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# **UNIT 1 SURVEY RESEARCH**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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One of the most important areas of research tools in the field of applied social science is the ‘survey research’. It is one of the most relevant techniques basically used for collecting data and involves any measurement procedures that prominently include asking questions from respondents or the subjects selected for the research study. The term “survey” can be defined as a process which may involve an investigation/ examination or assessment in the form of a short paper-and-pencil feedback form to an intensive one-on-one in-depth interview. With the help of the questionnaire or other statistical tools, the method tries to gather data about people, their thoughts and behaviours. This unit tries to focus on the concept, various methods, the relevance and implications of the survey research method.

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## **1.1 OBJECTIVES**

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After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Define and describe the survey research method;
- List out the different methods or techniques of the survey research method;
- Elucidate the different types of survey research;
- Analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the survey research method; and
- Describe the kind of questions that should be used in survey.

## 1.2 CONCEPT AND MEANING OF ‘SURVEY RESEARCH’

The method of survey research is a non-experimental (that is, it does not involve any observation under controlled conditions), descriptive research method which is one of the quantitative methods used for studying of large sample. In a survey research, the researcher collects data with the help of standardised questionnaires or interviews which is administered on a sample of respondents from a population (population is sometimes referred to as the universe of a study which can be defined as a collection of people or object which possesses at least one common characteristic). The method of survey research is one of the techniques of applied social research which can be helpful in collection of data both through direct (such as a direct face to face interview) and indirect observation (such as opinions on library services of an institute).

## 1.3 STEPS INVOLVED IN CONDUCTING SURVEY RESEARCH

Any type of survey research follows the following systematic steps:

**Step 1:** Determination of the aims and objectives of study:

The researcher must at the outset analyse and assess the relevant areas or issues which need to be studied. Once the research area is selected by the researcher, the basic aims and objectives have to be clearly specified. These have to be focused and analysed so as to make the purpose of research relevant and understandable. The researchers have to come up with the basic aims and objectives which would be focused and analysed in their over all research.

**Step 2:** Define the population to be studied:

After selecting the theme of the research, the researcher also needs to define the target population which would be studied by him/her. As discussed earlier, the population or universe would be a collection of people or object that would possess at least one common characteristic, which is going to be helpful and which would also provide direction in the process of conducting the research.

**Step 3:** Design and construct a survey:

Once the target population is defined by the researcher, he or she needs to design a survey research. On the basis of the framed design, the research decides to conduct a survey, selects instrument for survey (for example telephonic interview) with the help of which data will be collected. After the selection of the instrument, the researcher conducts a pilot study (a small survey taken in advance of a major investigation or research). The pilot study helps the researcher to analyse the significance and relevance of the instruments selected by the researcher for the present research.

**Step 3:** Select a representative sample:

The process of construction of the survey instruments gives a way to the selection of the sample from the target population. The researcher selects a sample which represents nearly maximum characteristics of the whole universe/ population. If the sample selected is a good representation of the population, then the results or

the findings of the survey conducted on the sample can be easily generalised on the population as a whole.

**Step 4:** Administer the survey:

After the selection of the sample, the researcher conducts the survey by administering the survey instrument or tool on the selected sample. This step helps in the collection of the required data or information from the sample.

**Step 5:** Analyse and interpret the findings of the survey:

Once the data has been collected, the researcher analyses the data with the help of required statistical tools and then interprets the findings on the basis of the information revealed. This step involves several processes such as coding the data and then processing it.

**Step 6:** Prepare the report of the survey:

On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the results, the researcher prepares a report of the over all research conducted. The report contains all the details of aims, objectives, data analysis, interpretation and discussion of the results. In this step, the researcher tries to evaluate how the findings meet the proposed aims and objectives of the research.

**Step 7:** Communicate the findings of the survey:

Last but not the least, the most important step of conducting the survey research is to disseminate the survey findings. The researcher needs to communicate the findings to the target population and it is equally important record for the future research to be done on a similar field. The impacts of the survey results are also assessed on them, on the basis of which the researcher may also recommend certain policies on decision making.

**Self Assessment Questions**

Fill in the blanks

- 1) In a survey research, the researcher collects data with help of .....
- 2) On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the results, the researcher prepares ..... of the over all research conducted
- 3) The population or universe can be defined as .....
- 4) Pilot study can be defined as .....
- 5) Discuss the steps involved in survey research

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## 1.4 METHODS/INSTRUMENTS USED IN COLLECTING DATA THROUGH SURVEY RESEARCH

It has been argued that surveys should be designed in such a way that helps in making accurate decisions. Predominantly there are three major ways which can be used as an instrument in collecting data with the help of survey research. They are being explained below:

