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Fundamentals of Survey Research Methodology in Social Sciences Research in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper provides a complete review of survey research, explaining what it is and how it is used in Social Sciences. It looks at the different approaches used in survey research, going through each step from developing the questions to collecting and analyzing data. It also evaluates both the benefits and the drawbacks of survey research, such as the ability to reach a large number of people efficiently and the possible issues like lack of flexibility and difficulty in gathering in-depth information. Important aspects of survey designs, such as selecting a sample, deciding on the size of the sample, and choosing the method of data collection (like phone calls, face-to-face interviews, mail, or online tools), are discussed. It highlights factors that need to be considered for accuracy, grouping people into different categories, and managing resources. The study also stresses the need for clear and unbiased questions, using the right types of questions (like open-ended or closed-ended ones), and methods to reduce the influence of personal opinions on responses. It also emphasizes the importance of following ethical standards, such as getting informed consent and keeping data private. It recommends ways to improve the quality of survey research, such as using random or stratified sampling methods, keeping questions neutral, offering incentives to participants, combining surveys with qualitative methods for more depth, and using technology for better efficiency. By tackling these challenges, researchers can make their surveys more accurate and dependable, ensuring that the results truly contribute to academic research, policy decisions, and social programs.

Keywords: *Fundamentals, Survey, Research, Methodology and Research.*

Introduction

Methodology refers to the systematic and theoretical analysis of the methods used in a particular field of study. It involves examining the theories and principles that guide the use of specific techniques or approaches in a subject area. Typically, methodology includes concepts like paradigms, theoretical models, stages, and both quantitative and qualitative methods. (Irny & Rose, 2005). A methodology does not provide direct solutions; it is different from a method. Instead, it gives the theoretical background that helps understand which method or set of methods can be applied to a specific situation to achieve a particular result.

Flick (2022) states that the process of research began due to the human desire to understand and interact with the environment and natural world. To do this, people rely on their experiences and reasoning, as well as on knowledge from authority figures outside their immediate surroundings. Experience and authority are major sources of hypotheses, which are usually based on common sense and accidental events. Therefore, it is not valid to draw conclusions simply from events. Research based on experience and authority is considered unscientific. Research, on the other hand, is grounded in scientific reasoning, which may be inductive, deductive, or both. Research combines both experience and reasoning, and it is the most effective way to discover truth, particularly in the field of Social Sciences.

Survey research is an essential part of Social Sciences,

offering a structured way to gather information to understand human behavior, societal trends, and the effects of policies. It is often chosen by researchers for its versatility and efficiency in exploring opinions, attitudes, and behaviors among different groups of people. The basic elements of survey research methodology include designing the survey, administering it, and analyzing the results to ensure that the findings are accurate and trustworthy (Howell).

The fast growth of technology and data analysis has significantly improved the potential of survey research, allowing researchers to reach larger groups of people and analyze complex data sets more precisely (Isaac 1997).

According to Singh (2023) despite the common use of survey research it has challenges, such as bias, low response rates, and ethical issues. Solving these challenges requires a strong understanding of the principles and practices of survey methodology, as well as a commitment to maintaining scientific standards. This presentation aims to simplify survey research methodology, highlighting its basic ideas, real-world uses, strengths, and limitations, while providing important tools to help design and carry out effective surveys.

Statement of the Problem

Survey research is utilized to address inquiries that have emerged, to resolve identified issues, to evaluate requirements and establish objectives, to ascertain the achievement of particular goals, to create benchmarks for subsequent comparisons, to examine temporal trends, and fundamentally, to delineate the existing state, quantity, and context (Christian, 2023).

Isaac and Michael (1997) delineated three major characteristics of survey research. First, it is used to explain certain characteristics of a population in numbers, usually by examining how different aspects are related to each other. Second, the information collected comes from people, thus it is subjective. Lastly, survey research uses a small group of people to make generalizations about the total group. In survey research, independent and dependent variables delineate the study's parameters; nevertheless, the researcher cannot directly manipulate these variables.

Before starting the survey, the researcher needs to predict a model that outlines the expected relationships between these variables. Even though survey research is useful, it faces criticism in Social Sciences due to issues like sampling errors, bias in how variables are measured, and low response rates. The rise of online surveys has introduced new challenges, such as the digital divide and concerns about data security. Additionally, the reliability and accuracy of survey results are often questioned, especially when surveys are not well planned or executed. The issue is worsened by the lack of standardized practices and limited knowledge among researchers about advanced survey techniques. This highlights the importance of seminars and training sessions to help social scientists develop the necessary skills and understanding to conduct high-quality survey research. This paper is meant to fill this gap and ensure that survey data can effectively contribute to academic discussions, policy-making, and social actions.

