SELECTING RESPONDENTS FOR SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE IN ISLAMIC WAY

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Abstract: The main objective of this study is to identify key attributes of a respondent to deem him worthy and reliable for the purposes of a survey questionnaire. These key attributes are based on the teachings of the Qur'an. As the Holy Qur'an is the word of Almighty Allah and it contains absolute knowledge. In this paper, various human traits are identified and described in the light of Quran to determine whether a person can be a respondent in a survey questionnaire study or not. This paper also highlights the types of questions in survey questionnaires and distinguishes which type of questions are used for qualitative and/or quantitative research. Additionally, this paper emphasizes on the problems with data collection and samplings, as well as stresses on the problems of probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling.

Keywords: Survey Questionnaire, Data Collection, Qur'an, Character Traits, Islamic Sampling

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Introduction

Knowledge has been a topic of debate for centuries and its reliability is questioned. The most authentic and absolute source of knowledge is revealed knowledge but it has only been limited to the Prophets of Almighty Allah. The other sources of knowledge have been shrunk down to Innate (Intuition), Experience (Senses), and Non-experience (Reason/Logic). These other sources of

knowledge are for all human beings. However, any knowledge acquired other than revealed knowledge can be unreliable because of human involvement.

It is believed that Allah gave Adam the knowledge of things directly without the need of an Angel to carry through the message as according to the Qur'an: And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful" [Quran 2:31]. The following verse proves that an exchange happened between Adam and Allah without the need of angels to pass through the message: They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise" [Quran 2:32]. When Angels couldn't name the things that were asked of them, Allah asked Adam to inform them and Adam proved that he is a being with vast intellectual capacity. As the following verse indicates: He said, "O Adam, inform them of their names." And when he had informed them of their names, He said, "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed" [Quran 2:33].

Quran is the word of God and contains a complete guidance on ethics for mankind, and has been the ultimate source of disposition over the past fourteen centuries. Muslim scholars have thoroughly examined, analyzed and interpreted the Holy Book to identify what the Qur'an demands from Muslims in order for them to achieve spiritual purity (Al-Islam.org, n.d.). Establishing that Quran serves as a source of spiritual guidance for the followers of Islam, verses from the Quran have been extracted to determine how some of the very fundamental traits in a human being should be. These verses provide the criterion on which the character of a person can be measured.

Literature Review

Types of questions in survey questionnaires

There are three main types of questions that are used in questionnaires; demographic, close-ended, and open-ended. Questionnaires contain these types of questions in respect to whether the nature of research is qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative research is used to generate possible leads and ideas to formulate a realistic and testable hypothesis (Shuttleworth, Qualitative Research Design, 2008). Whereas quantitative research uses an already generated hypothesis to be proved or disproved by mathematical and statistical means (Shuttleworth, Quantitative Research Design, 2008).

i.   Demographic questions

Demographic questions are factual, their purpose is to target characteristics of a population in order to sample the data later on. When a survey questionnaire is designed, the research needs some criterion to break down the overall survey data into meaningful groups of respondents. Demographic questions allow the data to be categorized, as it can be broken down into characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, education, profession, occupation, income level, and marital status (Wyse, 2012).

ii.   Close-ended questions

Close-ended questions are used when the frequency of particular answers is important to the surveyor (Law, n.d.). In close-ended questions a limited number of specific responses are offered

to answer the question, for example two-point questions (true or false, yes or no), multiple choice questions and scaled questions (like Likert scale). These type of questions are ideally used for quantitative type of research. This is because respondents take less time in answering these questions and it's easy for the surveyor to interpret the responses (Sincero, 2012).

iii.   Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are used when the surveyor wishes to collect long-form qualitative data. The respondent is given a question without any specific answers to choose but to provide their genuine and precise opinion on the matter. This comes in handy when the surveyor is looking to discover new ideas that he/she may have overlooked or did not know existed (Law, n.d.).

Problems with data collection and samplings

According to (Imperial.edu, 2010), when the data is collected in a conventional way, there is some data that is irrelevant or duplicate because some of the respondents may not understand the depth of the questions and some of them may misinterpret it. There are two forms of sampling that are used in statistics; probabilistic sampling and non-probabilistic sampling.

Probability sampling considers every member of a population to have a known and equal chance of being selected. For example, in a population of 100 people, each person would have a chance of 1 out of 100 of being chosen. However, in non-probability sampling, those chances are not the same. For example, a person might have a better chance of being chosen if they live nearby the researcher or have access to a computer (Andale, 2015). Both forms have their own plus points and have been very useful with the collection of data, but both of these forms have their own disadvantages too.

i.   Problems of Probabilistic Sampling

Probabilistic Sampling methods normally have higher complexity because more people are chosen which leads to duplicate and irrelevant data. As it is conducted on a larger scale, it consumes more time and is more expensive than non-probability sampling (Dudovskiy, Probability Sampling - Research Methodology, 2011). There are also chances of only selecting a specific class of samples. This can happen, for example, when a surveyor carries out a survey about any data relating to family members, the surveyor may develop a trend of numbering from the eldest member to the youngest member of the family. In this case, only the oldest or the youngest generations will be taken as samples. Additionally, by doing a repetitive job in assigning the numbers and taking the information, the surveyor may suffer from monotony which will, in result reduce the effectiveness of the system (Devkota, Probability Sampling, Advantages, Disadvantages, n.d.).

ii.   Problems of Non-Probabilistic Sampling

The main issue with non-probabilistic sampling is that it focuses on simplicity over effectiveness which is why the generalization of research findings lack quality. Non-Probabilistic Sampling methods usually have an unknown proportion of the entire population that is not included in the sample group (Dudovskiy, Non-Probability Sampling - Research Methodology, 2011). It is also difficult in non-probabilistic sampling when estimating sampling variability and identifying possible bias. This is because non-probabilistic sampling methods excessively depend on judgment as there are no specific rules or principles for selection of samples. Due to high dependency on

judgment, these methods also require the pollsters to be more purpose-oriented in order to try and make reasonable sense of the collected data (Devkota, Non-Probability Sampling, n.d.).

