The Art of Asking WHY in Marketing Research: Three Principles Underlying the Formulation of Questionnaires

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The Art of Asking *WHY* in Marketing Research

THREE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE FORMULATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES

By PAUL F. LAZARSFELD

Dr. Lazarsfeld discusses underlying principles which he believes should be taken into consideration in formulating questionnaires for use in marketing research. He stresses psychological factors and develops three principles which he terms, the principle of specification, the principle of division, and the principle of tacit assumption. His thesis is that the ordinary WHY question is a source of potential misinformation unless carefully interpreted and preferably should be supplemented with appropriate follow-up questions based on current psychological knowledge.

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I. ASCERTAINING WHAT A QUESTION MEANS; THE PRINCIPLE OF SPECIFICATION.

ASKING for reasons and giving answers are commonplace habits of everyday life. We have all had the experience of acting under certain impulses and certain influences so many times that we are sure that our fellow men have had the same experiences and reasons for their own actions. And we are seldom disappointed if we inquire. Our respondent not only has had reasons for his actions; he usually knows, also, in which reason we might be especially interested, and it is upon this assumption that he bases his answer. If a friend explains why he has come to see me, he does not start to tell me that he was once born, and that he moved to this city two years ago, although these, too, are reasons for his being here today. He is aware that most of these reasons are known as well to me as to him, and he picks out the reason which he hopes will contribute especially to a mutual understanding of the present situation.

In market research, the question-and-answer business is not so simple, and the ease of furnishing answers in everyday life may involve dangerous pitfalls. In social intercourse, it is most likely that what is important for our respondent is important also for us who have made the inquiry. In market research interviews, we cannot rely upon this good fortune. The purpose of our *why* questions is to discover all of those factors which determine the purchases of a certain group of people; or, to put it more exactly in anticipation of a later part of this paper, we want to know all the determinants of a certain sort. Such knowledge should permit us to increase our future efficiency in this field by providing a more complete and accurate basis for anticipating demand factors of the market. We cannot leave it up to the respondents to tell us whatever they are inclined. The average consumer is not trained to survey offhand all the factors which determine his purchases and he usually has a very hazy understanding of the *why* question. On the other hand, the information we want should be exact and precise. This creates the initial problem in the art of asking *why* in market research: how can the gap between these two attitudes be bridged?

We have, in general, three possible purposes in market research in asking people questions:

a. *Influences toward action.*
We may want to know by which media people have been *influenced* to act the way they did, which is the case when we want to evaluate the role of certain advertisements, of advice of friends, etc.; or

b. *Attributes of the product.*
We may want to know if it were the *attributes* of the product itself, and which of them—its taste, its color, or its use—led the customer to buy; or

c. *Impulses of the purchaser.*
We may want to know certain *tendencies* by which the consumer was controlled: Whether he bought for himself, or as a gift; whether he bought under sudden impulse, or after long deliberation; whether it was an habitual or a unique proceeding, etc.

The consumer, however, is seldom aware of these varying interpretations. For example, take a simple question such as why some one bought a certain brand of coffee. One respondent might answer that he liked the taste, and another that a neighbor had told him about the brand. These two respondents interpreted our question *why* in two different ways. The one thought that we were interested mainly in the attributes of the coffee; the other, that we had in mind the outside influences which affected his choice. The answers, therefore, are not comparable. The neighbor who spoke to the one respondent may very well have mentioned the good taste of the coffee; and the man who told about the good taste may have heard about it from a neighbor in the first place. So the two cases may have had the same sequence of determinants affecting the two respondents, only the interpretation of our question *why* in different ways led to seemingly quite different answers. But it is possible, as we shall see, to ask our question in such a specific way that both of our respondents will tell the whole story.

The importance of the problem involved here becomes still more evident when we turn to the statistical treatment of answers given to a *why* question. The usual table of reasons as we find it in current market research studies would record the result of our coffee question by stating: *X* respondents bought their particular brand of coffee because of its taste; *Y* people bought it because of some advice they had received. But these figures are apt to be completely erroneous. What the research man may really discover is: *X* people understood his question as pertaining to influence, and the influence they had experienced was advice; *Y* people understood the question as pertaining to attributes, and the decisive attribute for them was taste. This danger is illustrated by the following diagram:

Respondent has been actually determined by	Respondent understands the question to mean Pertaining to:		
	Influences	Attributes	
Advice	X	N	X+N
Taste	M	Y	M+Y

Advice was the real determining factor for X+N people, and *taste* for M+Y people. But the question, improperly put, made the student lose the true reason of M and N people and his results were, therefore, unsatisfactory. (In practice, the matter would be still more complicated by two-way interpretations of the question; but we need not go into that much detail.)

