

ASPECTS CONCERNING THE ELABORATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE MARKETING RESEARCH

Nicolae TEODORESCU, Professor, PhD
Aurelia-Felicia STĂNCIOIU, Professor, PhD
Academy of Economic Studies Bucharest
Carmen PUIU, Lecturer, PhD
University of Craiova

Keywords: questionnaire, marketing research, market survey

Abstract: This study brings up the problems of the various questionnaires type applied in the study of market phenomena and processes and it shows the relevance of the possibilities the elaboration of the questionnaires brings in the process of achieving many category of information as well as the exigencies that should be considered when a certain type of questionnaire is selected. All these considerations should be put, of course, in the methodological and organizational general context of the planned statistical survey, in accordance with the recommendations of the theory and practice of specialty.

In the methodology of statistical surveys applicable in the marketing researches, the questionnaire holds an important place representing the key for a successful market survey next to the problems of sample and sampling.

1. Elaboration of questionnaires

In strong correlation with the problems of choosing the words and writing the questions, the elaboration of questionnaires needs the right solutions for a number of essential aspects, on which finally depends the quality of information that are to be obtain from the survey's subjects.

Elaboration of questionnaires applicable in the market surveys has multidisciplinary character, meaning that it needs knowledge from many scientific domains (economy, sociology, psychology, statistics, mathematics, IT etc.). The elaboration of a questionnaire is strictly conditioned by the existence of certain elements:

- The target and objectives of the survey;
- The place where the interviews will be taken – people's houses, commercial entities, exhibitions/fairs, enterprises/institutions etc.;
- The way to fill in the survey – with interview operators, by self administration, by phone, by mail, by electronic devices etc.;
- The available possibilities of processing;
- The costs brought by the applying of the statistical survey overall etc.

Taking into account the complexity of the work needed for elaborating the questionnaires, especially because they can be applied in the market research in a large number of different situations, it is difficult for sure to create recipes generally valid. But this does not mean there are not enough "patterns", consequences of the theory and practice in the domain, and respecting them signifies assuring the scientific character of

the process of elaborating the questionnaires. We will mention below the most significant of these.

The elaboration of questionnaires is based mainly on several fundamental concepts:

- The theory of attitudes, regarding the meaning of the answers given by the information suppliers;
- The theory of conversation, regarding the assurance of answers' validity and fidelity;
- Methods and techniques of analysis and models' creation, regarding the interpretations of the information gathered.

These concepts, to become effective in the practice of surveys, must be corroborated with the other theories which are the basis of planning and making this type of surveys. For example, it is about the theory of probabilities, which is applied in the sizing of the samples, and the theory of sampling, which solves the requests for the subjects' selection. The conversation theory has a truly special importance because each questionnaire, no matter its type, is based on a dialog situation. The problem is always to assure the cooperation between "the emitter" and "the receiver". This problem, in order to be solved in concordance with the target and the objectives, imposes certain carefulness in the elaboration of the questionnaire, because the market polls are based on conversational situation which makes exception from the every day situations. The sociology gives plenty examples of conversations in which the collaboration with the information supplier is assured from the beginning by their institutionalized character: like the teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, seller-buyer conversational situations etc. in all these cases a well-known social frame exists and it facilitates greatly the communication. The situation is entirely different in the conversation between the interview operator and the interviewed persons during the market surveys: the interviewed person can accept, but also refuse the dialog; he can answer to the question in a veridical or non veridical manner; the interviewed person is conscientious of the absence of consequences upon his interests, never mind his behavior during the interview. The communication between the interviewer and the interviewed persons is disturbed also by the instrument of gathering information, the questionnaire itself, and this is frequent reproach done to the statistical surveys based on questionnaire. This paper that gets between the two can provoke a certain inhibition of the interviewed persons, which can sometimes refuse to cooperate. But the questionnaire is irreplaceable in the process of investigating the market and the consumers, even only for the necessity to avoid confusions nag memory gaps. More than that, the questionnaire is the most eloquent proof of the social function of the interview operator, defining its status and role, in such a manner as the uniform of a ticket controller proves his quality of controlling tickets. From this perspective, we can observe the necessity to inform the interviewed person in a market survey about the conversation's aim in order to make him better understand the "role" he must fulfill. The difficulties of the conversational situation during market survey interviews are not overwhelming and insuperable. There are also advantages in these types of interviews, which must be exploited with ability by the elaboration of the questionnaire as well as the making of the interviews. A technical support, confirmed by the survey practice, exists according to which the interviewed persons feel a true inner pride to be determined by "chance" to represent the attitudes, preferences, opinions of more persons from the collectivity of reference.

