

Course Name- B.A. (Hons.) Economics

Paper Name – Data Analysis

Paper No. : Skill Enhancement Course (SEC)

Module No. 3

Module Title
Methods of collecting Primary Data

Academic Script

Hello dear students, welcome to the course Data Analysis. Topic for today's discussion is- 'Method of Collecting Primary Data'.

Objectives of the Module:

The main objectives of the module are:

1. To summarize the notions of primary and secondary data.
2. To discuss various methods of collecting primary data.
3. To analyse merits and demerits of methods of primary data collection.

Introduction: Data can be collected either from the primary sources or from the secondary sources. Accordingly, the data acquired through primary sources is known as primary data and data obtained from secondary sources is termed as secondary data. Primary data is usually collected by the person himself, who required it, while secondary data is collected by someone else and is made available to others for the use. Like data collected by National Sample Survey Organisation i.e. NSSO on various economic variable e.g. employment-unemployment, debt, land use survey etc. is treated as secondary data. On the other hand, if someone wants to study the pattern of consumption of durables among landless households in Punjab region then the data collected for this analysis will be treated as primary data for that person. Further, information can be collected either for whole population or for the particular group, former is concerned with the census approach while later is associated with the sampling approach of data collection. There are various methods through which primary data can be collected namely, direct personal interviews, indirect oral interviews, information from correspondents, mailed questionnaire method and schedules sent through enumerators. In this context, present module will elaborate the methods of primary data collection along with their advantages and disadvantages.

Methods of Collecting Primary Data

Direct Personal Interviews

As the name suggests, in direct personal interviews, there is a face to face meeting between the interviewer and interviewee. The person from whom we seek to collect the information is known as informant or respondent. So, the direct personal interviews method requires the investigator to visit the field in-person. Scope of such types of interviews is limited to small scale and hence this method is suitable for intensive studies only. On the other hand, in case

of extensive studies (where the area of study is wide) this method proves to be very expensive. Further, the data or information acquired through this method is novel and of good quality.

Advantages: Merits or advantages of this method are –

1. Information acquired through this method is more trustworthy and precise. Moreover, interviewer can countercheck the suspicious information by the cross queries.
2. In intensive studies (where money and time are not the constraints), we can rely on the direct personal interviews as it provides us with more reliable information.
3. Supplementary information can also be obtained from the respondents by this method, which may be further utilised for interpretation of the results.
4. On the basis of temperament of the respondent, interviewer can sandwich the sensitive questions among other queries and can shuffle the questions according to the situation.
5. Inconvenience and misconception caused by communication gap can be avoided under this method. Because the interviewer can communicate the respondent either in local language or as per the educational status of the informant.

Disadvantages: Limitations of this method of primary data collection are –

1. This approach is suitable for intensive sort of studies only, because in case of extensive studies (with wider coverage) this method is much expensive.
2. This method requires more money, more time and more manpower.
3. Due to personal meeting with the informants, expectations of personal prejudices and biases are more.
4. Major problem with this approach is that the success of interview lies on the intelligence, skill, tact, insight, etc. of the interviewer. It simply implies that if investigator is not trained one then he may not be able to acquire the satisfactory information from the informant.

Telephonic Interviews

In the direct personal interview method, investigator has to meet the respondent personally for collecting the information, while under telephonic interviews, investigator need not to meet the respondent face to face. Investigator can conduct the interview session over a phone call. Generally this approach is followed by the television and radio programmes and sometimes some of the branded showrooms/outlets call their customers to furnish information related to their product on the phone calls. Also we receive messages or emails for feedback of the product; all this is related to the collection of primary data through the telephonic interviews method.

Major advantage of this method is that it is cheaper method of collecting the data. Besides this positive point, this approach too faces the criticism on the aspects as –

1. It is not necessary that every person own the phone, thus this method is limited to the phone users only.

2. Another limitation of this method is, very concrete, descriptive and few questions can be asked to the informants.
3. The information obtained through telephonic interviews is not much reliable.
4. Likelihood of occurrence of serious errors of communication are more in this approach to primary data collection.

Indirect Oral Interviews

Indirect Oral Interviews are conducted when in-person interviews are not possible or the person is not interested in supplying the required information or chances of unreliability in the data. Like, for collecting the data on drug addictions, respondents may hide the right information. So, in such cases relevant information or data can be obtained from friends, relatives and neighbours of the concerned person through the indirect oral interactions. Under this approach, data is collected by enumerators by asking the set of questions related to the query. The persons (i.e. friends, relatives and neighbours) who furnish the relevant information are treated as witnesses or informants and their responses are properly recorded. Generally, this approach of data collection is employed by the state or central government authorities.

