

BA (H) GEOGRAPHY

SEMESTER IV

SEC: RESEARCH METHODS

Unit 2: – Data Collection: Methods of Collection

Introduction

The following are the methods of primary data collections methods:

1. Interviews
2. Questionnaires and surveys
3. Observations
4. Documents and records
5. Focus groups
6. Oral histories

1. Interviews

If you asked someone completely unaware of data analysis how to best collect information from people, the most common answer would likely be interviews.

Almost anyone can come up with a list of questions, but the key to efficient interviews is knowing what to ask. Efficiency in interviewing is crucial because, of all the primary data collection methods, in-person interviewing can be the most expensive.

There are ways to limit the cost of interviews, such as conducting them over the phone or through a web chat interface. But sometimes an in-person interview can be worth the cost, as the interviewer can tailor follow-up questions based on responses in a real-time exchange.

Interviews also allow for open-ended questions. Compared to other primary data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews are more customizable and responsive.

2. Observation

Observation involves collecting information without asking questions. This method is more subjective, as it requires the researcher, or observer, to add their judgment to the data. But in some circumstances, the risk of bias is minimal.

For example, if a study involves the number of people in a restaurant at a given time, unless the observer counts incorrectly, the data should be reasonably reliable. Variables that require the observer to make distinctions, such as how many millennials visit a restaurant in a given period, can introduce potential problems.

In general, observation can determine the dynamics of a situation, which generally cannot be measured through other data collection techniques. Observation also can be combined with additional information, such as video.

3. Documents and records

Sometimes you can collect a considerable amount of data without asking anyone anything. Document- and records-based research uses existing data for a study. Attendance records, meeting minutes, and financial records are just a few examples of this type of research.

Using documents and records can be efficient and inexpensive because you're predominantly using research that has already been completed. However, since the researcher has less control over the results, documents and records can be an incomplete data source.

4. Focus groups

A combination of interviewing, surveying, and observing, a focus group is a data collection method that involves several individuals who have something in common. The purpose of a focus group is to add a collective element to individual data collection.

A focus group study can ask participants to watch a presentation, for example, then discuss the content before answering survey or interview-style questions.

Focus groups often use open-ended questions such as, “How did you feel about the presentation?” or “What did you like best about the product?” The focus group moderator can ask the group to think back to the shared experience, rather than forward to the future.

Open-ended questions ground the research in a particular state of mind, eliminating external interference.

5. Oral histories

At first glance, an oral history might sound like an interview. Both data collection methods involve asking questions. But an oral history is more precisely defined as the recording, preservation, and interpretation of historical information based on the opinions and personal experiences of people who were involved in the events.

Unlike interviews and surveys, oral histories are linked to a single phenomenon. For example, a researcher may be interested in studying the effect of a flood on a community. An oral history can shed light on exactly what transpired. It’s a holistic approach to evaluation that uses a variety of techniques.

As in interviewing, the researcher can become a confounding variable. A confounding variable is an extra, unintended variable that can skew your results by introducing bias and suggesting a correlation where there isn’t one.

The classic example is the correlation between murder rates and ice cream sales. Both figures have, at one time or another, risen together. An unscientific conclusion may be that the more people buy ice cream, the higher the occurrence of murder.

However, there is a third possibility that an additional variable affects both of these occurrences. In the case of ice cream and murder, the other variable is the weather. Warmer weather is a confounding variable to both murder rates and ice cream sales.

6. Questionnaires and surveys

Questionnaires and surveys can be used to ask questions that have closed-ended answers.

Data gathered from questionnaires and surveys can be analyzed in many different ways. You can assign numerical values to the data to speed up the analysis. This can be useful if you're collecting a large amount of data from a large population.

To be meaningful, surveys and questionnaires need to be carefully planned. Unlike an interview, where a researcher can react to the direction of a respondent's answers, a poorly designed questionnaire will lead the study nowhere quickly. While surveys are often less expensive than interviews, they won't be valuable if they aren't handled correctly.

Surveys can be conducted as interviews, but in most cases, it makes sense to conduct surveys using forms.

Online forms are a modern and effective way to conduct surveys. Unlike written surveys, which are static, the questions presented in online forms can change according to how someone responds. For instance, if you use JotForm to create your forms, when someone answers no to a question about allergies, they won't have to scroll past all of the related follow-up questions about specific allergies. Instead, they'll go immediately to a question on a different topic.

Modern form building also emphasizes **mobile data collection**, so the forms can easily be viewed and filled out on mobile devices. One concern when gathering data electronically in the EU is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This newly enacted regulation provides privacy protection to EU residents and citizens and can result in costly fines for noncompliance. If you want to learn more about how to make sure your forms are GDPR compliant, JotForm has all the information you need.

Imagine that your business serves a substantial population. Maybe you have a massive customer list (which most businesses would love), or you're trying to gain some insights on a large group, such as the residents of a large city. In most cases, it's impractical to try to reach each member of this population.

Sampling is the process of identifying a subset of a population that provides an accurate reflection on the whole. It can be a tricky process, as populations are often diverse. However,

there are some statistical methods that can make sure a small subset of the community accurately represents the whole group.