Questionnaires

Questionnaires are common tools of data collection in many research projects. However, questionnaire is not an easy task. It has to consider mainly the

(i)   purpose of research

(ii)   information relevant to research objectives and

(iii)   ability and willingness of respondent to answer the questions. Relevance and accuracy are the two most basic criteria to be met if the questionnaire is to achieve the researcher's purpose. In order to achieve this, several decisions must be made.

Questionnaire relevancy - A questionnaire is relevant if no unnecessary information is collected and if only the information needed to solve the marketing problem is obtained. To ensure information relevance, the researcher must be specific about data needs; there should be a rationale for each item, and all possible omissions should be considered.

Questionnaire accuracy - Accuracy refers to right data. It can be obtained only when questions do not make misrepresentation or lead to misunderstanding. It means the wording and sequence should be right. While it is generally believed that one should use simple, understandable, unbiased, unambiguous, and non-irritating words, no step-by-step procedure can be generalized. Respondents tend to be most cooperative when the subject of the research is interesting - if questions are lengthy, difficult to answer, or ego threatening, there is a high probability of biased answers.

Phrasing Questions - There are many ways to phrase questions and many standard question formats have been developed in previous research. We may categorize two basic types of questions asked on the amount of freedom respondents are given in answering: Open-ended response versus fixed-alternative questions

Open-ended response questions require respondent to write the answers in their own words. They are free response questions.

Merits - Open-ended response questions are most beneficial when the researcher is conducting exploratory research. By gaining free and uninhibited responses, the researcher may find some

unanticipated reaction toward the project. They may also be useful at the beginning of an interview as they allow the respondent to warm up to the questioning process.

Demerits - The cost of open-ended response questions is substantially higher than that of fixed-alternative questions, since the job of coding, editing, and analyzing the data is quite extensive. Also, openended response questions allow potential interviewer bias to influence the answer - even the best interviewer can take shortcuts in recording answers

Fixed-alternative questions or closed questions, give the respondents specific, limited, alternative responses and ask the respondent to choose the response closest to his or her viewpoint. The following types of fixed alternative questions are in use.

Single-dichotomy or dichotomous: alternative questions: require that the respondents choose one of two alternatives. The answer can be a simple "yes" or "no" or a choice between "this" and "that."

Multi-choice alternatives: They ask a respondent to choose one and only one - response from among several possible alternatives

- The frequency determination question is a determinant choice question that asks for an answer about the general frequency of occurrence.
- Attitude rating scales, such as the Likert 5 point scale (Strongly agree- Agree –Neutral-Disagree- Strongly disagree).
- The check list question allows respondents to provide multiple answers to a single question. In many cases, the choices are adjectives that describe a particular object. There should be no overlap among categories in the check list - each alternative should be mutually exclusive, that is, only one dimension of an issue should be related to that alternative. The researcher should strive to ensure that there are sufficient response choices to include almost all possible answers

Merits - Fixed-alternative questions require less interviewer skill, take less time, and are easier for the respondent to answer.

Demerits – The forced choice limit the scope of getting accurate presentation of views from respondents. They tend to approximate their answers.