

Questionnaire as a Tool of Data Collection in Empirical Research

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Abstract

The questionnaire is a highly used tool of data collection as compared to interview and observation in empirical research. The paper is intended to make the reader acquainted with types of questions, viz., Fixed or Close Response Questions, Open-End Questions and Mixed Questions. The authors have also commented on the advantages and Disadvantages/De-merits of the questionnaire as a tool of data collection in empirical research and the requirement of a covering letter.

Keywords— Tools of data collection, questions, types of questions, advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire

I. INTRODUCTION

The questionnaire is an important and freely used tool for data collection in empirical research. The questionnaire in simple words, is a bunch of questions used to collect information or data from the people in relation to the given problem. In the questionnaire, a bunch of questions is posted to the respondent through e-mail or any other mode of communication. The questionnaire tool of data collection is most helpful when the number of respondents is huge and geographically scattered.

Ill-developed and wrongly worded questions may not yield the expected results. It is important to note that questionnaires shall be pre-tested in order to verify their aptness and clarity. Skill to develop questions is crucial while preparing a questionnaire, interview schedule, interview guide or questions for structured and semi-structured interviews. The object of a good questionnaire is to obtain the best possible response from respondents. If you want a better answer, ask the best question.

II. TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Questions are of three kinds, viz., Fixed or Close Response Questions, Open-End Questions and Mixed Questions. Selection of the type of question depends upon various

factors, such as the nature of the problem, the nature of the information required and the nature of the respondent. Following are the types of the questionnaire:

2.1. Fixed or close response/Multiple choice questions:

In this type of question, two or more choices are provided to the respondent. The respondent has to choose the option(s) from multiple options provided by the researcher. This type of question is easy to reply, record and analyze. The researcher can easily count the responses provided by the respondents. There are two fundamental disadvantages of the fixed response questions. Firstly, the respondent is forced to choose the response from the options provided and secondly, detailed information about the problem/phenomenon under investigation cannot be collected. In order to solve the first problem after the fixed options, 'any other _____' option may be provided. Providing 'any other _____' option depends upon the nature of the data required. 'Any other ____' option need not be provided when the researcher requires a precise response to test the hypothesis or to answer the research objective and question.

2.2. Open End Questions:

In open-end questions, specific questions are asked and the respondent is free to respond to the question in his own language and in his own way. No alternative or suggested reply is provided in the open-end questions. This type of question can be useful if you do not know the possible answers to questions or for gathering insightful or unexpected information.¹ This tool of data collection is also employed when the information is quantitative in nature. This category of questions is difficult to answer, time-consuming, and difficult to analyze.

Example: What are the causes of female foeticide in India? And the respondent is allowed to answer it without providing a list of causes or fixed responses.

2.3. Mixed type of questions:

This type of question is a mixture of both fixed responses and open-end questions. Mixed questions are useful to achieve the objectives of both the above-mentioned types of questions.

Example: Do you think there is a need of a Uniform Civil Code in India?

Options: 1) Yes ☐ ☐ 2) No ☐

If yes, explain/why: _____.

If no, why? _____.

III.ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF QUESTIONNAIRE TOOL OF DATA COLLECTION:

3.1. Advantages of questionnaire tool of data collection:

- 1) Compared to other tools of data collection questionnaire tool is cost, time, energy and resource-saving.
- 2) The questionnaire tool of data collection has less administrative hassles compared to other tools of data collection.
- 3) The questionnaire tool of data collection is useful though the population is huge and geographically scattered.

- 4) The respondent gets time to ponder upon the questions. Therefore, he/she can answer it in adequate depth and clarity.
- 5) Perceptions, views and opinions of the researcher/interviewer do not get reflected in the respondent's responses. In the interview, the response may be prompted by the interviewer/researcher. In the interview and observation tool of data collection, there is a possibility of reflection of the opinion, perception or biases of the researcher/interviewer. In this sense, the data collected through the questionnaire tool is more reliable.

3.2. Disadvantages/De-merits:

- 1) The researcher requires a mail list of the respondents.
- 2) There is a possibility of less responses from respondents; the questionnaire may not be sent back to the researcher.
- 3) The researcher/interviewer cannot keep the respondent on track. He or she may provide extra or irrelevant information, particularly in reply to open-ended questions.
- 4) The researcher may not get clarification from the respondent in case of ambiguity or inconsistency in responses.
- 5) The response of the respondent cannot be easily verified. In an interview, the interviewer has an opportunity to verify the responses immediately after the conclusion of the interview.
- 6) The data may not be complete and accurate. All questions may not be responded by the respondent.
- 7) This tool of data collection cannot be used when the population is illiterate or not ready to share the information.
- 8) Usually, people prefer talking than writing a questionnaire.
- 9) Misunderstanding and ambiguity of the question cannot be easily corrected. Sometimes even a simple question may be interpreted differently. For example: If the question is: What is your marital status? Expected information: single, married,

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<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief14.pdf>, visited on 19/04/22

divorced, widowed or separated. The respondent's reply may be -Fine, Good, as could be expected; I'll have to ask my wife.²

- 10) It is not a suitable tool for long investigation on complex issues.
- 11) In open-ended questions, the respondent may provide too much or too little information.
- 12) The researcher may not have the skill to develop a quality questionnaire. The formulation of good questions is a much more subtle and frustrating task than is generally believed to be by those who have not actually attempted it.³

IV. COVERING LETTER

Apart from the above, a letter of appeal or covering letter and a self-addressed envelope with the requisite stamp shall be sent with the questionnaire. A covering letter shall contain brief background and objectives of the study. The letter shall contain a phone number, e-mail and contact detail with an appeal to contact in case of any doubt or further clarification. It shall also include assurance of confidentiality of the data, date of return of the questionnaire and signature of the researcher.

The researcher needs to maintain a proper record of dispatch so that he/she can keep track of the questionnaire.

V. CONCLUSION

Though the questionnaire is a freely used tool of data collection, it has its own limitations and advantages. The researcher can counter these limitations by applying the correct type of questionnaire, a combination of two or more types of questionnaire or a combination of questionnaire and observation or questionnaire and interview tool of data collection.

REFERENCES

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