- 1) **Sampling:** As discussed earlier, a sample is a representation of the population or universe selected for the study. The technique of sampling can in itself act as an instrument in collecting data in survey research. For example if the researcher wants to study the level of job satisfaction amongst the employees of an organisation, then the researcher can select and study the attitude of at least ten persons of each department of the organisation. In order to avoid any bias, the sampling can be done with the help of randomisation (a method of sampling which provides an equal chance for each subject to be involved in the study, which can be done with the help of lottery or fish bowl technique) or stratification (a method of sampling which categorizes the population in to various categories and subcategories and then conducting the research).
- 2) **Questionnaire:** Questionnaires are basically a kind of paper pencil and multiple choice test in which the individual needs to select the most suitable alternative. The researcher may collect data with the help of a questionnaire from a large number of samples at a single time. Questionnaires can be administered to the sample in three ways: (i) Mail survey (ii) Group administered questionnaire and (iii) household drop off survey. These are being discussed in detail below:
  - i) **Mail survey:** The researcher may forward a soft copy of the questionnaire to a large number of respondents through mail and can get the data collected from them at a single time. It is one of the relatively inexpensive, less time consuming and convenient method of getting responses. Yet, the questions which require on the spot response or detailed answer is difficult to be achieved through mail survey.
  - ii) **Group administered questionnaire:** It is one of the traditional methods of administering questionnaire. The researcher calls for a large number of respondents to be present at a stipulated time period as a group. Under such group settings, the respondents are asked to respond to a structured sequence of questions written in paper or questionnaire. The greatest advantage of this method is that the respondents can clarify their doubt regarding any question that has been asked by the researcher instantly.
  - iii) **Household drop-off survey:** In this method, the researcher goes door to door to the respondents and personally hands over as well as collects the questionnaire from them. It is a kind of pick and drop facility which is provided by the researcher so that the researcher can answer the questions according to their convenience.
- 3) **Interview:** Interview is a kind of face to face interaction which helps in providing more honest answers and responses from the sample, as the

interviewer (the one who is interviewing i.e., the researcher) works directly with the respondent or the interviewee (the one who is being interviewed). Unlike questionnaires, the interviewer has an opportunity to ask follow-up questions. They are the best suitable methods for those questions which require opinions or impressions from the respondents. Interviews can be of different types as given below:

- i) *Structured interview*: Structured interviews are those interviews in which the questions that are to be asked from the respondents are prepared and preplanned in advance by the researcher. The researcher imposes those prepared questions on the respondents serially and notes down the answers given by them.
- ii) *Unstructured interview*: Interviews are said to be unstructured when the researcher conducts an interaction with the respondent in an informal atmosphere. Nothing is preplanned in advance. The response of the sample gives a clue to the researcher to ask the next question.
- iii) *Telephonic interview*: In order to save time and money, the researcher may call the subjects or sample through telephone and ask them questions to collect data. This method helps in saving time and energy but the sample gets limited to only that part of the population who have the facility of telephones at their residences or offices.

## **1.5 TYPES OF SURVEY RESEARCH**

Based on the selection of an instrument or method of data collection, the researcher can use qualitative (e.g. ask open-ended questions) or quantitative (e.g. use forced-choice questions) measures. Basically there are two major types of survey: cross-sectional surveys and longitudinal surveys, though there exist some other types of surveys also. These are explained below:

### **Cross sectional survey**

Cross sectional surveys are used by the researcher when he or she wants to collect data from varied or different types of groups (that may be in terms of age, sex, group, nation, tribes and so on) at a single time. An example of such a survey can be a study on the effect of socialisation of children of different age groups of a particular country. This type of survey is less time consuming and economical as well.

### **Longitudinal survey**

This type of research is used only when the subject wants to study the same sample for a longer period of time. Such longitudinal studies may be used to study behavioural changes, attitude changes, religious effects or any event or practice that may have a long time effect on the selected sample or population. There are three main types of longitudinal studies which help the researcher to analyse the long term effects on the selected sample. These three include (i) Trend studies (ii) Cohort studies and (iii) Panel studies. These are explained in the following paragraphs.

i) *Trend studies*

When the researcher needs to analyse a trend of a phenomenon in a population, they conduct trend studies. The sample of the selected population might not be the same (as over a period of time they might have shifted or not available for various reasons) but they belong to the same population. This selected population is sampled and examined regularly. Since it is a type of longitudinal research, it may not be started as well as ended by just one researcher or research project. An example of trend studies may be a yearly survey of number of graduates actively using books and journals from the library of a university.

ii) *Cohort studies*

The focus of this type of longitudinal study is also on a particular population which is sampled and studied more than once within a time gap. The example of this study can be an investigation of the number of graduates of the year 2009 who have been actively using the library and four years later, the researcher may examine the same issue on another sample of the 2009 graduates and investigate whether after the time gap has there been any difference in the attitudes towards the importance of the library within the members of the same class. Wherein, in the trend study, the research scholar would study such an attitude within the graduates of different batches of the same university.

iii) *Panel studies*

The researcher in a panel study uses the same sample of people every time and that sample is called as a ‘panel’. Such a study is used in order to investigate the changes in attitudes, behaviour or practices of the same panel within a period of time. They are more specific and focused as the researcher studies a particular change in the attitude, behaviour, belief or practice of the same group. For example, a researcher may study the library usage trends amongst the graduate students and ask them questions related to their frequency of library usage habits. Thereafter, the researcher may ask the same group or panel, similar questions and also the reasons behind the changes in their habits, if it has occurred. The study is difficult enough as it faces a greater trend of attrition rates (difficulty in availability of the same people).