Objective

The goal of this paper is to provide researchers with a thorough understanding of survey research, including its definition, purpose, and use in Social Sciences in Nigeria and at large. It will examine the different frameworks used in survey research by highlighting all the stages involved, from creating the survey questions to collecting and analyzing the data. It will also evaluate the advantages and possible downsides of survey research, supported by recent literature, while addressing the ethical concerns that come with survey research, such as obtaining informed consent and maintaining data privacy.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative design, relying on existing data from multiple sources. Choosing secondary data was appropriate because the aim was to synthesize current knowledge rather than generate fresh information. The study employed thematic synthesis to uncover recurring themes about the significance of survey design in behavioral science, its applications, and the challenges encountered. Thus, diverse perspectives were integrated into a coherent narrative that links global trends with the Nigerian context.

Survey strength

Kataicas (2009) * asserts that survey research possesses numerous advantages relative to other research methodologies. Surveys are a good way to get information from a lot of people. They can get information on a lot of different things, like beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and facts. Surveys are also a good way to get demographic information about the sample, such as its age, gender, and race. They can also give us information about things we can't see, such as how people feel about politics or their self-esteem.

Another strength of survey research is its ability to cover large areas, such as entire countries, using sampling techniques to ensure the population is adequately represented in a smaller sample. Surveys are also preferred by some respondents due to their unobtrusive nature and the convenience of responding at their own pace. Surveys allow researchers to collect information on a wide variety of variables and can be conducted efficiently.

They are relatively inexpensive, require less time and effort compared to other methods like experiments or interviews, and are useful for making generalizations from the sample to the population.

However, Michael et al. (1997) stated some weaknesses of surveys.

One limitation is that they are not suitable for situations where an in-depth understanding of the historical context is necessary. Surveys are also inflexible in that once the questions are set, they cannot be changed without affecting all respondents. This can lead to confusion if the questions are not clear. Additionally, respondents may misreport data for various reasons, such as social desirability or personal bias, which can affect the accuracy of the results.

Another weakness is the lack of depth in survey responses: Because of the standardized format, surveys often cannot capture the nuances of how people truly feel or think about a topic. This can make it difficult to understand the underlying reasons behind people's attitudes or behaviors.

Survey design involves two main steps.

The first step is creating a sampling plan, which entails deciding how to choose the sample from the population, figuring out the right sample size, and selecting the mode of administration—such as online, phone, or mail surveys. Establishing methods for estimating population characteristics from the sample data and evaluating the accuracy of these estimates constitute the second phase. The needs of data users and the resources available for conducting the survey should be considered when designing the survey.

The variables to be measured, the required degree of accuracy, and any resource constraints should all be determined by the data users. Based on their experience, survey respondents could offer suggestions regarding viable alternative sampling techniques. Sample selection is influenced by the population's size, homogeneity, kind of sample media, cost, and required level of accuracy (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Individuals picked for the sample must be chosen at random; their chances of being included should be equal or known. Salant and Dillman (1994) pointed out that it's critical to characterize the target population as precisely as possible prior to choosing a sample. However, determining the precise population is frequently impossible. Attewell and Rule (1991) advised employing a theoretical sample in these circumstances. Organizations that exhibit the traits the researcher is interested in are purposefully chosen for a theoretical sample. Individuals within the sample can be chosen at random to obtain a general idea, even though these samples are not generated at random.

The determination of sample size is based on five key factors:

1. The level of precision desired
2. The statistical power needed
3. The researcher's ability to access the study participants
4. The extent to which the population can be divided into different groups
5. The choice of units of analysis

Whether the random sample may be separated into subgroups based on factors like size, sector, or technological proficiency is another factor in determining the sample size (Attewell & Rule, 1991). A researcher can connect these disparities in technology to variations in the consequences of those technologies by dissecting the technologies employed in various businesses. Salant and Dillman (1994) noted that in order to guarantee the necessary degree of accuracy when employing stratified samples, the sample size must be greater.

The final factor in determining the sample size is selecting the right units of analysis.

The researcher must determine whether the responses to the survey will be individuals, offices, or entire companies (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993). Additionally, workgroups may be helpful analytical units, according to Attewell and Rule (1991). A team can lessen the impact of individual attitudes and behaviors by combining individual responses. It is crucial to explain the variations across workgroups in such study. Salant and Dillman (1994) also noted that the resources available have an impact on the survey method selection.

Written surveys require minimal resources (like staff, time, and money) and are best for getting confidential information. Because they are relatively inexpensive, they produce less sampling error. There is also less chance of errors from interviewers or respondents because there is no direct contact (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Written surveys offer the most flexibility in the speed and order of responses. These surveys can be sent by mail or electronically. In some cases, they are handed out in person to a group of people to assess a recent event. This method is often used in military research to evaluate exercises after they take place. While this approach gives immediate results, the fact that it is not voluntary can lead to biased responses. A downside of written surveys is the potential for certain types of error. For example, they can have coverage errors when population lists are incomplete or outdated. They are also likely to face non-response issues. People who are less educated, illiterate, or have disabilities are especially less likely to respond (Isaac & Michael, 1997). Written surveys can also lead to bias if the person

filling out the survey refers to someone else. Finally, they may suffer from item non-response, where some questions are either skipped accidentally or intentionally (Salant & Dillman, 1994).

