

FOCUS-GROUP AND ITS IMPACT IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF MARKETING RESEARCH ON THE ROMANIAN CAR MARKET

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Designing a questionnaire is the most profound activity which makes an impact on a research in marketing. The investigation instrument finally determines the quality of this type of research. Never will a market research be able to exceed its questionnaire in point of quality. The present contribution succinctly itemizes a research project for the Romanian car market, emphasizing the importance of focus group, and appends, at the end, the concrete result, applied to the Romanian car market. The first part describes the hypotheses and sets out the objectives of the research, focusing on the market leader, i.e. Automobile Dacia Renault. The second section describes the practical process of designing the questionnaire, with a special stress laid on the impact of focus-group in the final version. The synthesis of focus group is materialized through a number of final remarks on the manner of concretely writing the questionnaire, which was put to practical use on the Romanian car market.

Key words: questionnaire, marketing research, car market, focus group.

JEL Code: M31

1. Introduction

The questionnaire is the most widely used instrument in marketing research, and it is on its quality that the success of such an undertaking depends. Half a century ago, C. A. Moser concluded that any enquiry cannot be better than its questionnaire. This fact hints to the special significance that has to be attached to its instrumental carrying out, i.e. to its materialization through a formalized set of questions, built in order to generate the data needed to achieve the objectives of a marketing research. A multiple-target marketing research can also have recourse to sets of questionnaires: in that situation, association with staggered / overlapping canvassing / poll becomes a methodological necessity. Whether one questionnaire or sets of questionnaires are used, their practical role remains to secure the *conversion of the objectives and hypotheses of a research into adequate questions*, which are then administered, and also getting veracious information from the responders.

2. Hypotheses and specific objectives as reflected in the questionnaire of marketing research in the car market

In general terms, the questionnaire allows to simultaneously achieving several objectives:

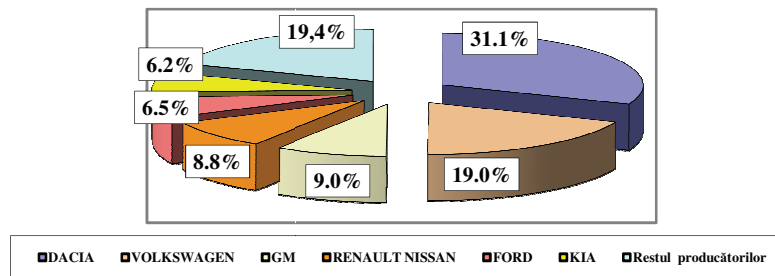
- *it contributes to shaping the structure of the interview*, by ensuring a logical succession of the questions;
- *it secures the standard format and lends uniformity to the manner in which factual information is recorded*, as well as the opinions and attitudes of the responders;
- *it motivates and coherently sustains the responders' cooperation* through the type of the questions used, through the manner the latter were formulated, and through their succession, and even through the general aspect of the questionnaire, in order that the final end of the interview is reached in the best conditions;
- *it serves as a data base concerning the research conducted*;
- *it facilitates scanning, processing and analyzing facts*, through its format, hierarchies and

logical correlations.

The present article tries to give solutions to a question of the type “What specific, fundamentally different aspects must a car market questionnaire respond to?” to begin with, this questionnaire will centre on the market leader, none other than Automobile Dacia Renault, as can be seen in the recently concluded picture of market structure for the year 2009.

The principal competitors on the Romanian car market having a quota above 5%

Graph no. 1.



Data source: www.drpciv.ro

The questionnaire will investigate the degree to which most of the owners of Dacia Renault cars know the market, and also the extent to which they are informed as to the car make they own. The other hypotheses, which concentrate the questionnaire on the detached market leader, namely Dacia Renault, could be detailed starting from the following noticeable facts:

- most of the car owners previously had at least one other car;
- most car owners consider that the cars correspond to their expectations;
- there are no differences between the appreciations of the leader made by male and female responders;
- a number of customers consider the optional equipment as insufficient;
- the majority of the customers prefer petrol / gas as an engine fuel;
- most of the customers are satisfied with the commercial distribution network;
- a relatively small number of car owners are dissatisfied with the servicing conditions.
- most customers consider that the export of components makes the prestige of the Dacia car make increase;
- most of the car owners consider that the *Dacia Asistență* car service is satisfactory.

