

4. The respondent's characteristics and environment cannot be observed.
5. It is rather difficult to establish rapport between the respondent and the interviewer.

Mail survey

The mail survey is another method of collecting primary data. This method involves sending questionnaires to the respondents with a request to complete them and return them by post. This can be used in the case of educated respondents only. The mail questionnaires should be simple so that the respondents can easily understand the questions and answer them. It should preferably contain mostly closed-end and multiple choice questions so that it could be completed within a few minutes. The distinctive feature of the mail survey is that the questionnaire is self-administered by the respondents themselves and the responses are recorded by them, and not by the investigator as in the case of personal interview method. It does not involve face-to face conversation between the investigator and the respondent. Communication is carried out only in writing and this requires more cooperation from the respondents than do verbal communication.

Procedure

The researcher should prepare a mailing list of the selected respondents by collecting the addresses from the telephone directory of the association or organization to which they belong. A covering letter should accompany a copy of the questionnaire. It must explain to the respondent the purpose of the study and the importance of his cooperation to the success of the project. Anonymity may be assured.

Alternative modes of sending questionnaires

There are some alternative methods of distributing questionnaires to the respondents. They are: (1) Personal delivery, (2) Attaching questionnaire to product. (3) Attaching questionnaire in a newspaper or magazine and (4) News stand inserts.

Personal delivery: The researcher or his assistant may deliver the questionnaires to the potential respondents with a request to complete them at their convenience. After a day or two he can collect the completed questionnaires from them. Often referred to as the self-administered questionnaire method, it combines the advantages of the personal interview and the mail survey. Alternatively, the questionnaires may be delivered in person and the completed questionnaires may be returned by mail by the respondents.

Attaching questionnaire to a product: A firm test- a firm test-marketing a product may attach a

questionnaire to a product and request the buyer to complete it and mail it back to the firm. The respondent is usually rewarded by a gift or a discount coupon.

Advertising the questionnaire: The questionnaire with the instructions for completion may be advertised on a page of magazine or in a section of newspapers. The potential respondent completes it tears it out and mails it to the advertiser.

News-stand inserts: This method involves inserting the covering letter, questionnaire and self-addressed reply-paid envelope into a random sample of newsstand copies of a newspaper or magazine.

Advantages of mail surveys are:

1. They are less costly than personal interviews, as cost of mailing is the same throughout the country, irrespective of distances.
2. They can cover extensive geographical areas.
3. Mailing is useful in contacting persons such as senior business executives who are Difficult to reach in any other way.
4. The respondents can complete the questionnaires at their conveniences.
5. Mail surveys, being more impersonal, provide more anonymity than personal interviews.
6. Mail survey is totally free from the interviewer bias, as there is no personal contact between the respondents and the investigator.
7. Certain personal and economic data may be given more accurately in an unsigned mail questionnaire.

Disadvantages of mail surveys are:

1. The scope for mail survey is very limited in a country like India where the percentage of literacy is very low.
2. The response rate of mail surveys is low. Hence, the resulting sample will not be a representative one.
3. It is difficult to determine the degree of representativeness of a sample obtained by mail.
4. The causes for inadequate and non-responses cannot be known, and no probing is possible.
5. Information on the personal characteristics of the respondent and his environment cannot be secured.
6. Respondent may not cooperative if the mail questionnaire is long or complex.
7. Several returned questionnaires may contain unanswered questions and incomplete responses.

Tools for Data collection

The various methods of data gathering involve the use of appropriate recording forms. These are called tools or instruments of data collection. They consist of- Questionnaire, observation schedule, interview guide, interview schedule and mailed questionnaire.