From these illustrations, we can make the generalization that the innocent question *why* may contain many pitfalls and is actually only the beginning of a research questionnaire. If we want to carry out our program skillfully, we must state precisely in which of the infinite number of determinants of an action we are interested. Only when we make it clear to ourselves and to our respondents which groups of determinants are at stake will we get results which permit a sensible statistical treatment, which is, of course, the aim of every field study.

The real task, therefore, which confronts the market student every time he starts out with a *why* program is to be constantly aware of what he really means or seeks to discover by his questionnaire. What special question he will ask depends upon his decision. In the example just discussed, he will be constrained to start with two questions: "What made you buy this brand of coffee?" and "Why do you like it?" There is a probability that the wording of the first question will furnish, chiefly, reports of influences, as answers, such as radio advertising, magazine advertising, grocers' displays. However, many respondents will answer the question, "What made you start to use it?" with such an answer as, "because it is a stronger brand." Then we, as interviewers, will recognize that this answer is based on attributes, and must proceed to look for influences by asking, "How did you know that this coffee is a strong brand?" The respondent will then have to report the media, or say, "I don't know."

In order to make the basic principle of these considerations quite clear, let us take a somewhat different example. We shall assume that our program is to ask a group of individuals, "Why did you change from one brand of cigarettes to another?" Here again, if we put the question this way, the respondent must decide for himself what we mean, and he may either tell why he stopped using his old brand, or report why he chose the new one. If we then try to treat the answer statistically, we lump together the responses to two different questions. Therefore, we should ask the two questions really involved: "Why did you stop using the other brand?" and "Why did you choose this new one?" This last question, as we already know, is to be split again into two questions, one pertaining to *influences* and one to *attributes.*

The reader may be troubled by the fact that, according to the technic developed, the answers to the question *why* will not normally be recorded by one table but by several tables. There is really nothing astonishing in this; very often one word of our everyday speech becomes a group of figures in exact research. For instance, we speak about the position of a point in space and understand very well what we mean. But when it comes to numerical treatment, this position is represented by three figures, the three co-ordinates. In the same way, the reason for an action might well be represented by several indices. The number of indices necessary depends to a great extent upon the complete purpose of the investigation, as we shall soon see.

Before proceeding, let us briefly consider what ought to happen when we are forced for one reason or another to use the general *why* question. We have already excluded one unjustifiable procedure, namely, to construct one table and to record simply every type of answer as often as it has been given. The diagram used above reveals that the figures so obtained will be misleading. Let us take the example regarding the change of cigarette brands. Since by hypothesis, the respondent has been asked only one general question, whereas he should have been asked three, he will answer this question according to his own interpretation. He will report either a *dissatisfaction* with his former brand, an *influence* leading him to the new brand, or some *attribute* of the new brand inducing him to make the change. We should, therefore, segregate these answers and present them in three separate tables. Let us suppose for the sake of simplicity that every respondent reports only one element. According to his own interpretation, the answer of one respondent will be inserted definitely in one of the three tables; if he answered, for instance, that a certain advertisement made him change, his answer will be recorded under "advertisement" in the table of influences. In the two other tables—pertaining to dissatisfaction with the previous brand and attributes of the new brand—he will contribute an entry to the columns *dissatisfaction unknown* and *attribute unknown.* The result will be three tables, each with the column "unknown" heavily loaded. But at least the rest of the entries will yield sensible and comparable results. We would, for instance, be able to say with some truth that, among the influences recorded, advertisement was more important than personal advice, whereas if only one tabulation were made, our conclusions would be unsound.