These hypotheses are quantified, and can be statistically formulated in order to be tested by the agency of the questionnaire.

Consequently, a few approaches can be exemplified, which can contribute to stagger the scales of the various questions of the questionnaire, while ensuring the statistical testing of the hypotheses formulated (where, in the idiom of classical econometry, H_0 defines the null hypothesis and H_1 the alternative hypothesis).

Table no.1

Null hypothesis: H_0	Alternative hypothesis: H_1
1 customer out of 2 knows the performance of the car	H_1 average # 50%
1 customer out of 3 has already owned a car	H_1 average # 33%
2 customers out of 5 would have preferred a domestic car	H_1 average # 40%
1 customer out of 2 considers the price as accessible	H_1 average # 50%
1 customer out of 3 considers the domestic car as similar to an imported car	H_1 average # 33%
4 customers out of 5 considers that their income does not essentially influence their choice	H_1 average # 80%
3 customers out of 5 appreciate the quality/price ratio	H_1 average # 60%
9 customers out of 10 do not see any differences in appreciation between women and men	H_1 average # 90%
4 customers out of 5 consider that the car	H_1 average # 80%
7 customers out of 10 are satisfied with the commercial distribution network	H_1 average #70 %

Delineating and setting up the objectives of the marketing research is a complex process, and its structure in the car market is centred on specific targets, issues, and finally, on concrete objectives.

Setting up the objectives of the marketing research concerning the position of the Dacia Renault car on the Romanian market

Table no. 2

Aspects or targets to be quantified and made into a hierarchy	Problems that have to be answered through the research	The concrete and quantifiable objectives of the market investigator
1. Identifying the manner of purchasing of a Dacia Renault car	1. Which is the most frequent manner of purchasing the car? 2. Which is the most widely used source of funding?	1. Determining the modal value concerning the manner of purchasing a car. 2. Determining the prevalent funding source in purchasing.
2. Quantifying the degree of knowledge about the Dacia Renault car	1. To what extent are the car's variants known? 2. To what extent do the subjects detain information about the types of engines? 3. To what extent do the questioned people consider the car as being polluting? 4. To what extent does the inner space correspond to the expectations? 5. Do the buyers have any proposals for the improvement of the car?	1. Identification of the degree of knowing the car variants 2. Scaling the knowledge of the engine types 3. Scaling the opinions of the car's pollution degree 4. Scaling the opinions of the adequacy of the inner space as to the customers' expectations 5. Identifying the expected improvements.
3. Delimiting the adequacy of the distribution network to the expectations of the potential customers	1. Which is the coverage of the commercial distribution network? 2. Which is the owner's opinion concerning the quality of the services? 3. Which is the buyer's opinion concerning the purchase of a car?	1. Quantifying the coverage of the market by the distribution network 2. Scaling the car owners' opinion of the quality of the services 3. Scaling the buyers' opinion of buying a car
4. The degree of qualitative satisfaction of the demands of the customers through the manufacturer's network	1. Which is the buyer's opinion of the quality of the repair work and the service? 2. What do the customers think of the duration of the repairs? 3. Which is the customer's opinion of the veracity of the repair costs?	1. Scaling the buyers' opinion of the quality of the repair work and car servicing 2. Identification of the prevalent customer opinion of the duration of the repairs 3. Scaling the customers' opinion of the veracity of the repair costs.

3. The process of designing a questionnaire, and the impact of focus-group in the final writing

The stages of the practical design / planning of the questionnaire have been the following : specifying the information needed and the aspects/targets to be quantified and ordered hierarchically, setting up the solution of the stratified poll (strata / layers of customers as natural or legal entities), and the self-administered questionnaire with an anticipated rate of non-response, as a method of collecting data, elaborating the questions (content, type, quality order, pre-coding), using focus-group in a first pilot-analysis of the questionnaire, and the re-planning of its physical characteristics, endorsing the questionnaire by the beneficiary of the research, piloting, pre-testing and revising the questionnaire, as well as preparing the final variant and printing the questionnaire. The impact of the focus-group was bad far the most important factor of re-planning and final writing of the questionnaire, thus clearing most of the problems of writing and revising some peculiar aspects, derived from the specificity of the market. Four *sub-groups of experts* were used (each comprising on average 2-3 members), which appear in the following centralized table abbreviated as S.E. (1= quality/cost, 2 = technical, 3 = psychological = marketing).

