subject do people lie about the most? Ignore the lies little children might tell before learning about telling the truth. Forget about the lies told to avoid hurting someone's feelings. Also, it's important to think about what someone might answer on a survey but act on differently when there's the perception that no one else is watching. Those questions are exactly what Stephens-Davidowitz had to focus on when developing the data behind the book *Everybody Lies*.

Let's accept the premise that it's difficult to get reliable answers on a survey from many different people—some folks just lie rather than tell the truth on a confidential survey. But if the premise is that people lie on surveys, how does one prove that lying has occurred? Consider this classic logic problem: "I'm telling you the truth: I always lie." Is the speaker telling the truth this one time or are they lying? Is the statement true or false? It's an interesting problem, and trying to prove a negative is difficult.

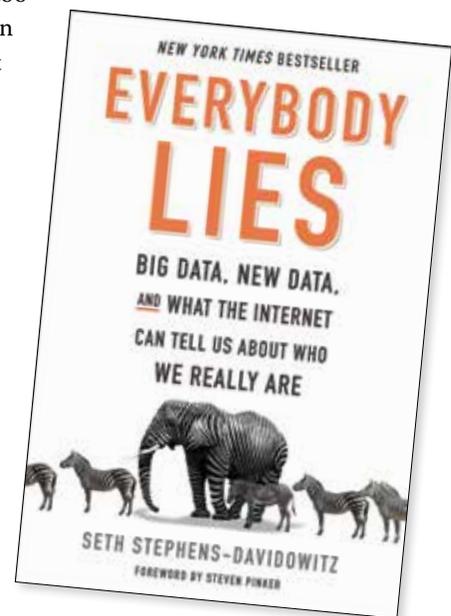
Throughout the book, Stephens-Davidowitz uses differences between surveys and publicly available data to prove that lying has occurred. The public source is Google search hits and site visits. While Google isn't the only search engine, it has a large user

base and its recordkeeping (of site visits, hits, and time) provides some interesting data.

Personally, I didn't like the particular subject the author chose to discuss—it's too easy. I don't find much value in knowing that people lie about this subject when speaking in public (yes, there are some honest people regardless of the subject). But the concept of using Google statistics to determine if people are likely to lie on a survey certainly is helpful and can provide insights on better questions to ask or alternate ways to conduct a survey.

Everybody Lies is interesting and can provide some researchers with a better understanding of the believability of survey-based results. It can offer them some good thoughts about alternate survey methods to avoid traps due to bad data. If you're interested in research and gaining a better understanding of your customers using a survey, consider reading *Everybody Lies*.

And what is the subject the author uses to prove that everybody lies? Sex, of course. 💰



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