We might call the handling of the whole set of problems involved herein the *principle of specification.* We have elaborated on it because much of the disrepute in which the statistical treatment of reasons gathered in field studies has fallen, is due to errors connected with this principle. This, however, presents only the negative side of the question. The constructive task is to find the concrete questions which should be substituted for the general *why* program. We have already mentioned that that depends very much upon the purpose of the study. What we want to do is to pick out from the indefinite number of factors which determine a concrete action the ones which are of interest to us. To further illustrate this point, let us take the reasons for book buying. Our *program* is to find out: "Why did you buy this book?" A respondent will give, out of the same concrete experience, quite different answers, according to the particular word stressed: BUY, THIS, and BOOK. If he understood: "Why did you BUY this book?", he might answer, "Because the waiting list in the library was so long that I shouldn't have got it for two months." If he understood: "Why did you buy THIS book?" he might tell what interested him especially in the author. And if he understood: "Why did you buy this BOOK?" he might report that he at first thought of buying a concert ticket with the money but later realized that a book is a much more durable possession than a concert, and such reasoning caused him to decide upon the book. If our study is undertaken as a service to the publishing company which wants to be in a better position to compete with libraries, we will have to specify in our questions the *buying* aspect versus all other methods by which a book may be acquired. If a library wants us to find out in what books people are most interested, it is the characteristics of the book which need more specification in our questions. If the survey in which we are engaged is a leisure-time study, we will have to stress all questions which pertain to *book-reading* in comparison with other means of entertainment. There is actually no element of a concrete purchase experience which cannot be made the object of a *specified why question* for a *general why program.*

We have seen the limitations and pitfalls in the use of one question. Follow-up questions which specify definite motives are one means to correct this difficulty while more careful tabulation of answers to a single question are apt to bring more truthful conclusions. One final point on the *weight* of reasons has been made. Even after we have ascertained attributes *and* influences the question remains: Was the neighbor's authority or the vision of the coffee's taste more important? Without entering into details we mention three possibilities in getting this information. We might use the way our respondent reports immediately as our source of information. He may mention first the neighbor and the taste only upon our second question: What did the neighbor say? Then we might decide that the neighbor had more weight as a factor. Or we might use a special question; interviewing about the movie attendance we might ask: Was the theater or the show *more* important? We shall find an example in our next paragraph.

The third way, to leave the decision to the interviewer, is illustrated as follows. In interviewing about the influence of advertising, for instance, it is sometimes advisable to ask a respondent to report any example in which he bought a certain commodity under the influence of an advertisement. We will get widely varying replies, and the problem is then how to make them statistically comparable. To accomplish this, the *interviewer* must keep in mind what we want to know. We are interested in where the advertisement was seen, in order to know something about the successful medium; what the advertisement said, in order to check up on the effectiveness of the presentation; what point in the advertisements led to the purchase, in order to know what were the successful appeals. While the actual question in which we are interested is not answered directly by this method, the interviewer has an elaborate supply of facts upon which to make a decision. So we leave it to him to decide in which of the following three main classifications the respondent's answer should be placed. Has the advertisement actually aroused a *new wish?* For instance, on a hot day, a picture of an iced drink makes us enter a drugstore and ask for it. Or has it been used as a source of information about a *need of which he was already aware?* For instance, did he look in the newspaper today to see where a stocking sale is to be found? Or did the respondent see the advertisement before and did it become effective only when the corresponding *need was aroused by some other circumstances?* It is surprising to what extent these three possibilities cover, for practical purposes, the dynamic aspect of all reports regarding purchases executed under the influence of advertising. However, the problem of the weight of different determinant factors involves quite a few complicated aspects, which we cannot elaborate here. Instead, the examples cited are offered as a contribution to the *principle of specification.*

II. ENABLING THE INTERVIEWEE TO ANSWER: THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVISION.

We have not yet applied our principle to the discussion of a concrete questionnaire and for a very good reason. What we have stated so far is not sufficient to lead to practical applications. Imagine, for instance, that we want to know the influences and the attributes which determined a certain purchase, and we straightway ask the housewife for them. We certainly should not get very satisfactory results. After ascertaining what we want to know, we must enable our respondent to give us the right answers. Here we touch upon the field of the psychology of interviewing, which has received much attention in this country. Bingham and Moore[1] have gathered much valuable material about the right way of keeping the respondent's attention, of avoiding leading questions, of creating an attitude of trustworthiness, and so forth. We do not intend to repeat here material which has been successfully dealt with elsewhere. But there is one point, related to what we have said above, which needs our special attention—the *technic of fitting our questions to the experience of the respondent.* In specifying our general *why* program, we might be forced to *specify* it *in a different way for different types* of purchase experiences undergone by different individuals. Suppose, for instance, that we want to know why certain people prefer silk to rayon. There may be respondents who have given much thought to this topic; this one will be well able to give us her reasons directly, while another one may never have earnestly thought about the subject, and, therefore, will be unable to give immediately the reasons for her preference. After having selected the people who prefer silk to rayon, we must ask them first: "Have you any special reasons for your preference?" The one who has some may be asked directly what they are; the one who has none will have to be questioned differently. We will probably have to ask her about her general experiences with fabrics and will have to infer from her report the reason for her partiality.

