

Social Research – Methods

Social Research Methods

Surveys: A survey is conducted by sending a set of pre-decided questions to a sample of individuals from a target market. This will lead to a collection of information and feedback from individuals that belong to various backgrounds, ethnicities, age-groups etc. Surveys can be conducted via online and offline mediums. Due to the improvement in technological mediums and their reach, online mediums have flourished and there is an increase in the number of people depending on online survey software to conduct regular surveys and polls.

There are various types of social research surveys: Longitudinal, Cross-sectional, Correlational Research. Longitudinal and Cross-sectional social research surveys are observational methods while Correlational is a non-experimental research method. Longitudinal social research surveys are conducted with the same sample over a course of time while Cross-sectional surveys are conducted with different samples.

For example: It has been observed in recent times, that there is an increase in the number of divorces, or failed relationships. The number of couples visiting marriage counsellors or psychiatrists is increasing. Sometimes it gets tricky to understand what is the cause for a relationship falling apart. A screening process to understand an overview of the relationship can be an easy method. A marriage counsellor can use a relationship survey to understand the chemistry in a relationship, the factors that influence the health of a relationship, the challenges faced in a relationship and expectations in a relationship. Such a survey can be very useful to deduce various findings in a patient and treatment can be done accordingly.

Another example for the use of surveys can be to gather information on the awareness of disasters and disaster management programs. A lot of institutions like the UN or the local disaster management team try to keep their communities prepared for disasters. Possessing knowledge about this is crucial in disaster prone areas and is a good type of knowledge that can help everyone. In such a case, a survey can enable these institutions to understand what are the areas that can be promoted more and what regions need what kind of training. Hence a disaster management survey can be conducted to understand public's knowledge about the impact of disasters on communities, and the measures they undertake to respond to disasters and how can the risk be reduced.

Experiments: An experimental research is conducted by researchers to observe the change in one variable on another, i.e. to establish the cause and effects of a variable. In experiments, there is a theory which needs to be proved or disproved by careful observation and analysis. An efficient experiment will be successful in building a cause-effect relationship while proving, rejecting or disproving a theory. Laboratory and field experiments are preferred by researchers.

Interviews: The technique of garnering opinions and feedback by asking selected questions face-to-face, via telephone or online mediums is called interview research. There are formal and informal interviews – *formal interviews* are the ones which are organized by the researcher with structured open-ended and closed-ended questions and format while *informal interviews* are the ones which are more of conversations with the participants and are extremely flexible to collect as much information as possible.

Examples of interviews in social research are sociological studies that are conducted to understand how religious people are. To this effect, a Church survey can be used by a pastor or priest to understand from the people the reasons they attend Church and if it meets their spiritual needs.

Observation: In observational research, a researcher is expected to be involved in the daily life of all the participants to understand their routine, their decision-making skills, their capability to handle pressure and their overall likes and dislikes. These factors are recorded and careful observations are made to decide impact of factors - such as whether a change in law will impact their lifestyle or whether a new feature will be accepted by individuals.