

RESEARCH METHOD

67 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are survey instruments designed for collecting self-report information from people about their characteristics, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, behaviors, or attitudes, typically in written form.

Questionnaires are one of the primary tools used to collect survey information, the other being interviews.

Questionnaires are simple to produce and administer, but careful attention should be paid to question wording and response options, sequencing, length, layout, and design. Software and online services are excellent resources for efficient and effective questionnaire construction and distribution, but are no substitute for good judgment in wording and design. In fact, among several factors in securing a good response rate are the appearance, clarity, instructions, arrangement, design and layout of questionnaires.¹

The way a question is constructed will play a key role in the type of response and analysis. For example, open-ended questions provide opportunity for depth of response, whereas closed-ended questions are easier to numerically analyze and communicate. Asking participants to rank order their choices or to divide a constant sum (for example, 100) among a set number of options, will give a better indication of preferences than a single checked response. To maintain question neutrality while also gaining an indication of strength of response, Likert scale questions are highly recommended. For example, rather than asking if participants merely agree with a statement or not, providing a five-point range from strongly disagree to strongly agree will give them the option of scaling their responses along a continuum of choices to indicate the strength of their agreement, or disagreement.

Questionnaires may be used in isolation, but are more commonly triangulated with other methods such as observation, which supplement the data with personal insights that may not be evident in written responses, and may verify or challenge self-reported behaviors.² Questionnaires can be used as an integral component of research in various phases of research for different purposes, for example, imbedded in a journal as part of a diary study, or as a self-reporting element within product evaluation.

1. Robson, Colin. *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

2. Questionnaires are efficient tools for collecting large quantities of data, but are subject to the weaknesses of self-reporting, and should therefore be complemented with other methods.

"As Agnew and Pyke (1982) put it, 'On a questionnaire, we only have to move the pencil a few inches to shift our scores from being a bigot to being a humanitarian...'"
From:

Robson, Colin. *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002: 310.

Further Reading

Bradburn, Norman, Seymour Sudman, and Brian Wansink. *Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design—For Market Research, Political Polls, and Social and Health Questionnaires* (Research Methods for the Social Sciences). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Behavioral
Attitudinal

Quantitative
Qualitative

Innovative
Adapted
Traditional

Exploratory
Generative
Evaluative

Participatory
Observational
Self reporting
Expert review
Design process