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[1] How to Interview, 2nd edition, Harpers, 1934.

Such a procedure was followed by a company which manufactured electric motors. It wanted to ascertain from individuals by means of a questionnaire the reasons *why* they bought only of that company. In the first trial questionnaire, it appeared that some respondents were able to give very definite reasons, whereas other answers were completely evasive, or stereotyped, or otherwise of no value. Therefore, the subsequent questionnaire elaborated upon the inquiry. The first question was: "Had you any special reason in this instance to buy from our company?" If the answer was "yes," the respondent was asked about the process of his deliberations and efforts which led to the purchase; and, as he was selected in this way, he was able to give satisfactory answers. The other individuals, mainly clients who habitually purchased from this company, were given another series of questions which tried to trace the origin of their habits as to influences and tendencies.

Another questionnaire which was used in a study of movie attendance will help to summarize our whole approach to the problems of specified *why* questions. The study was made to determine "Why people attend movies?" The determinants in which we were interested were: the situation which gave rise to attendance at the movie; the part played in the decision by the persons accompanying the respondent; the sources from which information was gathered; and the deciding factors of the show and the theater. There was no question inserted as to how our respondent came to the movie, although a taxicab company might have been most interested in this aspect. Possibly some reader may not at once realize how the vehicle used for conveyance to the movie can possibly be the answer to a specified *why* question. But let him consider the following case: "Why did Mary, but not John, come in time to my party yesterday?" Answer: There was a bad snowstorm. Mary came on the subway. But John used his car and got stuck. He therefore came too late *because he drove his car.* The movie attendance questionnaire follows:

Did you go primarily (I) just to go to a movie, or (II) because of a certain picture?

I——— II——— Both———

If I or Both:

1. When did you decide to go to a movie?
2. Why and under what circumstances did you decide?
3. (If not yet inserted) When and how was your company chosen?
4. As to the special theater or show. (Check.)
   a. Was it proposed by someone in the company?
   b. Did you have it in mind yourself?
   c. Did you look for or get special advice or information?
   If (b), how did you know about it?
   If (c)), where did you look for advice or information?
5. How many pictures were taken into consideration?
6. Which was more inducive, (A) the theater ——; (B) the picture——; (C) does not know—— (Check.)
   Remarks for Interviewers: If B or C, ask question 7 first. If A, ask question 8 first. But ask both questions in any case.
7. What interested you in the picture? (Please try to remember all the details.)
8. What made the theater suitable to your choice?

If II.

1a. When did you learn about this picture?
2a. How did you learn about it?
3a. What interested you in it when you heard about it? (Please try to remember all the details.)
4a. (If not yet inserted) When and how was your company chosen?

In All Cases:

1b. (If not yet inserted) When and under what circumstances was the final decision made? Why did you go at this particular time?
2b. What other uses of the time and money spent in seeing the movie were considered?

This questionnaire contains several examples of what we called the technic of fitting the question to the experience of the respondent. Take for example, the question on the media of information. If a respondent went to the movie because of a certain picture, he is very likely to remember offhand how he learned about this picture; it was the first reason which started his whole movie attendance. On the other hand, if he just went to the movie because he wanted some relaxation, he will not remember so well why he selected the special show. Therefore, in order to fit our questions to his experience, we have to proceed this way: First, we will ascertain if he went for the sake of a certain picture or not. In the former case, we might at once ask him "How did you learn about this picture?" In the latter case, an additional question has to be inserted first. We will ask him: "When and under what circumstances did you decide to go to the movie?" This question should lead his memory back to the concrete situation in which he decided to go and then he will be more likely to remember what information he looked for in order to pick out a special picture. In a second question, we will find him prepared to give us all necessary information about influences. Another example is the way we ask about the respondent's companions in this questionnaire. If our respondent were invited to go to the movie, he will have mentioned his companion in the first question as a reason for his decision. If he were the inviting party, a special question will be necessary to find how he chose his companion. The questionnaire has to be flexible enough to cover both cases in such a way that the respondent feels at his ease in remembering the whole process of decision.