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

State whether the following are true or false

- 1) The panel study is used in order to investigate the changes in attitudes, behaviour or practices of the same sample within a period of time. ( )
- 2) There are different types of longitudinal studies. ( )
- 3) Interviews are said to be unstructured when the researcher asks preplanned questions ( )
- 4) A sample can never be a representation of the population. ( )

## **1.6 CONSTRUCTING A SURVEY RESEARCH**

In the process of conducting a survey research, the researcher needs to design a framework of the instruments and processes of data collection, on the basis of

which the overall research would be done. The researcher needs to decide the content, format and wordings that would be included in the survey instruments. No doubt the researcher selects any one of the kinds of instruments (that is questionnaire/ interview), he or she needs to frame questions. The questions should be so worded that there is clarity in what is being asked and should have the capability of eliciting response.

The survey instruments are the back bone of research and that is why the statements or the questions of the researcher should be short and specific as well. Once the framework of the process of research is decided, then the researcher constructs the survey instrument by framing questions. While writing the questions for the survey, the researcher needs to take care of a few basic aspects, given below:

- Deciding the content, scope and objectives of the question.
- Selecting the most convenient format of response (for example- Likert type five point scale/ multiple choice questions and so on).
- Deciding on how to frame the questions that would elicit the required response.
- Formatting the series of questions to bring out the best response and favorable conditions for the survey.
- The researcher needs to be very sensitive while preparing the questions and take full care of the moral values and ethics of the respondents to get the best results.

## **1.7 TYPES OF QUESTIONS IN A SURVEY RESEARCH**

As discussed earlier, the researcher needs to be very careful while preparing or constructing the questions of a survey research. Selection of the type of questions is a very crucial aspect, as the whole research would depend upon such questions. Broadly survey questions can be divided as structured and unstructured questions. Each one of them is explained below:

### **1.7.1 Structured Questions**

Structured questions are those questions, the format of which is preplanned and predefined in advance. Some of the types of structured questions include (i) Dichotomous Questions. (ii) Level of measurement based questions (iii) Filter or Contingency Questions

#### i) *Dichotomous questions*

A question is said to be dichotomous if it has only two possible responses (for example – yes or no/ true or false and so on). The lay out of these questions appear in the following ways in the questionnaire:

Does the library of your university has an electronic data base system?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes

\_\_\_\_\_No

OR

Please mention your gender:

Male  Female

ii) *Level of measurement based questions*

Not to be mentioned that three basic levels of measurement are: nominal (based on names, classification of persons, objects and groups), ordinal (based on ranks and preferences) and interval (based on ratings) measurements. For example, a nominal question may have numbers before each response, which may only represent the serial order, like –

Please state the category to which you belong:

General- \_\_\_\_\_

OBC- \_\_\_\_\_

SC/ST- \_\_\_\_\_

The numbers here just denote the serial order and have nothing to do with the preference or ranks.

A question based on the ordinal level of measurement will be based on the preference or choice of the respondent. For example, the respondent may be asked to give a ranking for the business tycoons in an order of most trendy or fashionable to least trendy, where the respondent may be asked to give a rank of 1 to the most trendy tycoon and 4 to the least trendy tycoon:

\_\_\_\_\_ Subroto Roy

\_\_\_\_\_ Mukesh Ambani

\_\_\_\_\_ Bill Gates

\_\_\_\_\_ Vijay Mallya

The respondent may rank the tycoons on the basis of their own likings and preferences.

The question based on interval scale may be based on rating the choices, out of which the most commonly used scale is Likert response scale (which has a rating of 1 to 5, or 1 to 7, or 1 to 9). For example:

The university has a well equipped and fully furnished library:

1                  2                  3                  4                  5

Strongly agree   Agree   Can not say   Disagree   Strongly disagree

iii) *Filter or Contingency Questions*

When a question is framed in such a way that it is followed by succeeding questions, which are sub parts of the main question, such types of question design is known as filter or contingency questions.

For example, if a researcher wants to ask whether the respondent has ever attended the library of the university and if the researcher also wants to know how many times the respondent has attended the library, then the format of the question will be as follows:

Yes

No

If yes, then how many times?

