Questionnaire Designing-Some Useful Tips

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Abstract:
One of most important part of conducting survey is the formation of question that can accurately measure the opinions, experiences and behavior of the public. It is a multi stage and complicated process. Use of questionnaire method is one of the most common and popular method amongst all. In order to get required information from the sample population being chosen for the analysis purpose. The success of questionnaire method largely depends on the way of drafting of the subject questionnaire which requires proper skill development, experience base and time management techniques. This method is used in conducting surveys, experiments and other modes of observations primarily by the journalists, observers, researchers, market analysts and other interested persons.

Key words: Conducting, Drafting, Measure, Questionnaire, Survey.

Introduction:
One of most important part of conducting survey is the formation of question that can accurately measure the opinions, experiences and behavior of the public. It is a multi stage and complicated process. For a long time in social science research, use of questionnaire method is one of the most common and popular method amongst all, in order to get required information from the sample population being chosen for the analysis purpose. The success of questionnaire method largely depends on the way of drafting of the subject questionnaire which requires proper skill development, experience base and time management techniques. Babbie (1990) defined questionnaire as a document containing questions and other type items designed to collect information required for analysis. This method is used in conducting surveys, experiments and other modes of observations primarily by the journalists, observers, researchers, market analysts and other interested persons. Although it is very difficult to lay down any hard & fast rule in designing questionnaire, but it can be said that research questions are properly constructed to receive answers related to the chosen variable for the analysis.
Objectives of the Paper:

Following are the broad objectives of the paper:

- To find the basic essentials of questionnaire designing as an appropriate design may mislead the research thereby ill affecting the policy formulation
- To discuss the various types of questionnaire in details in order to throw more light on its application part
- To locate the dubious and inconsistent questions that can lead to ambiguous answers leading to futile outcome
- To enable the researchers to collect such qualitative as well as quantitative information on new issues/topics, that are abstract and not known to the society
- To enable the researcher to learn to form a short simple, compact and interesting questionnaire so that the problem of inappropriate results can be sorted out.

Rationale of the Paper:

Based on the above mentioned objectives, the rationale of the paper is to discuss the various:

- Types of questionnaire
- Contents of question
- Types of questions
- Construction pattern of the questions
- Language and sequence of the questions etc.

Based on the above rationale a detailed analysis of questionnaire designing will help us to avoid the loop less associated with research and to derive comparatively more authentic results from a target population chosen for the analysis.

Types of Questionnaires:

There are four types of questionnaires which as follows:

1. Non disguised, structured questionnaires:

When questionnaire is constructed in such a way that prescribed sequence of questions are pre-coded and well defined and also the objective of questions is clear to respondents, then questionnaire is structured and non disguised.

2. Non disguised and non structured:

When objective of issue is clear to the respondents but questions don’t follow a prescribed sequence i.e. they are vague and open ended, questionnaire is said to be non disguised and non structured.

3. Disguised structure:

In this case objective is not clear to respondent but questionnaire follows a proper sequence of questions.

4. Disguised non structured

When both the objective and the sequence are not followed Based on above clarifications it can be said that where first category involves less discrepancies, is easy to administer, easy to manage and leads to consistent answers at the same time other categories are used in group discussion, to form a proper format of the questionnaire However, in reality, it is difficult to be very structured and non disguised as normally some questions in the questionnaire are left as ‘other’. So, normally on the basis of structure, use of quasi-structured questionnaire is made in day to day life.

Contents of questions:

Basically, there can be found, contents of fact, opinions in the questionnaire are asked from the respondent. The fact based question is related to past or present and is closed ended e.g.

A. TV

1) Yes 2) no 1a) if yes, how many ?

B. Fridge

1) Yes 2) no 1a) if yes, how many?

C. Car

1) Yes 2) no 1a) if yes, how many?
However the opinion based question is past, present or future oriented. Answer alternative are liked a scaling format e.g.

To a female worker having 3 children 1 male and 2 female with working husband it is asked

“What has been your feeling in your family in comparison to other families in your neighborhood as regard your income?

Scale: 1) good 2) very good 3) average 4) below average

Types of questions:

Discuss regarding designing proper questionnaire is incomplete if we don’t know about type of questions asked in a questionnaire. Following are main categories of questions to be asked.

- Closed ended and open ended questions
- Scaling type questions
- Matrix type of questions
- Ranking type of questions

Close ended and open ended:

Evidence from literature illustrates that close ended questions are structured, whereas open ended questions are unstructured ones. closed ended questions follows definite alternative to received right information from respondent but are difficult to construct, whereas open ended are although open to answers but at the same time have problems for the post coding in data management. In such case, it becomes difficult to make proper analysis.