The reader is undoubtedly aware that this technic of fitting questions to the experience of the respondent is in conflict with usual procedure. Traditional opinion is that a question should be so worded as always to insure the same reaction on the part of all those interviewed. We advocate a rather loose and liberal handling of a questionnaire by an interviewer. It seems to us much more important that the question be fixed in its *meaning,* than in the *wording.* This new emphasis places the responsibility on the interviewer for knowing exactly what he is trying to discover and permits him to vary the wording in accordance with the experience of the respondent. The resulting margin of error would be much greater if a standardized question were to be interpreted in very different ways by different respondents who have their own different experiences in mind. If we get the respondent to report to us the determinants of his experience to his best knowledge and recollection, our results will be much more homogeneous than in a case where we have inflexible words but have not taken any care for ascertaining the meaning placed upon those words by our respondent.

This whole technic may be described as *"The principle of division."* It consists in adapting the pattern of our questionnaire to the structural pattern of the experience of the respondent from whom we are seeking our information. By this method, we find much easier access to the motives controlling his actions than if we try to compel the respondent to conform to a stereotyped questionnaire, which he may not understand in the way we intend. Our method, moreover, is supported by the most eminent authority. Plato, in his Phaedrus, speaks about the *principle of division* and points out the *wisdom of separating on the basis of the natural subdivision, as does the skillful carver, who seeks the joint rather than break the bone.*

III. ASCERTAINING WHAT THE ANSWER MEANS: THE PRINCIPLE OF TACIT ASSUMPTION.

We have briefly discussed the necessity of specifying the meaning of the *why* question, and that of adapting the question to the experience of the respondent. There is a third point which deserves our consideration. Suppose we ask a man what pleased him most in the coat he bought. Why doesn't he answer that he was most pleased by the fact that the coat had just two sleeves? He would certainly never have bought it with 3 sleeves, however pleasing to him other of the attributes might have been. The reason is clear: There is a tacit assumption between interviewer and respondent that coats have only two sleeves and therefore that fact will not be mentioned in spite of its predominant importance.

Very often, however, the particular consequences of this principle of tacit assumption are omitted. Let us suppose we want to know what attributes are important in the consumption of tea. If we ask: "*Why* do you drink tea for breakfast?" we immediately get answers pertaining to the use and effect of tea: It is quickly made; it keeps one awake; it doesn't burden one's stomach in the morning; and so on. If we ask: "Why do you drink X brand tea?" we get much more specific answers concerning the tea itself; because of its nice color; because it requires less sugar; because it is economical to use; and so on. But the former group of attributes is almost completely omitted. Of course, the two series of responses are by no means contradictory; in the first group the merits of tea were judged in comparison with those of other beverages, coffee, cocoa, milk; whereas, in the second group the general qualities of tea were taken for granted in a tacit assumption, and secondary distinctions between different brands were discussed. The best results are obtained by asking both ways and interpreting the differences in the two series of answers.

Such tacit assumptions are not always easy to realize. In a study of candies, three brands of different price and quality were at stake. It was the medium brand which met most frequently the objection of being ordinary. The best brand was of high quality and nicely wrapped; the medium was also wrapped, but was of a lower quality; the cheapest brand was unwrapped. People apparently felt that the best brand and the cheapest gave just what they promised, whereas the medium brand made promises in its appearance which were not kept by its quality. Therefore, the objections of low quality were more frequent with the medium than with the cheapest brand.

The role of tacit assumptions shows up everywhere where questions are involved. Therefore, it might be worth while to quote a remark from one of Chesterton's detective stories, which brings it out in a very amusing way:

> "Have you ever noticed this: That people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean, or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house: 'Is anybody staying with you?' The lady does not answer: 'Yes, the butler, the three footmen, the parlor maid, and so on,' though the parlor maid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says: 'There is nobody staying with us,' meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, 'Who is staying in the house?' then the lady will remember the butler, the parlor maid, and the rest. All language is used like that; *you never get a question answered literally, even when yet get it answered truly.*"[1]

The whole matter has, of course, immediate bearing upon the formulation of questionnaires. I quote the following questions from a questionnaire concerning shoe buying: "What is most important to you in buying shoes: color, price, durability, style, quality, fit?" Such a question and the resulting statistical tabulation have been used over and over again, with quite contradictory results. In Germany, much discussion centered about the problem of whether customers lay more stress upon quality, or upon style, because different investigations following such procedure had brought out different results. Now, price and color and style are items which can be easily ascertained at the time of purchase. Quality and durability, on the other hand, are attributes which we can test only by wearing the shoes. While the purchase is being made, we must judge them by accessory criteria. One person might judge the quality by the style; another, by the price; still

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[1] G. K. Chesterton, *The Invisible Man*, "Innocence of Father Brown."

