

CHAPTER 3

THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF QUESTIONS



Structured and semi-structured questionnaires are made up of three different types of questions depending on the type of information which is being collected.

A CLASSIFICATION OF QUESTIONS

| TYPE OF QUESTION | INFORMATION SOUGHT | TYPES OF SURVEYS WHERE USED |
|------------------|--|---|
| Behavioural | Factual information on what the respondent is, does or owns. Also the frequency with which certain actions are carried out. Where people live. | Surveys to find out market size, market shares, awareness, usage rates. |
| Attitudinal | What people think of something. Their image and ratings of things. Why they do things. | Image and attitude surveys. Brand mapping studies. Surveys to help build market share |
| Classification | Information that can be used to group respondents to see how they differ one from the other - such as age, gender, social class, location of household, type of house, family composition. | All surveys. |



Behavioural questions

Behavioural questions seek to find out what people (or companies) do. For example, do people go to the cinema, how often do they go, what type of cinema do they visit, who do they go with etc. They determine people's actions in terms of what they have eaten (or drunk), bought, used, visited, seen, read or heard. Behavioural questions record *facts* and not matters of opinion.

Behavioural questions address the following:

- Have you ever
- Do you ever
- Who do you know
- When did you last
- Which do you do most often
- Who does it
- How many
- Do you have
- In what way do you do it
- In the future will you

Attitudinal questions

Attitudes are opinions or basic beliefs which people have about the products they buy, the companies they deal with and it is attitudes that motivates people in their actions. Attitudes on a subject could be misguided and wrong, but this is hardly relevant since it is *perceptions* which count. The attitudes which people have will guide the way they act.

The way people react to situations depends on their attitudes and so they can be deemed to be favourable or unfavourable. Researchers need to measure these to find out what disposition is held and how it could affect the buying decision.

Matters of opinion are collected by attitudinal questions. As the term suggests, these questions seek to uncover people's beliefs and thoughts on a subject.



Attitudinal questions address the following:

- What do you think of
- Why do you
- Do you agree or disagree
- How do you rate
- Which is best (or worst) for

Attitudes or opinions are always important in surveys as they are pointers as to people's motivations and therefore their likely buying habits. However, whereas answers to behavioural questions can be assumed to be correct (unless someone is deliberately lying or the question is stretching the bounds of their ability to answer), answers to attitudinal questions may need considerable interpretation.

Take for example a question which seeks to find out the likelihood of buying a new product. The sample may be asked to sample the product and state whether or not they would buy it. To gauge the likelihood of buying the product, responses could be collected on a five point scale running from very likely through to very unlikely, ie:

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Quite unlikely
- Very unlikely

Assuming that 20% of the people interviewed said that they were very likely to buy the product and 30% said that they were quite likely to buy it, what would the true proportions be that would make the purchase? The chances are that when people have to part with money to buy the product, the proportions will fall dramatically. It would not be surprising to find that only half the people who showed some disposition to buying the product at the time of the interview (saying they were very or quite likely) would actually do so. Thus, unlike behavioural questions which collect factual information, attitudinal questions need interpretation to make sense.

On the other hand, there are circumstances when conditioning and advertising leads to an increase in the disposition to buy with the result that the proportions who said that they were likely to buy the product at the time of the interview are grossly understated.

One of the best means of assessing the relevance and meaning of attitudinal questions is by reference to benchmarks. By way of example, respondents taking part in a customer satisfaction survey may be asked to rate a company on a scale. For example:

And now I would like you to tell me what you think of a couple of suppliers of XXX (a product) which you know. I would like you to give me a score out of 5 where 5 is very good and 1 is very poor. **(SCORE 6 FOR DON'T KNOW, WON'T SAY)**
Can I start with **(NAME THE COMPANY)** What do you think of this company for

What does it mean if a company achieves an average score of 3.7 for the quality of its products and 4.2 for its deliveries? The researcher would interpret the results, comparing the scores of one company with another, but also using the 'normative' data built up over many similar surveys almost certainly in a variety of markets. Thus, besides saying where a company stands one to another, experience from many other surveys may enable the researcher to say that:

| | |
|------------|--|
| 4.0 to 5 | is a score which may be expected by a market leader |
| 3.5 to 3.9 | is a score which is acceptable but needs improvement |
| 3.0 to 3.4 | is a score which is bordering on the acceptable but needs considerable improvement |
| <3.0 | is a score which in most customer surveys would be deemed unacceptable |

These interpretations are typical of the problems faced by researchers who have to unravel the answers to attitudinal questions.

Attitudinal questions must be couched in a manner that is meaningful to respondents. This could determine the language used in the question, whether it is asked using words in a scale (a verbal rating scale), numbers (a numerical rating scale) or a list of statements where the respondent is asked to agree or



disagree or rank them in order. Examples of scalar questions are given in Chapter 5.

Determining the terminology for attitudinal questions could well involve some depth interviewing before the questionnaire is designed. For example, imagine a study which aims to collect people's attitudes to cars. What question could be asked to determine the level of interest held in cars? With the benefit of earlier depth research the researcher may have learned that a barometer of interest is to ask people how much they like talking about cars. Thus, a question which could be used to classify or segment people, and using terminology which is relevant to the subject, could be:

- Q. On a scale from 1 to 5 would you say that you like talking about cars a lot or a little? A score of 5 means you like talking about cars a lot and a score of 1 means you like talking about cars a little.

This seems obvious when it is pointed out but it need not necessarily occur to the researcher at the time of designing the questionnaire and without the benefit of qualitative research.

Think now of technical subjects which may well be far beyond the everyday experience of the researcher. In these circumstances the researcher needs detailed background on the subject, from someone with an expert view, before attempting to design attitudinal (or indeed behavioural) questionnaires.