Modeling focus-group of the final form concerning the Dacia Renault car in Romania

Table no. 1

Categories of themes	SE 1	SE 2	SE 3	SE 4
1. Knowledge or information possessed about cars generally				
1.1 Utility Car	Utility as to car price	Characteristics concerning the speed of traveling	Motion independence favorable limit-situations	It is useful mainly in work-related, and family holiday trips
1.2 The degree of hazard of the car for drivers and pedestrians	None, if rules are observed	Any technical advance brings about hazards	Possibly, but compensated to a small extent by the advantages of use	Very little, or none
1.3 Major critical aspects in car	Assessed comfort/post ratio	Power of the engine and speed of travel	Robustness and endurance in time	Possibility of purchase
1.4. Competition with other solutions of transport	Convenient	Flexible and adapted technological evolutions	Fast and prompt	Modern and easy
2. Evaluation of the interest that the interviewed subjects had in the Dacia Renault cars				
2.1 Identification of information sources	Internet, SIAB, dealers, financial situations	Technical catalogues and specialized magazines and technical specifications	Friends, acquaintances, colleagues, brochures, etc.	TV ads, internet, radio, cafés
2.2 Variety of models	Complete assortment	Incomplete; off-road models are in order	Incomplete; a small-tank model would be useful	I think there are enough models
2.3 Diversity of optional equipment	An anti-theft device would be necessary	Parking sensors, side airbags and adjustable steering-wheel	Increased communication and entertainment comfort	Each model with a distinctive additional option
3. Identification of the knowledge and information they had about the quality of the Dacia Renault cars				
3.1 Types of known engines	Small engine = low consumption, plus diesel fuel	Out of the 6 engine variants, the GPL and K4M formulas are preferred	I prefer silent the engine formula (with no diesel fuel variant)	The engine formula should give an image of comfort and economizing
3.2 Fuel consumption	Minimal consumption = low travel costs	Consumption up to 6.5 liters / 100 km	I prefer a special efficiency to an apparent small consumption.	Higher consumption for a good image of its power
3.3 Inner space	Very roomy inside	Rather high, but passable	Generous to its owner	Very roomy for a family
3.4 Flaws noticed at the already manufactured models	Low stability at turn	The Diesel engine formula is far noisier	Visibility affected by the side pillars of the screen	3-4 years' use increase the noise of the car
3.5 Improvements expected the cars	Only in terms economicalness (of efficiency)	Adjustable suspension (load, and on road)	In terms of crash survivability	In terms of adaptation to the road network
3.6 Price, as an important factor in choosing a car	Acceptable and attractive, if compared to other cars	Factor ranking in second place, according to the technical quality	Price can raise problems, if continuing to go down	In point of image, a rise is needed, but not a really major one
4. Determining the buyers' attitude towards the quality of the distribution network:				
4.1 Distribution network A. Fortes and B. Weaknesses	A. Diversity B. Low coverage / high cost	A. Spatial coverage B. Relatively incomplete technical information	A. Close to the public B. Rather high degree of red-tape	Diversity and additional facilities Interface /communication
4.2 Quality of staff in the distribution network	Training and qualification /cost	High technical abilities	Helpful and accessible	Not yet defined in the image of the brand
4.3 Favourite centers	AMAT	DAPEROM	Any	Delta Plus Trading
5. Determining the buyers' attitude towards the quality of the repair work, and servicing in general				
5.1 Distribution of repair centres	Sufficient proportion to the sales	Reasonable distance in proportion to consumption	Covering in point of information	Prompt in point of image on an internal plane
5.2 Technical equipment	Efficiency as a ratio cost / profit	Upward trend as real technical solutions	It is permanently improving	Satisfactory
5.3 Satisfaction and insatisfactions in the process repairing and servicing	Costs/prices Quality in time	Promptness and duration in servicing Technical guaranty	Trust in point of impact Bureaucracy in unfolding	Average-level servicing Long waiting time
6. Identifying the profile of the Dacia Renault car buyer				
6.1 Social and demographic characteristics	State sector wage-earners, small wages in private companies	Prevailing: men having an average (minimal) technical training	Average age (30-40 years old) medium (high-school) and higher education	The modal buyer on the Romanian market
6.2 Profile of the Dacia car buyer	Economical, efficient, wishing to achieve	Energetic, on the move	Usually, a family man, equanimous, balanced	Quiet, calm, earnest, sociable.