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another by some feature of the leather. Therefore, the people who state that they bought according to quality have made varying assumptions as to how quality can be ascertained at the moment of purchase. Consequently, this whole group should be recorded according to the concrete criteria used, and not according to a word which implies a tacit assumption unknown to the interviewer. This can be easily done by adding another question about this ill-defined attributes: "In buying, how do you recognize quality and how do you recognize durability?"

The reader, who may recall similar cases, will readily see the benefit to be derived from a previous careful analysis by market research men of terms which they use, in order to describe attributes. They would not only obtain more reliable results; they would be more prepared to refute objections which originate from misunderstandings. Professor Donald Laird,[2] of Colgate, conducted an experiment to show of what little use it is to ask a woman about attributes of commodities and their importance to her. He took identical pairs of stockings and perfumed them slightly with different scents. Then he asked certain women to select the pair which seemed to them to be of the best quality. The women definitely preferred a certain perfume, and Laird made the point that these women thought they judged quality, whereas they actually judged scent. But what about this word *quality*? No definition is given or presupposed. As a result, the women first exhausted the more usual criteria of quality, perhaps texture, or body of the weave, and as these did not give any clue, they finally relied upon scent as a criterion of quality, inasmuch as a definition of quality was left entirely to their own interpretation. The only thing which Laird's clever experiment shows is that scent can be used in tacit assumption as the definition of quality. No intrinsic difficulty in this kind of research is shown except that the basic problems have to be brought to light more clearly.

There is a similarity between this principle of tacit assumption and our principle of specification: Everything depends upon the purpose of the study. If we want material for writing advertising copy, then the word *quality* used by our respondent is satisfactory for us, since we intend to approach him with words anyhow. But if we want to use our interviews for guidance in shoe manufacturing, we want to know exactly what the word *quality* connotes to the consumer. It is, therefore, advisable to formulate questionnaires in such a way that the returns can be used for both copy writing and production guidance. We cite by way of example a question on book buying. The respondent was asked: "How did you learn about this book?" The problem was to ascertain: "What interested you in it?" The typical answer was: the title, or the author, or the subject matter, but in order to get more definite information, the following check list was used, which proved to be successful.[3] The respondent was first required to give his general answer, then was asked by the interviewer to specify this reply according to the following possibilities:

What interested you in it?

Title. . . . ; previous work of author . . . . ; fame of author . . . .
Subject matter which I understood from source above (the information) . . . . ; from glancing at the book . . . . ; from the jacket . . . . ; from the title . . . .
Nothing in the book itself, but its reputation . . . . ; the authority of the recommendation . . . . ; reading was professionally required . . . .
External features of the book (color, size, binding, etc.) Specify . . .
Other reasons.

The tabulation of the results will depend upon the use which is to be made of the data. If the answers are to be used for writing advertising copy, a table according to the main groups will be most useful. If a jacket design or a store display of books is at stake, the sub-items become of chief importance. Very often in current market research, we would find that the subject matter of a book was a reason for buying. Our example shows that subject matter can mean at least four different things, and just what it means in a special case has clearly to be ascertained by the provisions of the questionnaire.

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[2] Journal of Applied Psychology, June, 1932.

[3] No attempt is here made to discuss the problem of the checklist vs. free answer. Professor J. G. Jenkins at Cornell is now working on conclusive experiments in this field.

The problem of tacit assumption constitutes such a strong limitation upon the use of questionnaires alone, that it is sometimes necessary to resort to a combination of experiment and interview. In many instances, it is not possible to ascertain positively what tacit assumptions the respondent is holding in mind, and an experiment is helpful in bringing out the real facts of the situation. A product experiment in market research is, from a theoretical point of view, a tool for eliminating the respondent's tacit assumption by variations of stimulus. We cannot discuss the field of experiment here, but we want to give as a final example, an experience which is just on the line between interview and experiment.