There are not few the situations in which, during market surveys, the interview operators has much trouble in ending an interview, by comparison with its initiation,

because the answerers' desire to evoke many more aspects than the ones in the questionnaire. In these case strange situations occurs like the one in which the interviewed person thanks for the solicitude and not the operator as it was normal. The conversation takes place in general not only in the classical case subject-operator, but also through other modalities of interviewing (by phone, by mail, by self administration, by internet), considering each ones particularities. Therefore the adequate word choice and the correct writing of questions must be doubled by a scientific elaboration of survey questionnaires.

The persons elaborating survey questionnaire are confronted with another problem which is not easy to solve – the questions' order of succession. The experts have proven beyond doubt that the questions' succession in a questionnaire may influence the subjects' answers, especially in the situations in which are asked for instable or marginal types of information. The questions' succession in a questionnaire must in principle respect the postulate: the answer or answers to each question must not be influenced in any way by the previous development of the interview. There is logical succession of the questions, following the approached problems, so the subject may easily respond to all he is questioned about. The experts in the statistical survey domain recommend the interview to start with simpler questions, of general interest, than continue with specific questions, more difficult for the interviewed persons. It is also preferable to put the eventual "indiscreet" questions that might affect the subjects' personality to the end of the questionnaire. Following this logic, it is better that the opened questions (with free answers) to precede the closed ones (with encoded answers), so to allow the interviewed persons to structure their answers in a more adequate manner to the objectives targeted. It is useful in fact to do a logical organization chart of the questionnaire, including all the groups of questions, so its final form should present the correct successions of the questions.

The planners of the statistical surveys are compelled to solve correspondingly the length of the questionnaire, to respectively accept a certain number of questions so to answer to the desired aim and objectives, on one hand, and assure an acceptable length in time of the interviews, on the other hand, both from the "emitter" and the "receiver" point of view. The modalities to establish the questionnaire's general frame are not simple. In the large majority of investigations for implementing the market surveys the achieving more information is the main objective. This means more questions and therefore more supplementary costs in materials, money and manpower. The information cost is not the only variable in determination of a questionnaire's length. There also strictly methodological reasons:

- 1) A very long questionnaire affects in a negative manner the moral of the interviewed persons, as well as the operator's and the experts have proven it;
- 2) A shorter questionnaire on the other hand is convenient from the length point view but has little chances to generate the necessary conversational situation for the full cooperation of the subjects.

In the longer questionnaires' case we must expect a relatively big proportion of no answers as well as a doubtful quality of the gathered information - inconvenient that can be partially eliminated consequent to the conclusions of the pilot survey. It is difficult to establish general principles for determine the optimal length of interviews, the problem being similar to the determination of the sample size: a shorter questionnaire and a bigger sample are desirable because they offer more precise results. These methodological requests must be strongly related to the other aspects the

planning, organizing and making a statistical survey suppose. When the information necessities impose relatively long questionnaires - situation specific to omnibus type researches, which by definition approach a large number of themes – it is applied the interview fragmentation technique with relaxing/ funny questions, aiming to relaxing the subject and prepare him for a new set of questions, different from the previous ones.

The difficulties in determining the optimal length of questionnaires are greater in the unique surveys' case than in researches done on panels. In the before mentioned case, the subjects are accustomed with the interviews, they have already establish a behavior of cooperation, they are familiar with the fill-in techniques, they are not suspicious, the no answer percent is very low – in a word they are more suitable to provide valid information even to longer questionnaires.

The questions' order of succession and the questionnaires length must assure the scientific character and the objectivity of the gathered information, by the double role of these instruments: all the persons interviewed are put in the same conversational situation; the standard system of notification allows the comparison of the processed information. The questionnaires must be elaborated so to fulfill completely two fundamental conditions:

- a) to be valid, respectively to have the capacity to give information relevant for the followed objectives;
- b) to be true, in other words to produce the same results by repetition, or results that varies in predictable limits admitted by the theory and practice of specialty.

Naturally, the questions' order and their number are decisive for answering those criteria, if the choosing of words and writing the questions were made scientifically. These two priorities of the questionnaire must be periodically verified before, in the pilot survey, or after, during information processing. The verification modalities of the validity and fidelity of questionnaires are exhaustively described in the specialized literature, so we shall not insist upon them. We point out the tendency manifested sometimes by the statistical surveys organizers to treat in a less rigorous manner the testing of the mentioned above properties, ignoring the negative consequences on the process of information's capitalization.

The proper development of the survey questionnaires must take into account the necessity to present them in the most adequate graphic form. Practice proved the questionnaire's graphics must facilitate:

- filling in the questionnaire (by the operator, by the interviewed person);
- preparing the questionnaire for processing (codification, logical correlation);
- putting the information on processing supports (cards, tapes, disks etc);

Indifferent of the length, every questionnaire must be presented in such a way to result with clarity who and to what questions must answer, especially when the inclusion of “filter” questions (for separation) was imposed. In the final graphic form of the questionnaire is common to include elements like: the institution doing the statistical survey; information concerning the interview (day, hour, place, time etc.); certification for making the interview (the operator's signature) and preparing it for processing. The practical experience also showed it is useful to introduce in the questionnaire some mentions about the confidentiality of the information given by the interviewed persons.