These two types of questions are further categorized into

1. Contingency questions: where answer to next question is carried by answer to previous question

2. Multiple answer questions: where while answering one question respondent has option to select more than one answer.

Examples of close ended and open ended questions:

- Close ended structured:
  - Is your monthly income is sufficient to feed your family
    - A) yes    b)no    c)indifferent    d)don’t known
  - Open ended and multiple choice
    - In case of loss of job, how will you manage your family?
      - a) purchase/borrow essentials : yes/no/indifferent
      - b) Begging : yes/no/indifferent
      - c) Seek for another work : yes/no/indifferent
      - d) Seek friend support : yes/no/indifferent
      - e) Seek government support : yes/no/indifferent
      - f) Other (specify) : yes/no/indifferent

Scaling type of questions:

Such questions are used to quantify the subjective respondent. Scaling is very suitable for open ended opinion type questions and thereby making easy for researchers to reach general conclusions. As judd, smith and kidder (1991) have remarked that the set of categories of scores on a variable with complex concept, is called a scale and process of giving scores to them is scaling. Scaling basically associates qualitative aspects with quantitative aspects.

Types of scaling, they are as follows:

- Thrust on scaling or equal appearing scaling:
  - In it, grouping, ranking and arrangement given by respondents is done carefully.

- Guttman scaling or cumulative scaling:
  - where the cumulative nature of currently
expressed opinion of the respondent includes the impact of previous opinion too. e.g.

A) I believe more economic freedom should be allowed to Indian producers.

B) I feel government economic policies must be more flexible for producers in India.

C) I believe that this is time for Indian producers to grow more commercial front.

Here each subsequent alternative is related with previous one i.e. cumulative.

- **Libert scaling or summative scaling:**

  In it, there is arrangement of opinion from fully positive to fully negative e.g. in newspaper polling if a question is asked
  
  “Do you feel that current government should resign?”

  The options are:
  
  1) fully disagree  2) somewhat disagree  
   3) indifferent  4) somewhat agree  
   5) Fully agree

- **Matrix type questions:**

  Such questions provide more options to more than one person/institution. The matrix depends upon the type of format in which questions are arranged. The battery questions (popular name) are mostly titled without proper sentencing and provide multiple information in single stroke. Main flaw back in these questions is the difficulty in data entry and proper analysis e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank Name</th>
<th>Year of</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishment</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>after</td>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>Nationalisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Ranking type questions:**

  It is fitting the information given by respondent from rank 0 to 10. i.e. qualitative judgment gets quantified in number e.g.

  “How do you score performance of Miss India in Miss World pageant”? 

  “Give ranks”

Advantage of this method is that respondent can analyse the things minutely, however on the other side, the disadvantage is problem of overlapping, possibility of colliding of ranks with each other exists.

**Construct of questions:**

On the basis of above mentioned types while designing a questionnaire, following points should be clear while constructing the questions

- Before constructing questions, objective and hypothesis of research should be clear to researcher
- Proper listing of selected variables and items should be done
- Questionnaire should be categorised into proper sections, to make it more practical
- Questionnaire designer should form question using easy vocabulary that is understood by the respondent. It will make administration part easy
- Use of precoded answer alternatives should be made in quantitative researchers in order to minimize the cost of data management
- While drafting questions, there language should be clear, easy, simple, without bias with adequate options and short sized with clear reference period.

**Sequencing, skipping and instructions:**

The questions should be properly sequenced from top to bottom i.e. movement from simple to specific one is appreciated. It helps in maintaining repo with the respondents. Proper ascending or descending order should be followed while organizing events, causes, reactions, and consequences respectively. If patternised approach is used, one can easily complete questionnaire while skipping questions with common sense e.g.

Marriage............if no...............skipping if yes.........................age at marriage............no of children

Moreover, proper questionnaire also contains instructions regarding selecting sampling unit,
clarification of objectives and directions to the interviewers.

**Layout of Questionnaire and its administration:**

Finally, most important is whole layout and proper administration of questionnaires. Format of questions should be such that a respondent can easily fill up information without any assistance such self-administered questionnaires should be attractive and must be printed in a very clear manner. This will help much more in emailed and telephonic survey questionnaires. In developed countries, research, this process has been given utmost importance. The name of survey conducting organization, title of survey, section breaks and proper sequence following is very important. For proper results, answer formats should be horizontal and there must be option as others with sufficient space to write proper feedback. Questionnaire should be pre tested to check the vocabulary, consistency and ambiguity, so that necessary amendment can be made. No matter how good the questionnaire is, if administration is poor, results can be biased, thereby harming the quality of data. Last but not the least, some measures of reliability must be taken before finalizing any questionnaire.

**Conclusion:**

A bad questionnaire, a bad administration of good questionnaire, a bad coverage of samples with good questionnaire and good administration all lead to collection of less valid data. One must keep this thing in mind that constructing questionnaire is one of the most important initial activity in social science research. If the questionnaire is not close to reality, it will lead to collection of irrelevant information and thus futile recommendations. Thus the efficiency of research entirely depends upon the excellence of questionnaire. Take adequate time, if necessary have a series of pre-tests and finalize the questionnaire. A perfect questionnaire is considered as half job is completed.

**References:**