Donald Cowen offered a few hundred women two brands of the same food product: the one was the leading brand in the market, the other a new brand of his company. The subjects divided about 50-50 for the two brands. Then he added the question: "Do you prefer the product you just selected to the product you have at home?" Here the adherents of the leading product responded in general: "Not especially." The adherents of Cowen's product definitely preferred it to the brand they had at home. The inference was clear; the two products were in taste about equally popular; but the one, the leading brand, had a flavor or taste similar to that of the product already in use, whereas the Cowen product had a radically new taste. This very important difference would not have been brought to light either through the mere choice experiment or by a question: "Why do you like it?" It was a happy combination of experiment and interview which broke down a tacit assumption. It is the conviction of this writer that such a combination will prove more and more successful in the field of product improvement.[4]

IV. SUMMARY AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.

The assumption of this paper was that the consumer we have in front of us had carried through a concrete purchase. Our problem was to record all the factors which had determined his purchase; or, better, all the factors which were important for our investigation. We have assumed that this consumer is perfectly willing to answer our questions. The main point was to formulate our questions in such a way that the different determinants really came to light. We have seen that three principles must be observed: the *principle of specification,* of *division,* and of *tacit assumption.* It is evident that our problem is a very restricted one and by no means covers the whole field of psychology in market research. It is, therefore, very important to end this paper with a short theoretical consideration which will enable us to show the connections between our problem and some others not discussed here.

Psychologists who have analyzed the structure of action, as, notably, Carl Buehler and Madison Bently have done, agree that the determinants of an action fall into three groups: biological determinants, biographical determinants, and what we might call instantaneous or actual determinants of the first degree. These differences are easy to demonstrate in a purchase which is, of course, just a special case of action. Some one buys a book. He wants to read on the train, therefore he selects a detective story. He is especially fond of a certain author. He is in a cheerful mood, and therefore he spends more money on it than he intended. These are all determinants of the first degree. We could go on in our investigation: Why doesn't he like to read historical novels on the train? Why is he fond of this special author? What gave him his cheerful mood? The answers to these questions would be biographical determinants. They might lead us, more or less, far back into the biography of our respondents. The biological determinants are so obvious that we need not bother with them in an interview. Why does he read the book instead of eat it? Goats like to eat paper, but the biological composition of our respondent makes paper-eating uncomfortable for him.

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[4] I refer especially to the interesting efforts of Alexis Sommaripa in connection with the Psychological Corporation.

If one wants to define explicitly the determinants of the first degree, he might put it this way: The circumstances under which the decision for purchase has been made, the purpose of the purchase, and all the factors which carry this decision on until it has actually been executed, represent the actual determinants of the first degree. It is evident that the number of different determinants can vary greatly from one purchase to another. If we buy some foods under the immediate influence of how nice they look, the number of determinants of the first degree is much smaller than if we shop around for days in order to find a certain object. That does not mean, by the way, that the number of biographical determinants is smaller in the former case. It might well be that we are led far back when we want to find out why these foods appeal so much to our respondent, whereas the shopping for the other object might have a short history as to its biographical determinants.

It is probably clear to the reader that, in this paper, we have been dealing with the technics of ascertaining the determinants of the first degree which motivate a purchase. Here let us introduce a new term: *The complete motivational set-up of the first degree.* By this, we shall understand all the determinants of the first degree which are of significance for our study. This concept is of practical importance because it gives us a certain check as to the value of our questionnaire. A questionnaire is satisfactory when, and only when, it actually secures the *total* motivational set-up of the first degree. Let us suppose, for instance, that a woman gives as her reason for a purchase in a certain store that she has a charge account there. This reason is acceptable as long as she maintains a charge account only at this store. As soon as she has charge accounts in other stores also, we must demand additional reason for her selection of this store. Or, let us suppose that in a leisure-time study, reasons for time-spending are asked. Some one tells us: "I was bored, and, therefore, visited a friend." This is acceptable only if we have reason to suppose, or if the respondent tells us, that he always visits this friend when he is bored. If that is not true, we must seek an additional reason for his going to see this friend, rather than taking a walk, for instance. On the other hand, if there is only one shoe store in town, or only one which is socially "possible," we don't need to ask, in every case, why this store has been selected.