The complex process of elaborating questionnaires for the market surveys is organically linked to the other methodological and organizational problems brought up by the scientific basing of any statistical survey. In this way the questionnaire has a very

important role in sizing the quantity of the sample (subjects) from which information will be collected. On the other hand, it is necessary to reconsider periodically the contents of certain concepts, liable to change in time, consequent to the evolutions of the consumers' behavior. For example, the concept "acquisition intents" had a certain meaning at the beginning of the era of assuring all households with appliances and nowadays he has received a more nuanced content - we talk about "acquisition intents" only when:

- we want a second or third product of the same kind (cars, TV sets etc),
- we want some modern, improved goods ready to replace the used morally or physically ones(automat washing machines, microwave ovens, kitchen robots etc.);
- we want the newest products from the technological point of view (DVD player, TV LCD etc.).

Such kind of aspects regarding the dynamics of behavioral processes must find an adequate solution in the testing operations of the survey questionnaires, the pilot inquiries being the only modality to find out the degree in which a certain questionnaire is able to answer in realistic manner to the informational needs of the experts. The pilot inquiries are also useful for structuring the answers to the open questions from the survey questionnaires, meaning that it offers lists of answers which, based on their frequency, give the possibility to encode the answering variants in accordance with the language and the expression manner of the interviewed persons.

For the above mentioned reasons, the pilot inquiry is irreplaceable in order to elaborate good questionnaires - instruments to collect information answering the requirements imposed by the specialized theory and practice, as well as to the needs for acknowledgement of the complex behavioral processes associated to the carriers of request for consumers' products and services.

2. Types of questionnaires

The questionnaires conducted in the market research are meant to answer a large area of aims and objectives, depending on the information requests of the producers and retailers of household appliances and services. Consequently, there is a large diversity of questionnaires, accordingly to the features of different survey types in which they are used.

Questionnaires can be classified by many criteria, some mentioned below:

- The nature of the question (quantitative, qualitative);
- The period of frequency (once or repeatedly, in panel based researches);
- The actual contents of the observation program (specialized, omnibus) ;
- The type of question (open – with free answers, closed – with predetermined answers);
- The entity under observation (person, household, economic units etc.);
- The place where they are filled in (home, commercial units, exhibitions, enterprises or institutions, in the street or public places etc.);
- Another criterion of great practical importance is added to the above ones, the method of data collection adopted. According to this criterion there are two types of questionnaires:
 - a) Questionnaires filled in by the interview operator and
 - b) Questionnaires filled in by the interviewed persons.

In the first case, but in the second as well there are many variants that the questionnaires' designers must take into account in order to assure the conversational situation absolutely necessary for a good cooperation between the "emitter" and the "receiver". For example, the interview operators can ask directly for the answers to the questionnaires, in the subject's presence or on the phone. It is obvious that the applied questionnaires are different in these two situations (number and length of questions, questions' order, the observation program degree of complexity etc.). When the questionnaires are fill in by self administration, many modalities can be used (frequently by mail, but also sharing and gathering afterwards the questionnaires in commercial units, exhibitions, enterprises, institutions etc.), but they induce many particularities. The essence is that the type of questionnaire must be optimally adequate to the actual conditions in which the subjects give the information.

A special mention must be made concerning the self administration of questionnaires through modern informatics' devices, from the electronic computers configuration. We are speaking about statistical or opinion surveys of telematic, respectively based on video-questionnaires, their questions appearing successively on terminals' screen, as the interviewed person answers. The video-questionnaire must be conceived in such a way to allow the easily filling in by the subject, the questions' simplicity and concision being far greater than those of the questionnaires applied by self administration during the common surveys. The persons under research write on the keyboard of the terminal one or more numbers or letters, corresponding to the answer requested by the question, fact which recommends the video-questionnaire to be mostly made from "close" questions, with predetermined answers.

REFERENCES

1. Antoine J., (1981) – „La collecte des informations dans les enquetes par sondages”, *R.F.M.*, nr.3;
2. Chevy G., (1962)— *Pratique des enquetes statistiques*, Paris;
3. Demetrescu M. C., (1971) – *Metode cantitative în marketing*, Editura Științifică, București;
4. Festinger L., Katz D. (1973) — *Les methodes de recherche dans les sciences sociale*, Paris;
5. Franzkowiak M., Korber P. (1985)— „Video-cestionnaire: telematique et Marketing”, *R.F.M.*, nr. 1;
6. Kotler, Ph., Saunders, J., Armstrong, G., Wong, V. (1998) - *Principiile marketingului*, Ed. Teora, București;
7. Stoetzel J., Girard A. (1971)— *Sondajele de opinie publică*, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, București.