

Designing Questionnaire

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Abstract

First step of any research to Design Questionnaire well

What is designing questionnaires?

A set of questions designed to generate the data necessary for accomplishing a research project's objectives.

Objectives of designing questionnaires:

There are two main objectives in designing a questionnaire:

- To maximise the proportion of subjects answering our questionnaire—that is, the response rate.
- To obtain accurate relevant information for our survey.

The key principles of effective questionnaire design:

There are seven steps in the design of a questionnaire:

- Decide what information is require.
- Make a rough listing of the questions.
- Refine the question phrasing.
- Develops the response format.
- Put the questions into an appropriate sequence.
- Finalise the layout of the questionnaire.
- Pre-test and revise.

The 5 sections in a questionnaire:

1. The respondent's identification data
2. An introduction
3. Instructions
4. Information
5. Classifications data

Types of questionnaires for different studies:

Type of study Questionnaire type Method of administration

LARGE, QUANTITATIVE STRUCTURED TELEPHONE FACE TO FACE BUSINESS TO BUSINESS SEMI STRUCTURED TELEPHONE FACE TO FACE STUDIES; INVESTIGATIVE CONSUMER STUDIES QUALITATIVE STUDIES UNSTRUCTURED DEPTH TELEPHONE/ FACE

TO FACE/ FOCUS GROUPS

Five people to take into consideration when designing a questionnaire:

- CLIENT
- RESEARCHER
- INTERVIEWER
- RESPONDENT
- DATA PROCESSOR

The structure of a questionnaire:

- Questions should be grouped in logical groups that relate to a particular topic.
- A questionnaire should be viewed as a conversation and hence should have a certain logical order. It is therefore important to exhaust a particular topic before the next one is introduced.
- The more general questions about a particular topic should be asked first, followed by the more specific questions thereby creating a funnel effect.
- Questions dealing with biographical information are usually placed at the beginning of a questionnaire, since they deal with factual information and are generally perceived to be non-threatening.
- Transitions between questions should be smooth.
- One should avoid structuring the questionnaire in such a way that a response pattern develops where respondents answer all the questions in a particular way without reading the questions properly.

Length of the questionnaire

- Response rate is often inversely proportional to the length of the questionnaire, i.e. the longer the questionnaire the lower the response rate tends to be
- The length of a questionnaire depends on the survey format and the characteristics of the respondents.
- As a rule of thumb, it should take no longer than 30-45 MINUTES to complete a face-to-face (personal) interview, 15-20 MINUTES to complete a self-administered questionnaire and 5-8 minutes to complete a telephone interview.

Format and layout

The following should be taken into account as far as the physical appearance of the questionnaire is concerned.

- The font size should not be too small. Choose a style that is easy to read, such as Arial 11 or 12.
- The layout should not be cramped to avoid respondents missing a question.
- With regard to paper size, A4 or A5 is preferable.
- If the questionnaire is printed on both sides of the page to avoid costs, it should be crammed to read like a book. If it is crammed in the upper left-hand corner there is a danger that respondents might miss the questions on the back page.

The cover letter

The cover letter is the researcher's last chance to elicit a response. It is important to provide a well-written cover letter that provides the following information:

- Why is the study being conducted?
- Who is doing the study?
- Why is it important to respond?
- How long will it take to complete the questionnaire?
- How and when should the questionnaire be returned?
- What are the contact details of the researcher?
- Whether his/her responses will be treated confidentially, i.e. ensure the respondent of anonymity.

How to administer the questionnaires:

- There are several ways of administering questionnaires.
- They may be self administered or read out by interviewers.
- Self administered questionnaires may be sent by post, email, or electronically online.
- Interview administered questionnaires may be by telephone or face to face.

Piloting your questionnaire

Having created your questionnaire, it is important that you test it out on a small target group before you circulate it more widely. This will not only help you pick up any typos, but highlight any ambiguity in the wording of your questions. You may also discover that in order to analyse the data in the way you want, you need some extra questions. Or you may find out that some questions are superfluous. Give your pilot group the same information that you intend to give your target population – and a deadline.

Limitations of questionnaires

- Can be superficial - difficult to capture the richness of meaning
- Cannot deal with context - information is Collected in isolation of environment
- Information is not causal - cannot attribute cause-effect relationships
- Information is self-report - which does not necessarily reflect actual behaviour.

Conclusions:

Questionnaires must be carefully designed to yield valid information. Meticulous attention must be paid to ensure that individual questions are relevant, appropriate, intelligible, precise, and unbiased. The order of the questions must be carefully arranged, and the layout of the questionnaire must be clear. It is wise to draft a clear personalised covering letter. Questionnaires must first be piloted and evaluated before the actual survey.

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