



**ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS
& PROFESSIONALS OF NIGERIA**

Questionnaire Construction

**7th ACSPN Empowerment Series (AES)
March 24, 2015**

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Introduction

- The dynamism and complexity of our world dictate that we find new approaches to the solution of our economic, political and social problems.
- The challenges facing the media industry today command that new knowledge and new techniques be applied to whatever it is we are engaged in.
- Nor is it wise to expect that what works today would tomorrow

Introduction cont'd

- The professional information carrier must learn new ways of performing old trades and must come to full understanding of the complexities of old relationships
- What better way of achieving this new realism than to fuse theory and practice?
- Hence our topic of today: *Questionnaire Construction*

Introduction cont'd

- The questionnaire is an important instrument for obtaining information from people about their perceptions, opinions, attitudes and behaviours in survey studies (Sobowale, 2008, p.46).
- The usefulness of the questionnaire is not limited to surveys only. It can be used to complement or supplement other research methodologies.

Introduction cont'd


- It can be, and it is often used, in experimentation:
- For example, when an experimental stimulus has been administered to a subject, a questionnaire may be used to measure the reaction/s.
- It can also be employed when supplementary information is necessary after a content analysis to answer questions that content analysis may be unable to answer.

Introduction cont'd

- The questionnaire can similarly be used with observation when it is necessary to answer the question 'Why'?
- The findings of any survey will, to a large extent, be as good as the questions asked in the questionnaire.
- If inadequate or ambiguous questions are asked, inadequate or ambiguous responses will be obtained.

Introduction cont'd

- Wrong analysis and misleading interpretations and, consequently, misleading reports and stories are often the natural consequence of poor data, resulting from poor information gathering procedure.
- If the questionnaire is that important to the overall success of the survey, then, proper care must go into its preparation.


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- Constructing good questions that measure variables the researcher wants to measure is one of the difficult tasks in social scientific activities.
 - Not only must the questions be adequate, they must mean to the respondent what they mean to the researcher or the meaning he wants them to mean to the respondents.

Introduction cont'd

- Questions must be simple, direct, unambiguous
- A question must not connote more than one interpretation
- It is, therefore, important that researchers define their concepts clearly so that those who read or listen to the questions can share the researcher's own meanings of the concepts used in the questions.


Introduction cont'd

- This definition of concepts is known as *operationalization*.
- Unless major concepts are carefully operationalized by formalizing the questions, each respondent would be free to give his or her own interpretations.

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- If this happens, the researcher's work would have been a total waste of time and resources. His respondents would have talked in so many “incongruous tongues” that he would not be able to make much sense of the responses he collected.

A questionnaire helps the researcher to do the following:

- Provides an opportunity for a deliberate and careful operationalization of concepts of interest;
- Makes perfectly clear what the questions demand from the respondents/interviewees;
- Ensures that the same structure is used to observe all the respondents.

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- This means that all the respondents would be answering the same questions.
 - E.g. How are you? How are things? How is life? How are you doing? Hope all is well? Etc.

Types of Survey questions


- Open-ended or unstructured questions
- Close-ended or structured questions

OPEN-ENDED

- This type of question allows the respondents to answer the question the way he/she wants with little or no restrictions at all.

Disadvantages

- Irrelevant answers
- Pre-coding of responses is impossible.
- In this case, the researcher would have to think of all possible answers to the question before he could start coding.
- He must carefully list out those possible responses so that his coder(s) could code those responses correctly.

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- The interviewee could indulge in writing an essay instead of giving succinct answers.
 - It wastes time
 - Matching a given response with an exact or close option can take time, particularly if the sample size is large or the questionnaire is voluminous.

CLOSE-ENDED

- These type of questions restrict the range of answers available to the respondents. The researcher is required to provide a set of response categories after each question from which the respondents would be expected to choose one or any number of appropriate options;

- However, as desirable as structured questionnaire is, and is often used, care must be taken to avoid the abuse of its use. Efforts must be made to ensure that respondents are not railroaded into telling you what you want to hear.
- Because it is pre-coded does not mean it is easy. It susceptible to abuse.