Proposed role of character traits in data collection

Character traits define how a person is in his ethics and mannerisms. The whole of Quran has emphasized on keeping one's humanity as pure as possible. Quran has also mentioned how people who are truthful and modest are considered better human beings than people who are untruthful and immodest (Al-Islam.org, n.d.). Without basic honesty and consistency, it's hard to have one's life flow in an integrated and coordinated manner. These behaviors don't affect a person on a smaller scale but fit in a much larger one of life to run it smoothly, like a well-oiled machine with the gears meshing properly (Wilson, 2014).

To choose people based on their characteristics, some of the traits are chosen in order to help select the right individuals for the purposes of survey questionnaires. Below are the key traits of a human being followed by the verses from the Holy Quran to show how each of these traits are important.

i.   How Truthfulness can factor in Data Collection

Being truthful is a necessity in a society as it is a great virtue of human behavior. Lying however, is one of the major reasons of corruption in the society and a great vice of human behavior. Hence, Islam commands truthfulness and forbids lying (al-Munajjid, 1998). The Holy Quran mentions the importance of truthfulness in the following verses:

- "Talk straight, to the point, without any ambiguity or deception" [Quran 33:70].
- "Always speak the truth. Shun words that are deceitful and ostentatious" [Quran 22:30].
- "Do not confound truth with falsehood" [Quran 2:42].
- "If you do not have complete knowledge about anything, it's better to be silent. You might think that speaking about something without full knowledge is a trivial matter. But it might have grave consequences" [Quran 24:15-16].

A truthful person will not cheat on survey questionnaires as his inner beliefs will not allow him to do so. Especially when it comes to open-ended questionnaires, he will be inclined to speak the truth and keep his answer free from false information as well as exaggeration.

ii.   How Sincerity can factor in Data Collection

Sincerity is both originally self-referential and involved with truthful communication. Sincerity is neither a quality of states of mind nor a correspondence between acknowledgement and feeling. It is but a way of relating to other people in order to be recognized as trustworthy on the basis of emotional commitments. Thus, sincerity is situated in values that prioritize affective human connectivity (Ozar, 2009). The Qur'an has also emphasized on the importance of sincerity in a human being. The Holy Qur'an mentions:

- "And they were not commanded except to worship Allah (being) sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakah (poor due). And that is the correct religion" [Quran 98:5].
- "Choose best words to speak and say them in the best possible way" [Quran 17:53, 2:83].
- "Say with your mouth what is in your heart" [Quran 3:167].

- "When you voice an opinion, be just, even if it is against a relative" [Quran 6:152].

People with sincerity feel this great pressure on themselves to be sincere because they are bound to their emotional commitments. It is hard for them to actually go against these commitments and this is why it can reflect in a positive way while answering survey questionnaires. Whether a questionnaire has close-ended or open-ended questions, they will feel this obligation to write/speak the truth in the best possible way and be just in how they answer it.

iii.   How Consideration and Respect for Others can factor in Data Collection

People of good character are respectful to others. Consideration and respect is shown by recognizing and honoring everyone's right; to be themselves, to make decisions, and to have privacy and dignity (Missouri 4-H, n.d.). Holy Qur'an has also laid great importance on being considerate and respectful of others. The verses from the Holy Qur'an below indicate:

- "Respect and honor all human beings irrespective of their religion, colour, race, sex, language, status, property, birth, profession/job and so on" [Quran 17:70].
- "When you hear something malicious about someone, keep a favorable view about him/her until you attain full knowledge about the matter. Consider others innocent until they are proven guilty with solid and truthful evidence" [Quran 24:12-13].

A person who respect others and is considerate also possess a certain goodness in his character. For example, a person from another race takes a survey questionnaire to an individual, who respects others and is considerate of them. This individual will not purposely answer him with false information because this individual is not biased in his approach to answering the surveyor. When this biasness is ruled out of the scenario, accurate and precise answers are to be expected.

Integrity's role in the proposed way of selecting respondents

Integrity is a conglomeration of many attributes of a person. It itself comes to a person who believes in higher principles. People who are morally serious, care and think important about integrity. These individuals are to be relied upon, as in a fundamental way they are someone who we can and should view as being wholly (Davis, 2000). The moral uprightness is accessed through one's own conscience and a person who follows his conscience is not repressed or provoked into acting otherwise (Operation-Meditation, n.d.). For example, a person follows the traffic rules even when there are no cameras or traffic police, then it's evident that the person has integrity. This is because people with integrity are good observers and they know what is truly important to them. So when these people with integrity are answering close-ended and open-ended questionnaires they will think twice before answering the question and they will not be convinced by a third party or let their past experiences affect their approach in answering the surveyor.

Conclusion

This paper proposes an approach, a conglomerate of knowledge that a potential respondent possesses and the character traits he/she preserves, to select respondents for survey questionnaires. If the identified character traits are considered along with their knowledge and experience in the respective field while selecting respondents for a survey questionnaire, it's possible that they will give us a similar answer to the surveys done through conventional approaches. A liar, an insincere,

and an inconsiderate respondent may try to fulfill their own motives without respecting the truth and the surveyor, and may not give us accurate information. This study proposes that only a knowledgeable person with integrity can give us the right information and if we can prove that then we can eliminate the need of conventional approach for good.

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