On Line and Secondary Data Collection

Data collection is a critical phase in research. It requires proper identification of data sources and accessing them through appropriate data collection formats or instruments. Data collection methods are primarily classified into primary and secondary data sources. With the emergence of internet, we have a new opportunity for primary data collection – on line data collection. In this lesson, we shall examine on –line data collection and secondary data sources.

On –Line Data Collection -The advent of internet as a communication tool has provided new opportunities for data collection. Two types of approaches to data collection are:

(i)   e-mail surveys and

(ii)   web surveys. In the first one, questionnaires are sent via e-mail to the select respondents. IN web surveys, the surveyors will keep questionnaire posted in a web site or present it to the browsers through 'pop-ups'.

Web Questionnaire Design A web questionnaire site should be easy to use, have a logical flow, and have a graphic look-and-feel that creates an overall experience that motivates the respondent to cooperate from start to finish. Many of the guidelines for design of paper questionnaires apply to Internet questionnaires. There are, however, many important differences.

Interface - It should be easy for respondent to see the questions and answer them. Respondents can click on what they want rather than having to type answers or codes.

Screen Design - However, several features of a respondent's computer may influence the appearance of an Internet questionnaire.

Layout decisions - Even if the questionnaire designer's computer and the respondents' computer are compatible, there are several other layout issues. The first layout decision is whether the questionnaire will appear

(i)   page-by-page or

(ii)   one screen.

➢ **Page –by-page -** The paging layout going from screen to screen greatly facilitates skip patterns. Based on respondent's answers to filter questions, the computer automatically inserts relevant questions on subsequent pages.

➢ **Screen -** If the entire questionnaire appears on the screen, the display should advance smoothly, as if it were a piece of paper being moved up or down.

Section heads - When a scrolling questionnaire is long, using multiple category or section headings is helpful to respondents. Provide appropriate links to allow users to go to the top and bottom parts of each section, enabling the respondent to navigate through the questionnaire more easily than having to scroll through the entire document.

Push buttons - Many responses to Internet questions require the respondent to activate his or her answer by clicking a radio button on a response. Like push buttons on automobile radios, clicking on an alternative response deactivates the first choice and replaces it with the new response. Push buttons with labels should clearly describe the actions to be taken. For example, if the respondent needs to go to the next page a large arrow labelled "NEXT" might appear in colour at the bottom of a screen.

Graphics and animation - Layout decisions must also be made about the use of colour, graphics, animation, sound, and other special features that the Internet makes possible.

Status bar - With a paper questionnaire, the respondent knows how many questions he or she must answer. Because many Internet surveys offer no visual clues about the number of questions to be asked, it is important to provide a status bar or another visual indicator of questionnaire length. For example using a partially filled rectangular box as a visual symbol and a statement such as: "The status bar at top right indicates approximately what portion of the survey you have completed." increases the likelihood that the respondent will finish the entire sequence of questions.

Dialogue boxes - An Internet questionnaire uses special windows known as dialog boxes to display questions and record answers.

➤ **Drop-down box** It is a space saving device that allows the researcher to provide a list of responses that are hidden from view. Initially a general statement, perhaps "please select" or "click here" is shown. Clicking on a down-facing arrow makes the full range of choices appear. If the first choice in a list, such as "strongly agree", is shown with other responses hidden, the researcher is increasing his or her chances that response bias will occur. Drop-down boxes may present a problem for individuals with minimal computer skills who may not know how to reveal hidden responses behind a drop-down menu or how to move from one option to another in a moving-bar menu.

➤ **Check box -** Questions may be placed in a check box where several, none, or all responses may be checked.

➤ **Open-ended box** –They require respondents to use their keyboards to enter text for open-ended questions. Open-ended boxes may be designed as one line Text Boxes or Scrolling Text Boxes depending on the breadth of the expected answer. Of course, open-ended response questions require that respondents have both the skill and the willingness to keyboard lengthy answers into the computer. Some open-ended boxes are designed so numbers can be entered for frequency response, ranking, or rating questions.

➤ **Pop-up box**–They are message boxes that can be used to provide highlighted information. For example, pop-up boxes may be use to provide a privacy statement.