Advantages of Closed-ended


- Ease of coding
- Gain in coding time
- Uniformity of response


Disadvantages

- The way the researcher structures the answers may result in overlooking some response categories.
- It is usually difficult, if not impossible, to provide response categories that would suit all respondents.

Disadvantages cont'd

- This format often places the respondent in a straitjacket.
- If there is no response category that best describes his attitude or perception, he will be forced to choose one of the available categories that comes closest to the way he feels;
- This, of course, may result in inappropriate conclusions based on inappropriate answers to questions.

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- In order to ensure a high degree of reliability of the information to be collected through the questionnaire, the researcher must do the following:
 - He must make his questions clear. Ambiguous questions always elicit confusing responses from interviewees.
 - He must avoid double-barrelled questions. A double-barrelled question is a two-in-one question to which a response is demanded.

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- For example: Do you drink and smoke?
 1. Yes
 2. No

- The researcher must ensure that his respondents are quite competent to answer his questions. Consider this example:
“Recently, the Lagos State Government cabinet was reshuffled. What exactly was the reason for this?”
- Whatever any respondent may say is mere speculation. Apart from the State Governor, very few persons may be able to answer this question.

- He must make certain that the question is relevant to the experience of the respondents. If it has no place in his frame of reference, there is no way he can answer it either truthfully or meaningfully.
- He must ensure that the items in the questionnaire are short. Long, winding questions often confuse the respondent and, perhaps, the interviewer, too.

- He must avoid negative questions. Negative questions tend to be suggestive. For example, “Don’t you think...?” “Shouldn’t...?” “Would you not...?” The answers seem obvious to these types of questions.
- He must avoid biased items and terms. Terms that would portray the researcher as canvassing a particular point of view should be avoided at all costs.
- It helps if the questions are well spaced out as this enhances clarity.

- Do not try to economize space at the expense of complete information.
- It is better to list response categories vertically. That way, the respondents would be less likely to skip some responses. Let us make reference to the questionnaire in our hands.
- Any measure that can aid the completeness of answers must not be spared.


Kinds of questions in a questionnaire

- There are three ways a question can be asked in an instrument;
- These are: (i) **straightforward or direct questions** e.g. “Who do you think would win the presidential election on Saturday?” (ii) **contingent question** e.g. “Why do you think he would win? Is it because:
 - 1. He campaigns best of all
 - 2. He has the best programme?
 - 3. He has spent most money?
 - 4. His party is the most popular?
 - 5. I just feel he would win
 - 6. Other..... Please specify

- Note that the “other” category here is not “others”. You are expected to have thought of all possible answers to the question
- In a good questionnaire, it is not expected that anyone should select that option
- That is why, when you use it, you are required to request the respondent to specify that ‘other’ item

- You see that your response to the question is contingent upon the previous question of who would win the election?
- The third type is called “matrix question.”
- Matrix questions are used to pack several questions into one question

- A matrix question helps us to achieve a number of advantages
- It helps to put several questions that are unrelated together
- It helps to avoid repeating the same sentence structure many times
- It removes monotony and thus, prevents boredom
- It creates an illusion of asking or answering one question when indeed many are being asked or answered

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- It is commonly used when rating, ranking or when an assessment is required
 - However, care is needed in order not to abuse it
 - Among other benefits, matrix questions hold a special appeal for academic and professional investigators

Conclusion

- The findings of any survey will be only as good as the instrument (questionnaire) used to gather the information.
- With the availability of ICT, this instrument is now within the reach of an enterprising journalist and media organizations to use to enhance practice and challenge the affront of the new media.

THANK
YOU!

Reference

- Sobowale, I. A. (2008). *Scientific Journalism: What Tools for the Precision Journalist?* (2nd ed.). Lagos. Idosa Konsult