

Use of Questionnaire in Geographical Research & Studies

Abstract

Geographical research is a specific type of research that aims at understanding the geographical occurrences through various sources under a set process of study that involves defining the problem, going through the literature related to the issue under consideration, observation of the site, field survey, measuring the site in order to arrive at findings, collection, classification and analysis of the data, and finally developing concepts and theories.

In Geographical research, various traditional and modern techniques of data collection are used in order to collect primary data. Some of them are-observation, interview, field survey and questionnaire. Each of these tools and techniques is reliable in itself and is capable of supplying required primary data to the study makers.

However, questionnaire as one of the most reliable techniques of data collection remains the most popular technique of primary data collection. Questionnaire enables the geographers to study a large population living on a wide geographical area. With both the close-ended and open-ended questions in the questionnaire, the researcher is able to explore more and more about the problem being studied. The questions can be asked through face-to-face interaction, telephone or through mail to the sampled units associated with the study area.

The paper surveys the concept of survey research and its importance in geography. The paper especially discusses the use of questionnaire technique in geographical field surveys that are conducted by the geographers to collect primary data from the sampled units. The paper is associated with the human geography, and has much to reflect on the use of questionnaire in the studies associated with Human Geography, the core branch of Geography that studies the relationship between humans and earth.

Keywords: Research Tools, Techniques, Sources of Data, Questionnaire, Interview, Field Survey.

Introduction

Physical and Human Geography are two core branches of Geography that makes it binding on the associated geographers to study the problems and occurrences associated with them. In the studies of both Physical and Human Geography, both primary and secondary data are used, and various tools and techniques of data collection are used. Secondary data that is available in the various traditional and modern sources enable the researchers to develop an understanding of the problem by going through the available literature on the theme, while the primary data provides new knowledge to the researchers.

Questionnaire is probably the most popular tool of primary data collection in geographical studies. As we know, most of the geographical research is survey research for which field survey is suggested on the part of the geographer. Field survey is conducted undergoing and following certain specific steps. The purpose of field survey is to visualize and see the problem and to discover facts about the problem.

Questionnaire is a set of questions encompassing the various aspects of the problem to be studied. The questions are prepared and compiled by the researcher himself in a way that the required information is collected. The major types of questionnaires for geographical studies include structured questionnaires and the un-structured questionnaires or non-structured or semi-structured ones.

In structured questionnaires, using the inductive approach, the researcher prepares the questions quite systematically and scientifically allowing the respondents to answer as per the desire of the researcher,

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while on the other hand, in the non-structured or semi-structured questionnaires, the questions are found scattered, with no typed system.

The close-ended questions are those for which certain alternatives or options are given just below the question, and the respondents are allowed to pick out the most appropriate answer from the given options. On the contrary, the open-ended questions are those in which nothing is binding on the part of the researcher, and the respondents are at liberty to answer the questions in any way they please. In other words, options or alternative answers are not given in case the questions are open-ended.

Both the close-ended questions and the open-ended questions have their own importance. On the one hand, the close-ended questions facilitate the answering through the given options, while on the other hand, the open-ended questions allows the respondents to feel comfortable while answering.

Like all other techniques of data collection in geographical research, questionnaire too is both advantageous and disadvantageous. The greatest advantage of the questionnaire in geographical studies is that it allows the researcher to a vast geographical area and the population that belongs to it. On the contrary, the worst disadvantage of questionnaire is that the answers given by the respondents are generally not reliable.

However, despite much criticism of the questionnaire technique, it remains particular. It will not be wrong to comment on it that so long as there is earth, geography and geographical studies, researchers will continue to adopt questionnaire in order to collect primary data during the field survey of the problems associated with human geography because through this technique the geographer is able to make the study of behavior and attitudes of humans living in the study area.

Review of Literature

Ira M Sheskin (1985), in the study *Survey Research for Geographers*, observes that the use of survey research techniques by geographers is widespread, but discussion of these techniques in the geographical literature is limited. The study serves to the geographers who go for the surveys as a reference and as a guide to the research literature. The study produces an overview of objectives, ethics and alternatives, the main types of social survey that include personal interviews, postal, telephone and intercept surveys. Not only this, probability and non-probability sampling designs are also explained in it, and there is a separate chapter on questionnaire development that concentrates on types of questions, question-construction and questionnaire format.

C.J. Dixon and Bridget Leach, in *Questionnaires and Interviews in Geographical Research*, observe that Surveys take two main forms, for questions can be put by an interviewer and the answers recorded on an interview schedule which sets out the questions and provides room for the answers, or a questionnaire can be filled in by the respondents themselves. This handbook outlines the use of these two specialised techniques, interview and questionnaire surveys.

Petra M Boynton etc. (2004), in *Selecting, designing, and developing your questionnaire*, write that Questionnaires offer an objective means of collecting information about people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour.

D. K. Bird (2009), in *The use of questionnaires for acquiring information on public perception of natural hazards and risk mitigation – a review of current knowledge and practice*, surveys that Despite popular use of questionnaires for acquiring social data in relation to natural hazards, the techniques employed for their development and implementation have been a relatively neglected topic within published research articles dealing with hazards, risk and disaster. In line with Hawkes and Rowe's (p. 630, 2008) findings, "future studies ought to be more comprehensive in the descriptions of their methods". In order to rectify this situation, this article offers a template for researchers responsible for conducting social investigations in natural hazards research.

