

Survey tools

This week we bring you a material focused on online interviewing. Surveys are often an important part of semester papers or even diploma theses; therefore, the knowledge of the work with survey tools is a must for all students. This text is focused on the use of online methods while collecting and administering questionnaire data. It discusses some basic methodological problems connected with, above all, the returnability of online questionnaires. It presents and compares some concrete tools which may be applied not only for study purposes.

At the completion of the module you should:

- know useful applications for the collection of data (voting, polls and surveys),
- be able to orient in the offer of available online applications and software,
- be able to define the advantages and disadvantages of online interviewing,
- be able to describe the factors affecting the returnability of online questionnaires.

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1 Online interviewing: advantages and disadvantages

Online interviewing (CAWI – Computer Aided Web Interviewing) is a very popular method of data collection, mainly in marketing researches. It enables a **faster and more effective acquisition of a large amount of data**, often in an interesting form. If the right tool is used, this form of interviewing has many advantages, above all:

- it significantly reduces the time needed for the collection of data,
- it eliminates errors while collecting data (questions are filtered and logical sequences implemented without the respondent knowing about it),
- it enables immediate and continuous checking of the results and their basic analysis,
- it includes the possibility of *connecting multimedia* (video, image, sound...),
- *it eliminates the costs* of printing and questioners etc.,
- it enables the use of relatively long questionnaires (e.g. longer than while interviewing by phone) without the respondent leaving the form before it is completed,
- acquired data may be easily exported to various formats (.csv, .xls, .sav etc.),
- the questionnaire may be distributed via several channels at once (sending via a html link, publishing on websites etc.),
- an easy integration of the questionnaire in websites via iframe or pop-up windows - all you have to do is simply insert a code (embed).

A number of studies confirm that the quality of data acquired online is comparable with conventional interviewing (by means of a pen and paper). Denscombe (2010), based on his research, even concludes that online questionnaires contain fewer missing answers and provide more complete data than paper questionnaires. The CAWI method, however, **also has a number of weaknesses** which must be taken into account:

- The **target group** we are able to address does not necessarily have to be representative with regard to the global population - according to Eurostat data (2009), only 54% of Czech households has access to the Internet, while there are major differences in the use of the Internet between the different age groups (90% in the group between 12-19 years, only 14% in the group above 60 years),
- the identity of respondents is nearly impossible to **check**,
- the **returnability** depends on the form of distribution of the questionnaire,
- it is not really possible to ask complex and comprehensive **questions**.

The design and implementation of online questionnaires thus require a great emphasis on the control of low returnability risk, representation and selection mistakes.

It is advisable to consider the suitability of using online interviewing in the age group above 60 years.

2 Ensuring the data quality and increasing online questionnaires returnability

In recent years, a number of researches have been devoted above all to factors affecting the returnability of online questionnaires. Vicente and Reis (2010) have determined six areas which **affect the returnability of online questionnaires**:

- 1. General structure of questionnaires.** Previous researches have shown that there are differences between online questionnaires divided into several pages and longer questionnaires in which the respondent has to roll the screen. The division into several pages without the need to roll increases the rate of filled and completed questionnaires (Lozar Manfreda, Batagejl and Vehovar, 2002).
- 2. Questionnaire length.** The questionnaire length affects above all the rate of leaving the online form before it is completed; the longer a questionnaire is, the more frequent answers such as “I don’t know, I cannot answer” are (Deutskens et al, 2004).
- 3. Tracking the progress of filling in questionnaires.** Respondents should have the possibility of tracking their progress while filling in (either in the form of a graphic depiction or a message XX% of questions left/XX pages left etc.). What is more important than progress itself, however, is how the respondents perceive the progress (unless they see progress right at the beginning, they are more likely to leave the questionnaire).
- 4. Visual presentation.** A number of researches have also observed the role of visual presentation. A higher returnability has been registered with questionnaires of a moderate design. On the other hand, visualisation of certain elements (e.g. logos, product demonstrations) may increase the rate of answering a particular question (Deutskens, et al. 2004).
- 5. Interactivity.** An interactive questionnaire reacts to the respondent - it uses filter questions, changes in the answer order etc. Questionnaire interactivity affects above all the quality of acquired data.
- 6. The format of questions and answers.** Complex or open questions are, according to researches, more likely to cause leaving the questionnaire before its completion (Lozar Manfreda, Vehovar, 2002). On the other hand, there is no significant difference e.g. between answering via radio buttons and drop down boxes.

3 Technical solution

The design of a questionnaire and its distribution are affected above all by the chosen technical solution.

On the most general level, it is **necessary to consider** whether to **create the online form separately (e.g. within your own website)** or **whether to use one of the existing online applications for the collection of data.**

The first option (creating it on your own) enables you to tailor your questionnaire exactly to your needs (including e.g. your corporate design etc.); on the other hand, this variant also includes the costs of programming a new application. This may also be relatively complicated if we want to use more kinds of questions, for example. It is also necessary to program the questionnaire evaluation, or be prepared for arduous analytical work while evaluating.

The second variant enables you to choose among a number of applications, which are often available free of charge or for a small fee. One of the advantages of these applications is the fact that they enable and automate basic operations while evaluating data, and the work with data (e.g. clearing of data, second-level classification etc.).

Below we will present a few selected Czech and foreign online tools for the collection and administration of online questionnaires, including their comparison. The applications have been tested within the course Research methodology and statistics at KISK of the Faculty of Arts of MU.

Survs (www.survs.com)

Especially for simple questionnaires. Disadvantages: e.g. only eight kinds of questions. Advantages: user friendly and easy to manage.

What does Survs offer in its free version?

- the number of questions per each questionnaire: 10
- the number of surveys: unlimited
- the number of answers: 200/questionnaire
- the number of users with an access to the questionnaire: 1

SurveyGizmo (www.surveygizmo.com)

Provides a large number of functions and supports various user settings. What is pleasant is the interconnection between SurveyGizmo and Facebook or Twitter, even in its free version.

What does SurveyGizmo offer in its free version?

- the number of questions per each questionnaire: unlimited
- the number of surveys: unlimited
- the number of answers: 250/month
- the number of users with an access to the questionnaire: 1

SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com)

Enables the collection of data and evaluation of relatively complicated questionnaires. A selection from several interface designs; a possibility to invite respondents to fill in questionnaires via e-mail or on a separate page, or put the questionnaire as an embed on your website.

What does SurveyMonkey offer in its free version?

- the number of questions per each questionnaire: 10
- the number of surveys: unlimited
- the number of answers: 100/questionnaire
- the number of users with an access to the questionnaire: 1

Polldaddy (www.poll daddy.com)

A robust tool for online collection and analysis of various kinds of polls, voting and surveys.

Easyresearch.biz (www.easyresearch.biz)

A Czech application for the collection and administration of online questionnaires. Questionnaires are interactive, the application enables the use of filter questions. Automatically generated results are processed in an attractive fashion. A trial version is available free of charge for 30 days.

4 Conclusion

The choice of a particular online interviewing tool **depends on your individual needs**, as well as on the convenience of the given tool for your individual ends.

Remember that **online interviewing has both advantages** (it reduces the time needed for the collection of data, eliminates errors while collecting data, offers the possibility of immediate and continuous checks of results and their basic analysis, or the possibility of connecting multimedia) **and disadvantages** (nearly no possibility of checking the respondent's identity, a limited possibility of putting complex questions)

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