The impact of the focus-group generated most of the issues conducive to the revising of the questionnaire. It was subsequently reevaluated in proportion to the optimization of the content and

the placement of the questions, and mainly to some essential desiderata of any marketing research, already designated, in practice, by the name of rules of structure-shaping and hierarchy-establishing, as in the classical example provided by the *5 x 20 rule* concerning the significance attributed to the first 20 seconds, 20 words, 20 gestures, 20 looks, and especially the first 20 questions, where what is more important for the research questionnaire will enter.

4. A final remark

On the stratified market of the Romanian cars, Pareto's famous law of the 20/80 ratio could be rephrased like this: a percentage of only 20% of the firms bring approximately 80% of the incomes. In the year 2009, on the Romanian market, only 6 manufacturing car companies held 80.6 % of the sales, while Automobile Dacia Renault represented the leader, which deserved a special research, it being the holder of over 31% of the whole market. The merit of the experts in the sub-groups whose opinions were tuned to account in the focus of the research is most probably special, and it becomes all the more pregnant after the final reading of the questionnaire. We believe that, very much like the Romanian market, pressed by the slow evolution of economy, it is to the experts in the first sub-group that we owe the closest investigation image shaped by the agency of questionnaires, through comparison with the car market under investigation.

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Annex no 1

Final questionnaire

We are currently conducting a study that intends to identify the opinions and attitudes of the buyers of Dacia Renault cars, with respect to that firm's capacity as leader on the domestic car market. So, we ask you to be so kind as to answer the following questions. We assure you that your answers and identity are confidential.

1. What word comes to your mind when you think of the Dacia Renault cars?.....

2. You currently own a Dacia car. Which variant is it?.....

3. What was the reason you chose a Dacia car for?.....

4. Have you previously owned another car?

No	Yes. What make?
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5. How long have you had a Dacia car?

For 5 years	for 4 years	for 3 years	for 2 years	under 1 year
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6. Have you paid all the car's price?

- No (question 7 is continued)
- Yes (you go on to question 8)

7. Have you paid the whole price so far?

No	Yes
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8. Did you borrow money to purchase the car?

- No
- Yes, from bank
- Yes, from CAR (the Mutual Aid Fund)
- Yes, from other people
- Yes, from other sources (mention the source).....

9. In your opinion, the price of a Dacia car is:

very high	high	Middling	low	very low
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10. Do you think that the cars made by Dacia are up to your expectations?

wholly	to a high extent	Middling	to a low extent	at all
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11. Do you consider that owning a Dacia car:

- Confers a certain social status?
- Gives the possibility of fast and secure travel?
- Entails considerable costs?
- Is an additional concern?
- Is a necessity?

12. If you were to purchase one of the versions below, would you arrange them, marking one box according to your preference. Place at the top the choice that best matches your preferences.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Logan Pick-up						
Logan coupé						
Logan MCV						
Logan Van						
Sandero						
Sandero Stepway						

13. Which do you think the main advantages of the Dacia car? Would you please enumerate and note the order of their importance, starting with 1 for the most important, then 2 for the next, etc.

Advantage	Importance
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14. Which do you think are the main disadvantages of the Dacia car? Would you please enumerate and note the order of their importance, starting with 1 for the most important, then 2 for the next, etc.

Disadvantage	Importance
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15. In general, what improvements do you think should be added to the Dacia cars.....?

16. What are your preferences concerning the engine?

Type of engine	Preference level					
	Very high	High	Middling	Little	Very little	No opinion
Petrol type K7J (1.4 MPI)						
Petrol type K7M (1.6 MPI)						
Petrol type K4M (1.616V)						
Petrol and LPG type K7M 718 MP						
Diesel type K9K (1.5 dCi 70CP)						
Diesel type K9K (1.5 dCi 85CP)						

17. What do you think a Dacia-Renault car is like?

18. The versions of the Dacia-Renault car have more facilities, out of which some are optional (air conditioning, electrically operated windows, ABS, aluminum rims, etc.). Do you consider these cover all the buyers' preferences?

