

Questionnaire Design

Meaning of Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a very commonly used method of collecting primary data. It is kind of research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. These questions relate to the problem of inquiry directly or indirectly. Questionnaires can be thought of as a kind of written interview. They can be carried out face to face, by telephone, computer or post.

Questionnaires provide a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people.

Data can be collected relatively quickly because the researcher would not need to be present when the questionnaires were completed. This is useful for large populations when interviews would be impractical.

Types of Questionnaire

The questionnaire can be of following types:

1. Computer Questionnaire

Respondents are asked to answer the questionnaire which is sent by mail. The advantages of the computer questionnaires include their inexpensive price, time-efficiency, and respondents do not feel pressured, therefore can answer when they have time, giving more accurate answers. However, the main shortcoming of the mail questionnaires is that sometimes respondents do not bother answering them and they can just ignore the questionnaire.

2. Telephone Questionnaire

Researcher may choose to call potential respondents with the aim of getting them to answer the questionnaire. The advantage of the telephone questionnaire is that, it can be completed during the short amount of time. The main disadvantage of the phone questionnaire is that it is expensive most of the time. Moreover, most people do not feel comfortable to answer many

questions asked through the phone and it is difficult to get sample group to answer questionnaire over the phone.

3. In-house survey

This type of questionnaire involves the researcher visiting respondents in their houses or workplaces. The advantage of in-house survey is that more focus towards the questions can be gained from respondents. However, in-house surveys also have a range of disadvantages which include being time consuming, more expensive and respondents may not wish to have the researcher in their houses or workplaces for various reasons.

4. Mail Questionnaire

These sorts of questionnaires involve the researcher to send the questionnaire list to respondents through post, often attaching pre-paid envelope. Mail questionnaires have an advantage of providing more accurate answer, because respondents can answer the questionnaire in their spare time. The disadvantages associated with mail questionnaires include them being expensive, time consuming and sometimes they end up in the bin put by respondents.

5. Open Question Questionnaires

Open questions differ from other types of questions used in questionnaires in a way that open questions may produce unexpected results, which can make the research more original and valuable. However, it is difficult to analyze the results of the findings when the data is obtained through the questionnaire with open questions.

6. Multiple Choice Questions

Respondents are offered a set of answers they have to choose from. The downside of questionnaire with multiple choice questions is that, if there are too many answers to choose from, it makes the questionnaire, confusing and boring, and discourages the respondent to answer the questionnaire.

7. Dichotomous Questions

This type of questions gives two options to respondents – yes or no, to choose from. It is the easiest form of questionnaire for the respondent in terms of responding it.

8. Scaling Questions

Also referred to as ranking questions, they present an option for respondents to rank the available answers to the questions on the scale of given range of values (for example from 1 to 10).

Questionnaire Design Procedure

1. Decide the information required:

The first step is to decide 'what are the things one needs to know from the respondent in order to meet the survey's objectives?' These, as has been indicated in the opening chapter of this textbook, should appear in the research brief and the research proposal.

2. Define the target respondents:

At the outset, the researcher must define the population about which he/she wishes to generalize from the sample data to be collected. For example, in marketing research, researchers often have to decide whether they should cover only existing users of the generic product type or whether to also include non-users.

3. Choose the method(s) of reaching your target respondents:

This step is concerned with decision on the method used to conduct the survey i.e. personal interview, depth interview, telephone, mail, computer, etc. This decision on method to be used will have a bearing on the type of questionnaire to be designed.

