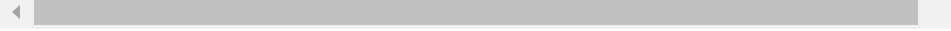




EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT

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Survey vs questionnaire: the differences for market research

12 min read

If you're looking to gain valuable insight into markets, businesses, customer perceptions and general feelings towards events or products at scale, look no further than surveys and questionnaires. In this article, we'll cover the differences between the two terms and how to use them to best effect.

People and businesses use and complete surveys and questionnaires all the time.

Whether it's to plan marketing campaigns or identify areas of opportunity, surveys and questionnaires enable us to gain valuable insight into markets, businesses, customer perceptions and sentiment and much more at scale.

But more often than not, people and businesses use the terms survey and questionnaire interchangeably — when in reality, they are two different disciplines.

Especially when it comes to [market research](#).

Now, it's easy to see why: both ask questions and aim to gather useful insights.

However, there are several differences between the two, and the method you decide to use is ultimately determined by the information you are

trying to gather. So, what are the differences?

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What is a questionnaire?

A [questionnaire](#) uses a set of questions to gain answers from a set of respondents. Questionnaires are often used to understand information like customer feedback and usually include a series of closed (yes/no) questions, with the occasional open-ended question to gain qualitative insights.

You can also use a questionnaire to gather information on specific issues like customer preferences and behaviors. You can conduct questionnaires over the phone, online or in-person.

What is a survey?

A [survey](#) can be a more in-depth form of data collection to gather data from a specific target audience and survey respondents. It's also more complex than a questionnaire.

Researchers can use the data gathered from a survey for statistical analysis to evaluate the data and responses, and generate conclusions from the responses to the survey questions.

Now, while you can also use a questionnaire in a research project to gather information — and it still collects high-quality data — surveys have several layers to consider, including:

- + The design of the survey
- + What type of sampling to use to create an effective survey
- + The method of data collection
- + Aggregation of data
- + How and what method you'll apply to the data analysis to understand the results glean actionable insights.

Ultimately, while a questionnaire is a list of questions to gather certain information, a survey can help researchers understand the bigger picture of a topic or issue to drive business action. That is the key difference.

Survey vs questionnaire examples

Now that you understand the basics, how can we differentiate the two further? Here are few examples to give you a better understanding of what we mean:

A questionnaire is a logical list of questions that a business uses to gather specific information from many respondents (not necessarily a certain group) — we know that — but how might you use it in a business context?

For example, you might use a questionnaire to gather customer information when they need to make a payment (name, bank details etc), or you might use one to accept donations. If you're building a brand-new marketing campaign, you might send out a questionnaire to capture new prospect names and then send out a survey — once they become customers — to determine their level of satisfaction or loyalty.

Here's another example — doctors and nurses use questionnaires when gathering medical histories of patients. They would then use a survey to understand patient satisfaction and to determine how those patients feel about the standard of care.

To summarize: you use questionnaires to capture specific information about an individual.

So what if you wanted to use questionnaires for your recruitment process? Well, a typical recruitment questionnaire follows a logical step-by-step approach to get a 'feel' for a candidate — their aims and objectives, experience, what they can bring to the job and so on. It's very much like an interview, just far less personal.

But if you wanted to understand the thoughts and feelings about your interview process as a whole, you could design a survey for candidates (and successful hires) to understand trends, including collecting personal accounts, which your hiring team can use in the future.

You could also create surveys for your own hiring team to fill out and use their responses to uncover any gaps in your process.

Remember: the main difference between a questionnaire and a survey is that a questionnaire is often used to get information from an individual, while a survey is a method of data collection targeted at a specific group.

What data can you collect using surveys?

Researchers use surveys to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Note — qualitative surveys use open-ended questions or video response options to produce long-form written or typed responses.

The main data types you'll gather from surveys are:

Qualitative data

Qualitative data is most typically gathered in the form of longer, more descriptive answers and responses from your target audience. It looks at the “Why” behind the “What”.

Qualitative data is gathered when you need information that's difficult to count or measured statistically, or when you need specific insights.

The data is usually gathered through the use of open-ended questions, but there are plenty of other qualitative methods beyond open-ends in surveys, such as:

Ethnographic research

Ethnography is the study of direct observation of users in their natural environment. The objective of this type of research is to gain insights into how users normally interact. Methods include direct observation, diary studies, video recordings and much more.