Every concrete topic of research offers new problems for getting the complete motivational set-up of the first degree. The movie questionnaire, discussed earlier in this paper, gives many examples of this sort, and the reader is asked to go back once more to it and consider it in the light of this new concept, which, in the preparation of a good questionnaire, must be taken into consideration. Further, this concept becomes a useful tool in training interviewers. In a characteristic way, even good interviewers, in the beginning, will turn in incomplete motivational set-ups. They will, for instance, report that their respondent wanted to see a certain picture and therefore, went to see it on Tuesday night. The picture, however, has been shown three consecutive days, and the respondent's interest in this picture does not explain why he went Tuesday. Such a report indicates that some determinants have escaped our interviewer. We have to train him in such a way that he realizes, on the spot, that the motivational set-up he secured was incomplete. If he understands it, he will have a very good criterion as to whether or not his interview was satisfactory. I believe that, in such training, quickest progress can be made by utilizing this concept.

The necessity for getting a complete motivational set-up may compel us to use additional tools of research beyond the mere asking why. Take for instance, the problem of ascertaining the reason why certain people did not vote in an election. It would be completely erroneous to tabulate in one straight table their reasons for not voting. Two men might report in a hasty interview that their reasons for not voting were that they were out of town. Our principle of specification quickly teaches us that not voting involves two items: amount of political interest, and the sort of hindrance that kept them away from the polls. One man might be eager to vote, but a dying relative may make it imperative for him to leave town. Another man might care so little for politics that he goes on a fishing party on election day. So if we want a complete motivational set-up, we need two sets of data, and in order to get the one we have to ascertain the amount of political interest of these two respondents. That might lead us to quite new technical problems, which we cannot discuss here. Probably an attitude scale or some other tool for measuring the amount of interest of our respondent will have been used to this end.[5] But still it will leave us in the realm of a set-up of first degree, because an interest which makes us do something is a typical example of an actual determinant of first degree.

So much for the importance of the word *complete* in our concept; now to the restrictions implied in the words *first degree.* Suppose we have ascertained that a certain color appealed especially to our respondent, or that he is especially interested in one author, and so on. Do we not miss just what is essential for our study if we fail to go back to the biographical determinants and ascertain why he likes this color, or why he is interested in this author? We will not answer the question here. It would lead us not only to new technics of ascertaining biographical determinants, but it would make us face an altogether new problem: the technics of interpretation. These technics of interpretation are of enormous importance and as great a contribution of psychology to market research as the art of asking why.[6] We can only touch on this subject in this paper, in one connection, the technic of ascertaining a motivational set-up of first degree, where it impinges closely upon the content of this article. We might, for instance, find that, in a particular study, many respondents, asked why they disliked a certain commodity, might answer, "I don't know" or "I just dislike it." This answer is completely legitimate and an actual determinant of the first degree. What such a great amount of emotional dislike means is a completely different question. For example, I happened to read a market survey regarding the use of a canned beverage. A third of the respondents approved the idea because it would be inexpensive and convenient. Another third said merely that they disliked the idea, but could give no definite reason for this dislike. The research man made the point that this latter group could easily be convinced because they themselves admitted the weakness of their point. Such a statement is, of course, preposterous. The mere fact that these respondents had an emotional dislike for this canned beverage showed that there were strong biographical roots still to be discovered. The only thing which we can do with such information is to point out that we have detected a sore spot. That is in itself a strong point. We ought not to weaken our position by going beyond our own means. We have to keep the problems of interpretation constantly in mind in order not to leave the field where the technics we discussed in this paper are located. But, on the other hand, we will not depreciate the importance of an adequate technic of asking *why* by the fact that there are other equally important things to do. It is the part of wisdom in any field, and it is consistent with the progress of methodology to develop the method step by step with the ultimate aim of integration of all of the elements into the larger pattern of methodology for the entire field. It would be indefensible to hold back simply because one step is all that could be taken at one time.

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[5] See R. Lichert, "The Technique of Attitude Measurement," Psychological Archives, 1932.

[6] See "The Psychological Approach to Market Research." *Harvard Business Review*, October 1934.

The reader who has followed our deliberations and matched them with his own experience will probably disagree with some of our statements and will feel that we overestimate the importance of others. But that is always true of discussions in a field which, at the present stage of its development, requires chiefly careful, logical, and psychological analysis. Whenever the writer of this paper has found something in his field which he believed new, he met a Mr. Smith who had already done the same thing. On the other hand, he always found scores of Mr. Jones who did not know what Smith and he had attempted. So this paper was written for Messrs. Jones, with an apology to Smith.