Classification questions

The third group of questions are those used to *classify* the information once it has been collected. Classification questions are required to check that the correct quota of people or companies have been interviewed. They also can be used to validate the sample at the end of the study and make comparisons with the universe as a whole. Not least they are used to compare and contrast the different answers of one group of respondents with those of another. Usually the information that is required for a classification question is behavioural (factual).

Typical classification questions provide a *profile of the respondents* - by finding out their age, their sex, their social class, where they live, their marital status, the type of house they live in, the number of people in their family etc.

There are a number of standard classification questions which crop up again and again in market research surveys. These are:

•**Sex.** There can be no other classifications other than male and female.

•**Household status.** Most researchers classify adults into three groups which are:

- Head of household ()
- Housewife ()
- Other adult ()

•**Marital status.** This is usually asked by simply saying "Are you"

- Single ()
- Married ()
- Widowed ()
- Divorced ()
- Separated ()

•**Social class.** This is a classification peculiar to UK market researchers whereby respondents are pigeonholed according to the occupation of the head of the household. Thus, it combines the important attributes of income, education and work status. Attempts to move market researchers to classifications according to income group (as is more common in the US) or by lifestyle grouping, have been slow to catch on.

In summary they are:

- A-higher managerial, administrative or professional
- B-intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
- C1-Supervisory, clerical, junior administrative or professional
- C2-skilled manual workers
- D-semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
- E-state pensioners, widows, casual and lowest grade workers.

For most practical purposes the social classes groupings are reduced to just four:

- AB ()
- C1 ()
- C2 ()
- DE ()

It is not sufficient to simply have boxes (or numbers) on the questionnaire for the interviewer to tick or circle to indicate the social class of the respondent. There should be a line to write in the full occupation since this allows someone at a later stage to see that the response is correct when the completed questionnaires are being checked or coded.

•*Industrial occupation.* Researchers may also want to record the type of firm where the respondent works. In theory it is possible to classify people according to which slot their company falls into within the Standard Industrial Classification (referred to normally as SIC). Researchers often condense the many divisions of the SIC into something which suits their convenience. This could be as simple as:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Primary (farming, forestry, fishing quarrying etc) | () |
| Manufacturing | () |
| Retailing and distribution | () |
| Service industries | () |
| Public service | () |
| Armed forces | () |
| Education | () |
| Professions (doctors, dentists, architects etc) | () |

In a consumer survey, it may be relevant to establish the level of employment of the respondent. For example:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Working full time (over 30 hours a week) | () |
| Working part-time (8-30 hours a week) | () |
| Housewife (full time at home) | () |
| Student (full time) | () |
| Retired | () |
| Temporarily unemployed (but seeking work) | () |
| Permanently unemployed (eg chronically sick, independent means etc) | () |

•*Number of employees.* The size of the firm in which the respondent works can be important to record - especially in an industrial market research study. Here the conventional classification is:

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| 0 - 9 | () |
| 10 - 24 | () |
| 25 - 99 | () |
| 100 - 249 | () |
| 250+ | () |

•*Location.* The location in which the respondent lives is usually recorded. Depending on the scope of the survey, this can be according to one of the Standard Regions of the UK, ITV reception areas or even a simple split into North, Midlands and South.

•*Neighbourhood.* Recently there has been a move to group people according to the type of neighbourhood in which they live. These are often referred to as ACORN or PINPOINT classifications after the market research companies which devised them. They group people into neighbourhood types such as:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Agricultural areas | () |
| Modern family houses, higher incomes | () |
| Older houses of intermediate status | () |
| Poor quality older terraced housing | () |
| Better off council estates | () |
| Less well off council estates | () |
| Poorest council estates | () |
| Multi-racial areas | () |
| High status, non-family areas | () |
| Affluent suburban housing | () |
| Better off retirement areas | () |
| Unclassified | () |

It should be clear from this consideration of classification questions that the researcher can include many different questions in order to analyse and control the sample. However, a cautionary note is necessary since the purpose of the classification questions may not be fully understood by respondents and there can be many refusals to co-operate in answering them. Rather than build in as many classification questions as possible (just in case they could be useful), the researcher should only include those which are really necessary. Apply the *relevance test* first! Is the information nice to have or necessary to have? What will be done with the information when it has been collected? If the question fails on either of these two counts, it is questionable that it should be asked.

Open ended, closed questions and scales

A further variation on behavioural, attitudinal or classification questions is that they can be *open ended* or closed. *Scales* are a special type of closed question.

Open ended questions, as the name suggests, leave the respondent free to give any answer. Although the question may be asked in open ended fashion,

the researcher may have given thought to the possible answers and have listed a number of alternatives on the questionnaire. The respondent would be unaware of these and they are there for the greater efficiency of completing the questionnaire and the subsequent data processing. This would be an *open ended question* but with a *closed answer*.

The second style of question is called a *closed question* and here the replies have been anticipated so that the respondent is asked to choose one or other of the fixed response categories. The pre-defined answers which the researcher has built in to the question will have been worked out by common sense, earlier qualitative research or by a pilot study. The responses would normally be read out (or shown on a card). Thus, closed questions are usually also *prompted questions*.

The third style of question is a *scale* - a special type of closed question. Scales could use either words, numbers or even diagrams to find out people's attitudes and behaviour.

The box below shows the combinations of types of question which could be employed in a questionnaire.

A Classification Of Question Types

| | Open ended question | | Closed question | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Behavioural question | Free response | Fixed response | Fixed response | |
| Attitudinal question | Free response | Fixed response | Fixed response | Scalar response |
| Classification question | Free response | Fixed response | Fixed response | |