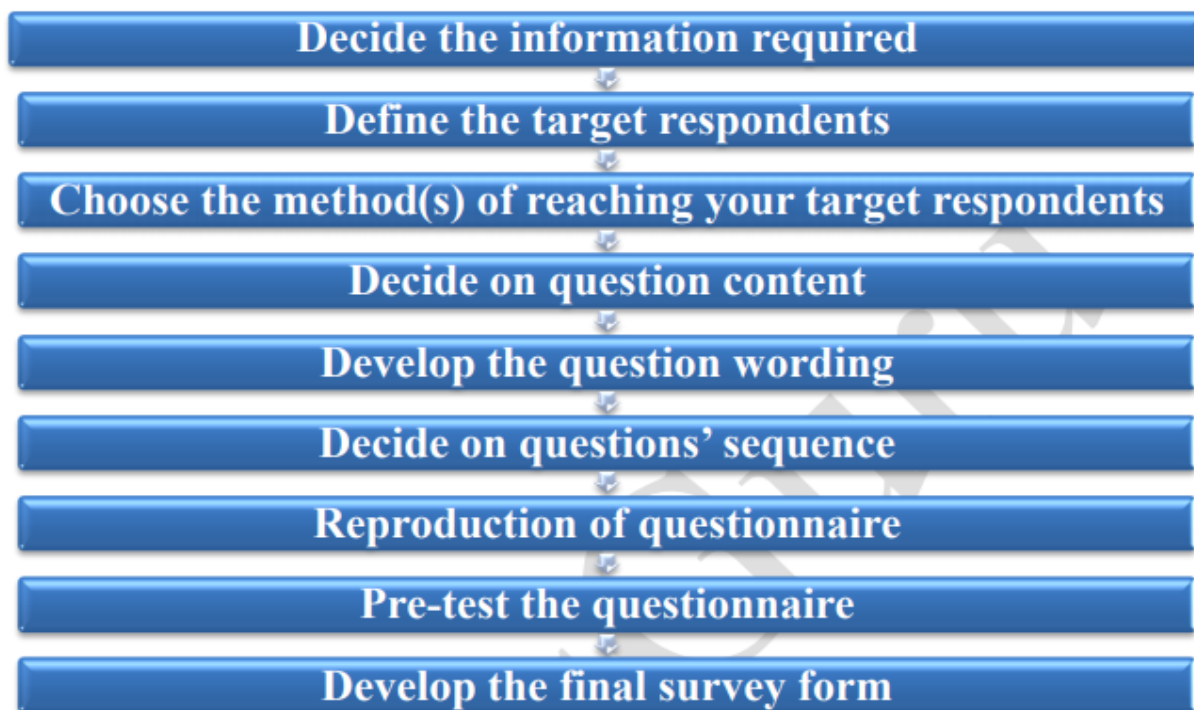
4. Decide on question content:

This step initiates the task of framing specific questions which would yield the data required for study. Researchers must always be prepared to ask, "Is this question really needed?" The temptation to include questions without critically evaluating their contribution towards the achievement of the research objectives, as they are specified in the research proposal, is

surprisingly strong. No question should be included unless the data it gives rise to is directly of use in testing one or more of the hypotheses established during the research design.

5. Develop the question wording:

This stage is concerned with the phrasing of each question. The researcher needs to use utmost caution in framing the question since a poorly framed question will either lead to a wrong response or result in refusal to answer. While wording a question, use simple words, avoid technical jargon, avoid using ambiguous questions and avoid biased wording.



6. Decide on questions' sequence:

At this step, the researcher must decide the sequence in which the questions are to be asked. The opening questions are crucial in establishing respondent's involvement and rapport, and therefore, these questions must be interesting, non-threatening and easy. Usually, the open-ended questions which ask respondents for their opinions are considered as good opening questions, because people like to express their opinions.

7. Reproduction of Questionnaire:

Here, we talk about the appearance of the questionnaire, i.e. the quality of paper on which the questionnaire is either written or printed. In case, the questionnaire is reproduced on a poor-quality paper; then the respondent might feel the research is unimportant due to which the quality of response gets adversely affected. Thus, it is recommended to reproduce the questionnaire on a good-quality paper having a professional appearance. In case, the questionnaire has several pages, then it should be presented in the form of a booklet rather than the sheets clipped or stapled together.

