**Research Methods Knowledge Organiser**

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| **Stages of carrying out research** | | **Ethical Issues** | | **Sampling** |
| * Generate a testable **hypothesis**: a statement/question that can be investigated * **Design** your study: choosing the correct research methods and sampling strategy * Conduct a **pilot study** (practice research investigation): designed to see if the main study is feasible * Apply your revised research method/s by **collecting primary/secondary data** * **Analyse data** to see if it is reliable, to make it into useful information, and to represent it using graphs/chart to investigate trends, patterns and correlations * **Draw reasoned conclusions** that are presented in a clear and useful manner | | * **Consent** - Participants must give their consent (permission) to take part. * **Informed consent** - Participants must be made aware of any dangers/risks, and be made aware of their right to leave the research at any stage (right to withdraw). * **Safety** - Researchers have a duty to protect their participants (and research team) and not to expose them to undue risks. This includes causing emotional distress. * **Sensitivity** - Researchers should be sensitive when dealing with vulnerable groups. * **Debriefing** - At the end of the experiment, participants must be debriefed: given an explanation of the nature of research and how the experiment works. * **Confidentiality/Anonymity** - Researchers must respect the confidentiality of their participants. This also includes storing all relevant data securely. * **Not misrepresenting data** - Researchers must have integrity: they must be honest and not tamper with data | | * **Random sampling** – This is when everyone has an equal chance of being selected. * **Systematic sampling** – Choosing randomly from a list. E.g. every 5th, 10th or 20th person on a register or from a list * **Stratified sampling** – to make the sample as representative as possible, the sample frame will be divided into a number of smaller groups, such as social class, age, gender, ethnicity etc. Individuals are then drawn at random from these groups. * **Snowball sampling** – This is when you ask your participants to recommend other participants * Opportunity sampling – Where the most convenient or suitable persons are picked * **Cluster sampling** – This is when the researcher divides the population into separate groups, called clusters. A random sample of clusters is selected from the population. * **Quota sampling** – interviews must question an exact quota (number) of people from categories such as females, teenagers, in proportion to the numbers in the wider population. |
| **Different Methods of Research** | | | | |
|  | **Advantages** | | **Disadvantages** | |
| **Overt Observations** | * Can collect detailed and **in-depth qualitative data** which is likely to be high in **validity** so it can help you understand what people do and why * If **non-participant** then you are likely to remain apart from your research subjects and so will remain more **objective** * If **participant observation** is used you will really understand the group under study and see things from their point of view * There is no deception involved in the research so nobody feels compromised * If **structured** using **grid tally observation** and **operationalised** terms then you can get reliable data | | * **Overt** **observations** may result in the group under study changing their behaviour due to the observer – the **Hawthorne effect** * **Time consuming** and likely to be **expensive** to complete as many **observations** are **longitudinal** * It can often be difficult to **gain access** to the groups you wish to observe * Often difficult to take notes when observing so many researchers have to rely on their memories later which means much can be forgotten or **misconstrued** * If **participant observation** is used, many researchers find that they become too involved with the group they are studying and start to lose their **objectivity** * It doesn’t get **reliable data** (**participant observation** is **unstructured**) | |
| **Covert observations** | * Allows the researcher to see **participants** in their natural environment – improved **ecological validity**; * Prevents people from changing their ‘normal’ behaviour – avoids the **Hawthorne Effect**; * Increases validity as people do not know they are being studied; * If using **participant observation**, it allows the researcher to act as part of the group under study and to really understand things from their point of view – improved **validity**; * May allow research to be conducted upon groups that would not normally allow researchers in i.e. prostitutes, the homeless, criminals, gangs etc. | | * **Covert** observations have a number of associated **ethical** **issues** * Difficult to gain access to the group you wish to study e.g. for a covert **participant observation**, as groups are often deviant/taboo i.e. drug dealers, gangs etc; * Not **ethical** – difficult to morally justify spying on people; * May put the researcher in danger if the group find out they are being researched and have not given their **consent**; * Danger of the researcher ‘going native’ and losing their **objectivity**; * Research conducted covertly is typically **small scale** and therefore is unlikely to be **representative** meaning **generalisations** cannot be made; * Taking notes/recording information in a covert research study would be very difficult meaning information could be forgotten/changed and therefore lessen its **validity** | |
| **Longitudinal study** | * Allows a researcher to build up a picture of **social life** that recognises changes over time * Helps to prevent the **study** from going out of date * Allows for lots of depth and detail * Helps the researcher to build a **rapport** with the participants * Gains more **valid** data | | * Difficult to manage as people’s circumstances are constantly changing * **Time consuming** for the researcher * **Costly** for the researcher * **Data** is not **reliable** * Researcher may have to cope with **participants** dropping out of the study or moving away | |