Advantages

1. Due to the in-person meetings with the informants, enumerators can obtain the accurate information by cross queries.
2. This approach involves lesser monetary as well as time resources for collecting the data.
3. One major positive point of this method is, for conducting the effective survey, expert suggestions can be considered.

Disadvantages

1. Since the information is furnished by another person, so chances of contamination of data and prejudice are more.
2. If the selected witnesses or informants are erroneous then it will lead to biased outcomes and in turn analysis of the problem in hand will be adversely affected.

Information from the Correspondents

Under this approach to primary data collection, study area is divided into different segments or regions and then data is collected from these segments by the local agents also known as correspondents. Correspondents or agencies obtain the data in their own ways. After this, collected information is transmitted to the central office (on the periodical basis), where data is further processed. This method is useful for the newspapers, magazines, periodicals etc. and some of the government departments also utilised this method for collecting the data at regular intervals. Some of the examples highlighting the use of this method for collecting primary data are crop estimates, vital statistics, information on economic trends, share markets, accidents, riots etc.

Advantages

1. It is one of the economical and cheapest ways of collecting primary data.
2. This method is suitable for extensive studies.
3. Time required for collecting the information by this method is lesser.

Disadvantages

1. This approach does not ensure the accurate information furnished by the correspondents.
2. This approach may either under-estimates or over-estimates the factual information.

Mailed Questionnaire Method

As per this approach, a questionnaire is being prepared at the initial stage related to the research problem. Generally, questionnaire involves the set of queries or questions relevant to the survey and a space is also provided to write down the answers. After preparing the questionnaire, it is mailed or post to the informants. Respondent has to revert the questionnaire within a fixed time determined by the investigator. An effective questionnaire must have a covering letter including the purpose of survey, meaning of terms and concepts used in questionnaire and statement mentioning the secrecy of information furnished by the informant. Generally, for collecting the information speedily, investigators bear the expenses of return postage by attaching the stamped envelopes with the questionnaire. This approach is useful for researchers, private individuals, government and non government agencies. Since the mode of communication among researcher and informant is questionnaire only, thus, utmost care should be given while framing it. Questions should be designed in such a manner that they are apparent and non-offending.

Advantages

1. This is an economical approach for data collection as it saves money, time and manpower.
2. If the study area of the research problem is large, then this method is more suitable.
3. Information furnished by this method is considered as more accurate as it is free from the personal biases of the investigator.

Disadvantages

1. This method is limited to educated group only i.e. illiterate persons would not be able to furnish the information by this method.
2. Major flaw of this approach of data collection is risk of greater degree of non-response, hazy and partial responses.
3. Frequently it happens that respondents hide the accurate data, thus the information obtained by this method faces the greater risk of reliability.
4. Through this approach, investigator can't collect the supplementary information, which is useful in cross verifying the data given by the informants.

Schedules sent through Enumerators

This method is similar to the previous method, the only difference is of questionnaire and schedule. Questionnaire is concerned with the set of queries which are posted to the respondent and he/she will return it after filling it. On the other hand, schedules are questionnaires, which are filled up by the enumerators himself. Enumerators visits the informants personally and collect the relevant information and then record it on the questionnaire. This method overcomes the limitations of the previous method of collecting primary data. Further, giant business organisations, PSUs (Public Sector Units), research agencies such as NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation), CSO (Central Statistical Office), NCAER (National Council of Applied Economic Research), in government funded projects etc. this method is employed for collecting the information.

Advantages

1. Enumerators can satisfy the queries of respondents related to the purpose of survey, which will further lead to acquisition of correct information from the respondents.
2. Information obtained by this method is accurate and reliable.
3. Useful for any kind of respondent i.e. literate as well as illiterate.
4. Suitable for intensive as well as extensive studies.

Disadvantages

1. This method is too much costly, as it involves the fairly high remunerations for the enumerators.
2. More time is required for collecting the data by this method.
3. Lack of uniformity in collection of data by different enumerators.
4. Possibility of biases is also present in this method.
5. Success of this method of data collection largely depends on the structure of questions in the questionnaire.

Conclusion: To sum up the topic, it can be stated that there are various ways of collecting the primary data like direct interviews, indirect interviews which can take place either on telephone or via questionnaire or schedule etc. In some sensitive types of research problems primary data can be even collected from the friends, relatives and neighbours of the sampled person. Sensitive problems may include the use of drugs, intoxicants, corruption etc. In all the discussed methods of obtaining the primary data, the success or accuracy of collected information entirely depends on the structure of questionnaire and skills and intelligence of investigator/ enumerator with which he/she asks the queries to the informant. Among all the discussed methods, direct personal interviews, telephonic interviews and indirect oral interviews methods are useful for conducting the intensive studies, while information from correspondents and mailed questionnaire methods are suitable for the extensive studies.

This is all about today's lecture, thanks a lot for watching us.