Once in a month

Twice in a month

Every week of the month

Each and every day in a month

The researcher may use multiple filter questions in order to get the subsequent responses. But he or she should take full care that in order to maintain the interest of the respondent, they should not exceed more than two to three levels for any question.

### 1.7.2 Unstructured Questions

Unstructured questions are usually used in interview, where either the researcher does not prepare a list of questions and the series of questions might depend upon the response of the subjects or they ask questions in an informal atmosphere. In order to get adequate and required information, the researcher should take full care and should give a silent probe, verbally encourage, ask for clarification and have full empathy with the respondent.

#### Self Assessment Questions

Choose the correct alternative

- 1) A question is said to be dichotomous one if,
  - a) it has more than two responses
  - b) it has two responses
  - c) It has a single response
  - d) none of the above
- 2) In the process of conducting a survey research, the researcher needs to design
  - a) framework of the instruments and processes of data collection
  - b) the framework of the administrative requirements
  - c) the framework of the personality requirements
  - d) none of the above
- 3) A question based on the ordinal level of measurement will be based on
  - a) the preference or choice of the respondent
  - b) the ratings of the respondent
  - c) the classification of the respondent
  - d) none of the above

## **1.8 PRECAUTIONS WHILE DESIGNING INSTRUMENTS**

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While preparing the questionnaire or the survey instrument, the researcher should take full care of the following aspects:

- 1) The items or the questions of the instruments should be clear , specific, relevant and short.
- 2) The respondents of the research should also be capable enough to answer the questions
- 3) The researcher should have full empathy with the respondents and should avoid those questions which might have a negative impact on the respondent.
- 4) The researcher should also avoid any kind of bias either towards the questions or towards the respondents of the questions.

## **1.9 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SURVEY RESEARCH**

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Survey research has the following advantages:

- It is convenient, less time taking and economical for the researcher.
- The survey can be conducted for a longer period of time, which gives a chance of knowing about the latest changes or advancements that might have taken place in the agenda under study
- The researcher gets a full chance to well organise and present the reasons of the study to get full and honest answers from the respondents.
- Yet, the method of survey research lacks the following aspects.

### **Disadvantages**

- Maintaining the privacy of responses of each respondent under a group interview is questionable and that may also restrict full and honest answers from them.
- High attrition rate of the respondents might hinder the longitudinal based studies.

## **1.10 DIFFICULTIES AND ISSUES OF SURVEY RESEARCH**

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If the researcher plans to go for a survey research, there are certain issues which he or she might have to understand and take full care. They are:

### **1) Issues on selecting the type of survey**

One of the most critical decisions for a researcher is to select the kind of survey that might be most appropriate or suitable for his or her study. The researcher should be aware of the kind of population that would be suitable for the study. Again, they should also be comfortable with the language of the selected population. The researcher should also analyse the geographic restrictions and try to find out which method can be most feasible for a dispersed population.

While constructing the survey, the researcher should have full knowledge of the suitability of the questions that would be asked to the respondents. The type of questions, clarity and specificity of the questions as well as the length of the questions are some of the controversial issues within a survey research.

**3) Bias Issues**

The researcher's bias and prejudices might have a significant influence on the findings of the survey research, so they should be fully aware of the repercussions of their bias. Their behaviour should be socially desired ones, he or she should not lose track and also should avoid false reports. In such cases, issues of bias is really difficult but essential agenda in a survey research.

**4) Administrative Issues**

The cost, mode of survey, feasibility of the area selected, required time period are also important aspects which needs to be preplanned even before the advancement of the research.

**Self Assessment Questions**

Fill in the blanks

- 1) The researchers' biasness and prejudices might have a significant influence on the ..... of the survey research.
- 2) High attrition rate of the respondents might ..... the longitudinal based studies.
- 3) The researcher should have full empathy with the .....
- 4) The basic administrative issues are .....

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**1.11 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we learnt that the method of survey research holds a significant position in the area of the applied research. We also learnt the steps involved in conducting survey research. We then learnt about the types of survey research and explained each of them in detail. We learnt how to construct a survey research and what are the ways in which questions should be asked in a survey and how to avoid biases. We dealt with the many precautions while designing instruments and learnt about the advantages and disadvantages of the survey research. The methods and kinds of survey research that are most common and are frequently used by a number of research scholars were also mentioned. Yet it was pointed out that there are certain aspects which are crucial enough and the researcher should take full care. The process of constructing of the survey research is also very significant and important decision that determines the extent to which the research would be successful.

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**1.12 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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- 1) Describe the different methods or techniques of the survey research method.
- 2) Explain the different types of conducting survey research.

**Types of Research**

- 3) Explain the different issues of survey research method
  - 4) What are the different types of questions that can be designed for a survey instrument?
  - 5) Explain the different types of interviews that can be used for conducting a survey research
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