

Social Science Research Methods

Interview:

- Advantages:
- ★ non-verbal cues can become data
 - ★ probing discussion is possible
 - ★ can clarify meanings of questions
 - ★ can control situation in which the subject responds
 - ★ subject can qualify statements and put into own words
 - ★ respondent may be unable to read or write

- Disadvantages:
- ★ relationship between subject and researcher may bias the results
 - ★ attitude and behaviour of researcher may affect attitude and behaviour of subject
 - ★ no two interviews are the same
 - ★ very time consuming

Questionnaire:

- Advantages:
- ★ format of questions is controlled
 - ★ efficient for covering large groups
 - ★ more comfortable to express intimate answers (confidentiality)
 - ★ takes less time to answer than an interview
 - ★ good for short, fixed, alternative answers

- Disadvantages:
- ★ situation where subject responds is uncontrolled
 - ★ response rate can be very poor
 - ★ no interpersonal contact
 - ★ difficult to interpret "no" or "I don't know" answers
 - ★ hard to know if respondents understand all of the questions (or interpret them the way you intended)
 - ★ hard to know if respondents answered in a hurry in a serious manner
 - ★ respondent has to be able to read and write

Experiment

Advantages:

- ★ study behaviour rather than the verbal responses
- ★ researcher has control over the situation
- ★ variables can be controlled in sampling
- ★ because of control groups, it should be able to be repeated
- ★ some subjects can't respond verbally

Disadvantages:

- ★ ability to generalize to reality is limited
- ★ liability as to what subjects can be used
- ★ ethics of manipulating subjects behaviour through research

Observation

Advantages:

- ★ behaviour rather than a verbal report becomes data
- ★ detailed, complete information is possible
- ★ researcher is not bound by rigid plans
- ★ can sometimes unearth information that other strategies wouldn't necessarily gather
- ★ researcher can play a less active role

Disadvantages:

- ★ difficult to repeat
- ★ do become involved somehow so researcher may be less objective
- ★ some behaviour will always remain private
- ★ researcher has a limited role position
- ★ difficult to predict the result of certain events
- ★ hard to gain acceptance by a group you wish to observe
- ★ recording may be awkward

Secondary Analysis

Advantages:

- ★ data has already been collected
- ★ inexpensive
- ★ no need to deal with humans
- ★ may obtain intimate material
- ★ may get data from a variety of sources

Disadvantages:

- ★ data may have been collected for different reasons
- ★ data be incomplete
- ★ unknown as to data collection methods