8. Pre-test the questionnaire:

Pretesting means testing the questionnaires on a few selected respondents or a small sample of actual respondents with a purpose of improving the questionnaire by identifying and eliminating the potential problems. All the aspects of the questionnaire must be tested such as question content, structure, wording, sequence, form and layout, instructions, and question difficulty. The researcher must ensure that the respondents in the pretest should be similar to those who are to be finally surveyed.

9. Develop the final survey form:

It means designed questionnaire will be administered among the selected sample respondents to the study.

Thus, the questionnaire design is a multistage process that requires the researcher's attention to many details.

Precautions in Preparation of Questionnaire

Although survey questionnaires can be a relatively simple way to obtain market research data, a poorly designed questionnaire can lead to wasted time and effort, useless data and frustrated respondents. The tips that follow can help to ensure that your market research questionnaire is well designed.

1. Keep it short and simple

A lengthy questionnaire is less likely to be completed and returned. It's important to establish clear goals for your market research project and to avoid including questions that do not contribute to the achievement of this goal.

It is also important to avoid using an overly complex structure with the design of your questionnaire, especially if it is being administered on paper.

2. Keep it clean and visually appealing

Respondents will be more receptive to a questionnaire that they feel can be completed quickly and easily.

Consider the following design elements before finalizing the look of your research instrument:

- **Text:** Choose a font style that is clearly legible, and make sure the font size is large enough for most of your respondents to read. If you choose to use colored text, make sure the contrast on the paper or screen is adequate.
- **Paragraphs:** Long paragraphs can be daunting to readers. Whenever possible, keep your blocks of text to a handful of lines.
- **White space:** The content of your questionnaire needs room to breathe. Don't make margins too small and ensure that there is adequate space between questions and sections.

3. Keep questions brief and easy to understand

Brief questions that use simple language minimize the chances that your questions will be misunderstood, making your survey results more useful.

Choose the simplest words with the right meaning when writing the questions for your questionnaire. Simple language is easy to read and comprehend, making the completion of your questionnaire less taxing for all respondents. The goal is to extract valuable information from your respondents, not impress them with poetic language.

4. Use open-ended questions appropriately

Open-ended questions allow respondents to answer freely using their own words. Closed-ended questions can be answered using a simple piece of information, such as a 'yes' or 'no' answer or a selection from multiple choices.

5. Avoid using leading questions

A leading question is one in which the answer is suggested within the question itself. These questions can make the respondent feel compelled to answer in a particular way, which can be off-putting to the respondent and skew the survey results. Some examples of leading questions are below:

- 'You like eating at restaurant X, don't you?'
- 'Why do you like eating at restaurant X more than restaurant Y?'

6. Avoid using ambiguous questions

Ambiguous questions use words that do not have fixed definitions and are therefore open to a range of interpretations by respondents. Questions that use ambiguous words can produce inconsistent results, as respondents may interpret their meanings in a variety of ways. Avoid being ambiguous about the time period the respondent should consider. Some examples of questions using ambiguous words are below:

- 'Do you buy product X regularly?'
- 'Is product X a good product?'

7. Avoid using compound questions

Compound questions are two or more questions in one. These questions are problematic because the answer may be different for each part of the question. Examples of compound questions include:

- 'Have you ever shopped at store X and do you shop there frequently?'
- 'Do you purchase product X and product Y?'

8. Avoid using unanswerable questions

Unanswerable questions require the respondent to recall information that is impossible to answer with any accuracy, if at all. If your respondents find the questions too difficult to answer, your response rate is likely to suffer. Some examples of unanswerable questions include:

- 'What is the first restaurant you remember visiting?'
- 'How many fruits and vegetables have you eaten in the past three months?'

9. Avoid hypothetical or future intention questions (if possible)

Hypothetical questions force the respondent to provide an answer to something he or she may never have thought about and, therefore, the respondent may not be able to provide an accurate response. An example of a hypothetical question might be:

- 'If a fruit and vegetable store opened down the street, would you shop there?'
- 'If your income increased, would you buy more of product X?'