- No (question 19 is continued)
 Yes (you go on to question 20)

19. What special facilities should be added?.....

20. Do you think the Dacia cars are adapted to the requirements of Romanian roads?

Totally agree	Agree	Neither nor	Disagree	Totally disagree
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21. Do you feel secure inside a Dacia car?

Totally agree	Agree	Neither nor	Disagree	Totally disagree
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the maintenance costs for a Dacia car are:

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low
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23. Do you consider that the price of the spare parts is:

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low
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24. SC Automobile Dacia SA has a vast distribution network. Do you think it is sufficiently developed?

- No (question 25 is continued)
 Yes (you go on to question 26)

25. What other areas should be covered?.....

26. Automobile Dacia has several distribution centres and showrooms staffed by qualified people. Would you say your opinion concerning the following statements:

Statement	Total agreement	Agreement	Neither-nor	Disagreement	Total disagreement
Purchasing a car is easy					
Exhibiting the models is up to expectations					
The staff is kind and helpful					
The staff is proficient					

27. The Dacia cars made at Mioveni are destined for both the domestic market, and export. Do you think that Dacia is praised on the foreign markets?

No	Yes
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28. The Dacia models are also manufactured in Russia, Iran, Morocco, Brazil. Do you think the cars made at Dacia are:

Much better	Better	Same	A little worse	Much worse
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29. Automobile Dacia is part of Renault Group. Do you think that the cars made at Mioveni, if compared with the similar Renault cars, are:

Much better	Better	Same	A little worse	Much worse
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developed?

No (question 31 is continued)

Yes (you go on to question 32)

31. What other areas should be covered?.....

32. Have you had recourse to the Service Dacia network?

No	Yes
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33. Starting from your own experience, would you say your opinion of the following statements:

Statement	Total agreement	Agreement	Neither-nor	Disagreement	Total disagreement
The quality of the work is at top level					
The equipment of the workshops is at a high technological level					
The duration of the repairs is short					
The costs of the repairs are calculated correctly					

34. The manufacturer gives 36 months' guarantee. Do you consider that period sufficient?

Yes	No
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35. Do you think the variants of the Dacia car are sufficiently well known?

Yes	No
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Characteristics	Extreme (1)	Foarte (2)	Suficient (3)	Nici/nici (4)	Suficient (5)	Foarte (6)	Extrem (7)	Characteristics
Non-polluting								Polluting
Spacious								Lacking room
Low consumption								High consumption
Modern design								Outmoded design
Close to the public								Distant from the public

22. In your opinion,

36. The information on the performance and technical data of the Dacia versions comes from many different sources. Grade each source, starting from 5 points – for the source that wholly identifies your option.

	5	4	3	2	1
Press materials					
Radio					
Television					
Brochures, folders					
Internet					
Other					

37. Dacia is manufactured in five versions. Do you think those cover all the buyers' expectations?

- No (is continued by question 38)
 Yes (you go to question 39)

38. What other versions do you think should be manufactured to cover the buyers' needs?.....

39. A general grade for the Dacia car should be:

1(min)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10(max)
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40. Part of the components needed for making the Logan model in foreign works are made by Automobile Dacia, and exported to those destinations. Do you think that brings further prestige to the Dacia brand?

Totally agree	Agree	Neither-nor	Disagree	Totally disagree
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41. The "Dacia Assistance" service is available on a 24h basis. Have you had recourse to the service?

No		Yes	
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42. Do you consider that service useful?

Totally agree	Agree	Neither-nor	Disagree	Totally disagree
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43. If someone asked your opinion, would you recommend them to buy a car made by Dacia?

No		Yes	
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Questions for identifying the subjects of the interview

44. Sex:

Male		Female	
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45. Which is the most recent type of formal training you concluded?

- Elementary school
 Vocational school
 High school
 Post-high school training
 Higher education
 Post-graduate training.

46. Your occupation:

- Unskilled worker
 Skilled worker / craftsman
 Service operator / commercial worker
 Technician/foreman/primary school teacher/clerk
 Military /policeman/guard agent
 Businessman/Executive / Manager / Middle medical staff
 Specialist / high education staff
 Student Unemployed Pensioner
 Different. Which one?

47. Your monthly income in lei is comprised between:

600-1500	1501-2500	2501-3500	Over 3500
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48. Your age lies in the interval:

18-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	Over 60
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49. You live...

In a town		In the country	
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Thank you for your cooperation