Moderated focus groups

[Focus groups](#) allow researchers to generate guided discussion around topics of choice. The moderator starts the discussion, but allows

respondents (or participants) to construct the conversation, providing real-time insight. The moderator's role is to ensure the conversation stays on track and is relevant.

Moderated discussions

Similar to focus groups, discussion boards are useful for collecting dynamic data. Much like an online forum, researchers can prompt a topic for discussion. It's a much more interactive way to generate qualitative data, and allows researchers to flex their level of input.

Video responses

Another great way to acquire good qualitative research is through video feedback. As our lives become increasingly digital and more brands and businesses move online, researchers need a way to capture qualitative feedback and at scale. Through video responses provided in surveys, researchers get more authentic, natural and insightful feedback from respondents.

Quantitative data

Quantitative data is more statistical data when research is based on numerical data. It's more concerned with the "What".

This type of data is used to understand "hard" facts. For example, it's often used to assess a content strategy when you want to understand or find trends in consumer behavior, or how they're interacting with your content.

Within the two camps of quantitative and qualitative data, there are several other types of research data that can be collected:

Nominal

Nominal data is information that's classified into specific categories, but you can't order it or measure it in any meaningful way for data analysis.

For example, data that highlights someone's favorite item of clothing — with the categories being t-shirts, jeans, shorts, etc.

Ordinal

Ordinal data is detailed data in which data values follow a natural order. It's commonly used in surveys and questionnaires to uncover preferences or agreement levels towards certain statements.

The likert scale is an example of ordinal data in which a survey may ask a respondent to choose between "Strongly Agree", "Agree" etc. You can use ordinal data with advanced analysis tools like hypothesis testing.

Discrete

Discrete data is data that can only take particular values, but doesn't necessarily use whole numbers. A prime example of discrete data is the amount of profit a business makes in a given month.

Continuous

Continuous data is a type of numerical data that refers to the unspecified number of possible measurements (or points) between two realistic variables. Continuous data, as such, is often referred to as 'infinite' data. Generally, continuous data is measured using a scale. Typical examples of continuous data are temperature, distance or weight. Due to the infinite nature of continuous data, it can change over time.

Research methods for surveys and questionnaires

As well as having different data types, surveys and questionnaires also use several research methods to gather information — these include:

Qualitative research

[Qualitative research](#) is the process of obtaining non-numerical data for use in research and decision making.

Qualitative research usually involves in-depth questioning of respondents to gather detailed survey data. For example, a researcher might carry out

interviews, focus groups and/or one-to-one discussions to capture data.

Quantitative research

Quantitative research is about gathering statistical (numerical) data that researchers can use to uncover trends that guide decision making and future planning. For example, customer satisfaction surveys (CSATs) or Net Promoter Score (NPS) surveys are both examples of quantitative research.

Descriptive research

Descriptive research helps researchers to understand the characteristics of a population, situation, or phenomenon that they are studying. It's more concerned with questions that answer the who, what, where and when, rather than the why.

Analytical research

Analytical research helps researchers to understand why certain things happen and the order in which they happened. They can then apply critical thinking to get a grip on the situation. This type of research can be extremely useful for research used to lead strategic decision making.

Applied research

Applied research is a type of examination that focuses on finding practical solutions to solve real-life problems. For example, challenges in the workplace or improving employee productivity.

Exploratory research

Exploratory research uses a range of quantitative and qualitative methods to look into a topic that hasn't already been widely investigated.

Questionnaire survey method

Ultimately, while surveys and questionnaires are often used interchangeably, for anyone looking for in-depth insights to guide decisions or improve processes, surveys are far superior.

The fact is, surveys offer far more opportunities to collect and analyze data at scale to uncover critical, business-changing insights. And with the right tools, you can create high-quality surveys that attract and engage target audiences, ensuring you get the responses you need to make changes and improve experiences.

And [Qualtrics CoreXM](#) is exactly what you need to do so.

With Qualtrics CoreXM, you can empower everyone in your organization to carry out research — at scale — and get insights faster than ever before.

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And with machine learning and AI-powered analysis, you can turn everyday data into a goldmine and use our built-in tool for assessing survey methodology to ensure you get high-quality responses.

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