| **Interviews** | * The researcher gets to speak to the **respondents** face-to- face so can persuade people to answer thus reducing the problem of **non-response** * **Interviews** can be conducted by phone, avoiding the expense and possible issues of social **desirability/interviewer bias** * In **unstructured** and **semi-structured** **interviews**, the researcher can probe to really find out what the **respondent** means, so increasing **validity** * They produce **qualitative** data that can be used to find out about attitudes and opinions; * Interviews are good for gathering **in-depth** and detailed information * Questions can be rephrased and explained if respondents aren’t sure what they’re being asked; Group interviews allow discussions to take place to really explore feelings and viewpoints * **Structured interviews** allow for **respondents** answers to be **compared** and are a **reliable** method * Interviews involve **interaction** between the **researcher** and the **respondent** encouraging open and honest responses which are likely to be more **valid** * Seeing body language helps you to **build rapport**/tell if someone is telling the truth * **High response** rate – difficult to say no to a researcher face-to-face | | * Interviews are quite **time intensive** as they involve a conversation * Can cost a lot to **conduct** as interviewers have to be trained * **Sample sizes** are often quite small when interviews are used as a research method which may lead to issues with a lack of **representativeness** and **generalisability** of data * Interviews are conducted in **artificial situations** therefore you can never be certain that what is said in an interview is actually what the **respondent** really thinks * Interviews are only as successful as the researcher carrying them out, particularly true in an **unstructured interview** where **probing** is essential * If respondents are not asked the same questions i.e. in unstructured interviews, then **comparisons** between findings are hard to make * There is a risk of **interviewer bias** which may affect the **validity** of the data * Sometimes **respondents** may give answers that they feel the interviewer wants to hear, so reducing **validity** – **socially desirable** responses * Recording **errors** may reduce the **validity** of the data collected * Respondents can lie e.g. because they don’t want to look bad in front of someone, which reduces validity | |
| **Questionnaires** | * Relatively easy and cheap to complete research therefore can target a large **sample** and gain more data * If comprised (made up) of **closed** **questions**, is good for gathering **quantitative** **data** which can be used to compare the responses of different **social** **groups** * Relatively quick and easy to complete as a **respondent** so shouldn’t be any problems in terms of knowing what to do * If **self-completion** can be completed at leisure allowing people time to complete properly and fully * If **postal** can be sent out to a wide geographical sample and so improve **representativeness** of **data** gathered * Often completed in private so avoids any **researcher effects** * **Standardised questions** means the **reliability** of the data gathered should be high | | * Often uses **closed questions** so unlikely to produce detailed, **qualitative** data therefore not good for finding out why people think/act as they do * **Closed questions** may mean people have to tick an option box closest to what they think rather than what they actually think thus reducing **validity** of data gathered * May be rushed or not taken seriously meaning answers may lack **validity** * If **self-completion** no way of checking the person you intended to complete the questionnaire actually did so * Problems of **non-response** may result in a **distorted sample** and thus less **representative** data * If **self-completion** no way for **respondent** to raise any queries about any part of the method meaning that it may not be completed in the way that was intended * Any **leading questions** may **bias** respondents answers | |
| **Content Analysis** | * Cheap to complete research – only really need some media to analyse * Can target a **sample** and gain more data * Easy to research - the rapid growth of the internet has made the process even easier with a vast array of media now available online to access and analyse * Straightforward to complete research as you really just need to **tally** up the number of times each **category** in your grid/chart is shown * **Reliable** method – others can check the **findings** by using the same **grid** and applying it to the same sample to see if they get the same results * Produces **quantitative data** which can be turned into **statistics** so various **comparisons** can be made to establish any **patterns** | | * The media is often **biased** so the researcher needs to be aware that results may also be biased * Success of the **method** depends on the quality of the **categories** - if important points are missed out then these will also be missing from the **results** which results in an incomplete picture * If **categories** aren't clearly **operationalised** then there will be a lack of consistency when completing research leading to issues of **reliability** - especially important if research is being completed by a team as they would all be recording different information in different categories. * The **quantitative** **data** produced will not be detailed or **in-depth** or explain why the content is as it is, leading some researchers to question its usefulness * Results are often based on the judgements and opinions of just one person, which is likely to make any conclusions **biased** | |
| **Official National Statistics** | * Many **official statistics** are freely available to researchers and the general public. * Easy to **access** and to navigate by using the ONS website. * Enable us to make comparisons between social groups and regions, for example the UK National Census * Enable us to make **historical comparisons** over time because they often go back a long way. * Allow us to spot **trends**, find **correlations** and make **generalisations**. * Allow the research to remain detached so there is less room for the **subjective** **bias** of the researcher to interfere with the research process. | | * **Statistics** are free, but they are **expensive** and **time** **consuming** to collect. * The data which exists and the **categories** and **indicators** used might not fit a researcher’s specific research purposes. * Some Official Statistics lack **validity**, for example crimes may go **unreported** and so aren’t counted. * The way that some **social trends** are measured changes over time – sometimes making **historical comparisons** difficult. * Official statistics may also lack **validity** because they are collected by the state and massaged to make things look better than they actually are. | |