Nigel Mathers, Nick Fox & Amanda Hunn (2009), in *Surveys and Questionnaires*, discuss that Questionnaires are a useful option to consider when conducting a postal survey. They can be cheaper than personal interviewing and quicker if the sample is large and widely dispersed. For any postal survey regardless of the sample size you must allow at least six weeks for the first wave of questionnaires to be returned, and another four weeks for each successive mailing.

As with telephone interviewing, a postal survey is useful if your respondents are widely distributed. However, due to the lack of personal contact between the respondent and the researcher, the design and layout of the questionnaire is all important.

All mailed questionnaires should be accompanied by a covering letter and include a stamped, addressed envelope. In general, postal surveys tend to have lower response rates than face-to-face or telephone interviews.

However questionnaires sent to populations with a covering letter from their general practitioner tend to have very high response rates. As an alternative to mailing the questionnaire, it is possible to hand them out directly to your potential respondents in your chosen sampling frame. For instance you may decide that questionnaires can be handed out directly to parents with young children attending a nursery.

Another example might be a health visitor visiting mothers six weeks after birth and asking them to complete a questionnaire. In both cases it is relatively easy to approach respondents in these circumstances and you are likely to achieve a much higher response rate than would be possible with a postal survey.

The main drawback of this approach is that your captive audience may in some way be biased. For example, if you carry out a survey of client satisfaction which is restricted only to those patients attending one drop in centre, then the results will be biased towards the views of the most frequent

attenders and consequently those people with most problems.

Engjellushe Zenelaj (2014), in Role of Questionnaire Method in Social Geographical Study-Case Study from Albania, holds that geographer as an individual connected to the mainland, cannot complete studies without closely observing of the territories, but not only this; receive information from the observed territory. From one period to another geographical evolution of discipline and increased use of research methods, in particular that of the questionnaire, which is a kind of survey of the terrain, but it is carried out in collaboration with the residents of the area.

Pauline M. McGuirk & Phillip O'Neill (2016), in Using questionnaires in qualitative human geography, write that in seeking qualitative data, questionnaires aim not just at determining attitudes and opinions but at identifying and classifying the logic of different sets of responses, at seeking patterns or commonality or divergence in responses, and at exploring how they relate to concepts, structures, and processes that shape social life. This is no easy undertaking, and questionnaires struggle with the tensions of seeking explanation while being generally limited in their form and format to obtaining concise accounts.

Objectives of the Study

1. To discuss the survey research in detail
2. To discuss the significance of survey research in geography
3. To highlight the various aspects of survey research
4. To describe the importance of data collection and analysis in geographical studies
5. To concentrate on the various sources of primary data required for geographical studies
6. To emphasize the questionnaire as a technique of primary data collection in geographical studies
7. To discuss the various aspects of questionnaire, such as, structure, types of questions etc.
8. To make the readers familiar with the advantages of questionnaire technique
9. To make the readers familiar with the disadvantages of questionnaire technique
10. To make a comprehensive interpretation of the causes of the use of questionnaire the effects of using questionnaire technique in geographical studies.

Hypothesis

1. Survey research is an approved type of research in several disciplines and subjects
2. Most of the geographical studies fall in the category of survey research
3. Survey research is of utmost importance in geographical research
4. Survey research has its own specific elements, components, design and process
5. Survey research in geography approves observation and field survey as integral part of research and study
6. As in other disciplines, in geography too, both the primary and the secondary data form the basis of research

7. Secondary data enables the scholars to go into the depth of the subject, while the primary data add to the existing knowledge of the scholars
8. There are several sources of collecting primary data for geographical studies
9. Questionnaire is a popular and mostly preferred technique of primary data collection
10. Questionnaire allows the geography scholars to get more and more information from a large number of people that form a part of the population of the given geographical area about all the major aspects of the problem that is being studied

Methodology

Based on the seven research papers that form the basis of the study, the paper is a theoretical, comprehensive study that has much to make the geography scholars familiar with the concept of survey research, and especially with the structure, types and the use of questionnaire technique of primary data collection. All scientifically prepared, the paper uses the secondary data served through the selected research papers.

The method selected for the writing of the paper is inductive. In other words, it is a review study having the author's viewpoint on the questionnaire technique as the most appropriate technique of data collection in geographical studies. For the purpose, all the prescribed steps, such as, title-selection after much consideration, Net-surfing and searching for the studies on the theme, research papers selection, thorough study of the research papers, review-making, problem-definition, objective-specification, hypothesis-formulation, content classification and analysis, conclusion-making, were adopted and followed.

Findings

1. In geography, survey-method has ever been used by the researcher all over the world
2. Surveys are particularly advantageous in non-experimental descriptive research designs that aim at describing reality of the phenomenon
3. In human geographical studies, survey research is generally preferred to get primary data on human attitudes and behavior
4. There are several forms of survey that are adopted in accordance with the nature of the research work.
5. A survey is a type of research design.
6. The face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and Questionnaires are the three main tools of data collection in geographical surveys
7. Questionnaires are useful collecting useful comparable data from a large number of individuals during geographical surveys.
8. Much attention needs to be given to the design of the questionnaire.
9. Geographically speaking, questionnaires are administered face-to-face by an interviewer, by the telephone or completed independently by the participants.
10. Both closed questions and open-ended questions are included in questionnaires in geographical studies

11. The best advantage of questionnaire technique is that practically, large amounts of information can be collected from a large number of people in a short period of time and in a relatively cost effective way
12. The worst disadvantage of questionnaire is that it lacks validity.

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