Tips on Survey Design

Introduction

A questionnaire is the main tool used for collecting primary data in research. How we design it shapes our research and its outcome. Overlooking its significance at the very beginning, often frustrates researchers in the end. Hence, it is important to remember the key points when designing one.

1. Who is your target audience?

Know your target audience. A questionnaire must be designed keeping in mind the target audience. As an example, the surveys that would appeal to and be comprehensible for the public would be different from what you would ask a scientific community.

For the public, the survey needs to be written in plain language, and clearly worded. In events where filling up the survey requires more subject knowledge, breaking down the questionnaire into parts and adding small briefings to each one of them can help. Adding "Don't know" as a response option becomes critical here.

2. Keep the survey simple

Simple, concise and precise, is the key. To get the desired information/ data from the research participants, the survey should be very focussed and precise in its wordings. Using a very complex survey, with a heavy overtone, too many response options, large question-matrices, with repetitions and/or too many questions, are all big turns-offs.

One of the major challenges faced in collecting quality data is keeping the audience engaged enough to get meaningful and reliable responses. Not paying attention to these areas can make them lose interest and they would either just rush to completion or quit in between.

3. Use a balanced scale

Positive---Neutral---Negative-Don't know-N/A. Scales are meant to give the respondent enough room to express themselves. Using a balanced scale, with equal positive and negative points is thus crucial.

Having more positive scale interceptions than negative, or vice versa, is like forcing the participant to respond in a certain direction. As a result, the reporting is far from being unbiased or uninfluenced. Conducting a fair research entail collecting data that reflects

the true sentiments of the respondents, uninfluenced by any external tool, neither survey design nor surveyor.

In cases where the distribution is more likely to be skewed, providing an unbalanced scale with more categories is advised. In such an event, the nature and degree of unbalance should be accounted for when analysing data.

Always make a provision for "Don't Know "and "Not applicable" in the questionnaire. Pre-empting these enables a proper understanding of results and allows capturing all possible information.

4. Avoid leading questions

A leading question can suggest the respondent to respond in a certain way, thus resulting in biased responses. One should remove any leading phrases from a question that can influence the respondent.

5. Peer reviewing the survey

Peer review of questionnaires helps keeping potential errors in check. Peers can check for any possibility of errors with the logic or wording of questions. Conducting some test interviews internally can also help reduce errors with logic or any ambiguous wording that might have been used in the survey.

6. Download a sample of filled surveys

Once the survey has been distributed, it is prudent to look at a small sample of the collected survey for any missing or misjudged logic. It is also the time when you can still tweak the questionnaire to get the desired result by making changes in the response options or scales. You may also remove any question that might be confusing the participants or is difficult to understand or with the intent to reduce the time taken to complete the survey.

In Conclusion:

Keeping the above factors (clarity, relevance and neutrality) in mind can give us fantastic results i.e. achieve the desired response rate, data that is accurate and valid, reduce missing values due to no response (caused by ambiguity in wording) and ensure participation by a larger and more diverse respondent base. This in turn would also reduce the need for extensive data cleaning and improve overall efficiency in analysis.