Reviewer's report

Title: Using conjoint analysis to develop a system to score research engagement actions by health decision makers

Version: 2 Date: 3 February 2015

Reviewer: Bridie Evans

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

Overall comments

1. The background and methods sections are confusing.
2. The justification for research engagement and for this paper are not made strongly enough. Terminology is too varied causing confusion for the reader.
3. The process for developing the attributes is not clearly described.
4. Why was a Delphi approach not considered?
5. Italics are used during the text for words relating to research engagement (e.g. introduction, 3rd para). What is the reason they are in italics? The effect for this reader was confusing.

Introduction

1. A definition of research engagement is needed. Research engagement is used in other contexts to mean raising awareness of research, informing people about individual studies and findings and generating interest and dialogue between the public and research community. There needs to be a clearer explanation of research engagement in this context and how it differs from other common understandings of the phrase.

2. This section also needs a clearer and stronger justification of research engagement and argument for the piece of work reported in this paper.

3. The introduction would benefit from subheadings in order to give it structure and guide the reader e.g. separate section about SAGE, aim of this paper e.t.c. At present, information about SAGE is mixed up with the rationale for research engagement, for example. This makes it difficult for the reader to understand the wider purpose and the specific detail of the project reported in this paper.

4. 4th para – ‘research engagement actions by policy makers are the bridge...’ Please expand and explain this more fully. This paragraph starts to explain why research engagement is needed but does not do this fully. Perhaps use some of the information in paragraph 7 about the SPIRIT Action Framework?
5. 6th para, line 6 – aim of CIPHER is unclear. Should it read ... ‘testing new strategies to increase use of research evidence in policy...’ Also, what aspect of research evidence in policy – in making it, in the processes which affect policy...? Please clarify.

6. 9th para, line 8 – justification of measuring research engagement needs to be given higher up in the introduction. This sentence also needs to explain the purpose and benefits of the approach i.e. ...in order to....

7. 11th and 12th para – these are very confusing. This information overlaps with the method. Is this the rationale for the scoring tool? Is this the rationale for the method? Please structure and clarify.

Methods

8. The method is difficult to follow because the terms used are confusing. It is not clear what is an ‘attribute’, a ‘level’, an ‘action’, a ‘domain’, a ‘profile’. These need to be clearly defined (perhaps in a box?) and used consistently. As a result of the way the terms were used, the sections under the subheading Procedure were not clear enough to follow.

Discussion

9. Please consider structuring the discussion to make it easier to follow. For example, sections could cover: Summary of findings; implications for practice; implications for future research

10. 1st para line 3 - Terminology remains confusing here. For example, what is ‘research engagement action attributes’?

11. 1st para line 6 - Is the previous qualitative research presented in the introduction? If not, it should be introduced in the first part of the paper.

12. 3rd para – Other evidence suggests policy makers do not act as they report that they wish to or did (see Evans et al., 2013, ref 23). Please reflect on this also in this paragraph.

13. 6th para, line 4 – what is ‘less intensive research’? The point being made here is not clear.

14. 8th para, line 7 – what is ‘linkage and exchange mechanisms’?

15. The paper states SAGE can be used to evaluate programmes to improve engagement with research. Please develop the implications of this opportunity.

16. 9th para, line 5 – the glossary of terms was not mentioned in the method. If part of the intervention, it needs introducing earlier.

Conclusion

17. This states that the scoring system will allow organisations to identify
strategies, tools and programmes to improve research engagement. This opportunity has not been developed clearly and fully presented earlier in the paper, leaving the reader feeling the conclusion is not underpinned by the content of the paper.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. Introduction 4th para, line 7 – ...are primarily self-reported.... add ed

- Discretionary Revisions

1. In questions relating to quality in SAGE, please clarify if this is methodological or reporting quality and consider the implications.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'