Telephone and in-person interviews are examples of verbal surveys. In-person interviews are highly adaptable and can record body language, gestures, and voice tone. By observing the respondent's body language, an experienced interviewer can learn more (Isaac & Michael, 1997). When the precise population is unknown or when respondents are unlikely to reply to written surveys, in-person interviews are useful (Salant & Dillman, 1994). They are also useful for contacting the right respondents and for lengthy or complicated questions.

Standards for Good Survey Questions At the core, “a good question results in answers that are reliable and accurate measures of the information we want to gather” (Fowler, 1995).

Vocabulary used in survey questions should correspond to the target respondents' educational background (McIntyre, 1999). Both the researcher and the respondent should be able to grasp the question and the available responses (Fowler, 1995). Any ambiguity or imprecise sentences that could lead to misunderstandings should be avoided in the phrasing (Browne, 1994). It is not appropriate to mix survey questions so that a respondent might select "yes" for one section and "no" for another.

Effective survey questions should be simple to complete and voluntary (Fowler, 1995). According to McIntyre (1999), the inquiries must be morally and respectfully directed. The researcher should refrain from asking questions that presume the respondent is knowledgeable about the subject or that request information that the respondent does not have or is unable to supply (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Additionally, you should refrain from asking personal inquiries, making biased claims, or asking complex calculations.

Types of Survey Questions

Open-ended Questions: Open-ended survey questions let respondents answer in their own words.

These inquiries are particularly helpful when deeper insights are required and can reveal concepts that would not otherwise be brought up (Salant & Dillman, 1994). They are also helpful when the researcher is unable to provide precise responses because of a lack of knowledge about the subject. Answering open-ended questions takes more time because they need more thought (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Analyzing the answers to open-ended questions is likewise more difficult. Lastly, given the variety of reactions, it can be challenging to draw a single conclusion or plan of action.

When the respondent is requested to choose from a list of predefined possibilities, the question is said to be closed-ended. Both respondents and researchers frequently find it easier to respond to and analyze these questions. Closed-ended inquiries come in various varieties. Closed-ended questions with ordered choices are the first kind. In this instance, the respondent is requested to rank a set of possibilities in a particular order. Numerical ranges and Likert scales are two examples. When assessing attitudes or beliefs on a continuum, these kinds of questions are helpful. The closed-ended question with unordered choices is the second kind of closed-ended inquiry. In this case, the respondent is requested to choose one choice from a list without a set sequence. Multiple-choice questions are an example of this kind of question. The researcher should make sure that all potential answers are covered by the options offered. Partial closed-ended questions are the third category of closed-ended questions. In this instance, the respondent is prompted to type "other" if none of the alternatives apply or to choose one option from a list. Data on particular choices or preferences can be gathered with the use of this kind of question. According to Salant and Dillman (1994), when given this kind of question, the majority of respondents often choose just one choice. As a result, it is crucial to make sure the inquiry is precise and unambiguous. According to Fowlie (1995), questions should be carefully crafted to prevent conflicting meanings. Closed-ended questions also include those that ask respondents to rate individuals, locations, and events. The respondent may be asked to choose from pre-provided answers or give a succinct response to these questions. A different kind of closed-ended question gauges answers to concepts, evaluations, and suggestions. Respondents are asked to weigh their opinions against the concepts put forth in these questions. It is important to make sure the question is unambiguous and does not permit more than one interpretation. Conversely, open-ended questions enable participants to give thorough responses in their own words. Although these questions yield richer data, they are more difficult to interpret. Each sort of question has a distinct function in the process of gathering data. Researchers can create better surveys and gather more precise data by being aware of these kinds (Wright, 2022).

The subject of survey research is a field of study, covering various aspects of survey research, including its purpose, methodology, and implications. It serves as a valuable tool for gathering subject-based responses from participants in research projects. A subject refers to a research participant, whose responses can provide insights into their beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. Survey research having anticipated talent and efficiency in collecting and analyzing these responses. This field of study involves a wide range of techniques used in researching complex challenges. These

techniques aim to collect data from subjects and then use that data in research. Subject-based responses are seen as an important method for gathering field-based data, covering various aspects of survey research. In research, responses reflect the personal views, opinions, and experiences of those being studied (Kumar, 2023).

Conclusion

This paper involves more than just collecting subject responses; it encompasses both the study of survey methods and the collection of data in various formats for research. Understanding the subject's perspective is essential to effective research. For example, the choice to respond to a survey question provides valuable information, ensuring that only relevant data is collected. This field of study also provides a framework for analyzing responses from a broad range of subjects, supporting comprehensive results. Understanding the subject's answer is essential to effective research. For example, the choice to respond to a survey question provides valuable information, ensuring that only relevant data is collected. This field of study also provides a framework for analyzing responses from a broad range of subjects, supporting comprehensive results.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are made:

1. Use random or stratified sampling to boost sample representativeness and reduce bias.
2. Ensure questions are clear, concise, and unbiased to prevent response bias.
3. Provide incentives to respondents to increase response rates and data quality.
4. Combine surveys with qualitative methods like interviews for a more comprehensive understanding.
5. Utilize online surveys and automated analysis tools to cut costs and enhance efficiency.

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