

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ANALYSIS? ILLUSTRATE WITH SUITABLE EXAMPLES

Every sociologist before starting to do a research has first to decide what methodological research is most suitable. That is they have to decide if they are going to adopt a qualitative (Interpretive Social Science) or quantitative (Positivism) research process (writing science). Research process is described as writing science, where one is going to see what he is going to observe and then see how this problem can be solved. Here variables play an important part, where first collection of data takes place and then construction of theory.

Questionnaires are a quantitative research process. Emile Durkheim is one of the leading sociologists who used this type of research method. In fact he did a famous research on suicide and wrote a book regarding this aspect. In addition, Ronald G. Suttana made use of questionnaires in his study of child labour practices in the Maltese Islands. There are various advantages of questionnaires. These are made up of a large number of data from many people in a relatively short time. Since data is obtained from a large number of people generalising is more possible. For example in Young and Willmott's study of family life in London in 1971, they found that free time is spent doing chores and odd jobs around the house. In a quantitative research, since little personal involvement by the researcher takes place there is little danger or sacrifice by the researcher. In addition by means of computers, data can be analysed quickly and efficiently and relationships and comparisons between many variables can be found out. Since this is a quantitative research method, results can be checked up by other researchers and new theories produced.

However, questionnaires have also their disadvantages. Interactionists see statistical data as inadequate for producing sociological explanations of human behaviour and Phenomenologists see data produced as an artificial creation of the researcher. In total, these put forward six main objectives:

1. It cannot be assumed that different answers to the same question reflect real differences between respondents, since words in vocabulary may have a different meaning in different areas. Respondents can interpret the question differently.
2. The researcher assumes that he/she knows what is important and what not. However, respondents cannot give information that is not asked and it is difficult to develop hypotheses.
3. Questioners produce a distorted picture of the social world since the process of breaking down a concept so that it can be quantified imposes sociological constructs, categories and logic.
4. The validity of data is limited since respondents may lie and lack co-operation. Even if they want to tell the truth, they may be unable to do so because they forget or lack the relevant information.
5. There is a great distance between the researcher and the subject of research. To a positivist, this encourages objectivity, but to an Interpretive sociologist, it prevents the possibility of understanding the meanings and motives of the subjects of the research. Unlike participant observation, the researcher does not undergo similar experiences to the subjects of the research, and so cannot draw so easily on experience to understand the behaviour of those being studied. It is not possible to see how people act and react towards each other, nor is it possible to examine the way in which self-concepts change during the course of interaction.
6. In addition, in this quantitative research method the researcher imposes his own order on the grouping of data.

Interviews are a compromise between qualitative and quantitative method and so they are more flexible. They have many of the advantages of questioners. In addition to these advantages, an Interpretive social scientist sees that in interviews, words are clarified and researcher is less likely to impose his ideas. Also the researcher does not limit the responses to fixed choices and so new hypotheses and theories, which the researcher would have not originally thought of, may be produced.

The disadvantages of interviews are those mostly those regarding ethics. The researcher may be biased and influenced by the presence of the researcher. In addition, the interviewer must be aware of the social conventions of those being interviewed. For example when David Matza interviewed delinquents, a surprising number of them disapproved of such crimes.

Participant observation is a qualitative type of research method. Its advantages include that the researcher is less likely for imposing his beliefs. This qualitative research method produces answers of questions not thought of. In addition, the researcher does not judge what is important or not but hears everything that is said, and so he directly observes the social world. Also in participant observation there is more closeness between the researcher and the person in research, and so he/she feels more freely to talk at ease. In addition, since the meanings (life history, participant observation, discourse analysis) which people attach to their own behaviour changes, participant observation can study the process through which such changes happen. In relation to this since some actions takes place instinctively and one cannot be expected to recall precisely if asked in an interview

This type of research process has also its disadvantages. Since one studies a small group of people, generalising is less possible. Also participant observation is time consuming and the researcher has to be physically present. Since he/she must be present this results to danger to the researcher's personal safety, especially when dealing with criminals, and the researcher may dislike the activities performed. Infact a researcher who called himself 'James Patrick' had to keep even his name a secret when studying violent Glasgow gangs. In addition higher classes tend usually to exclude participant observers, since these do not like the idea that that there is someone who is continually watching them. Also since participant observation is made up of small samples, results cannot be checked or compared. The researcher may impose his own framework of what to record and what is unimportant, and so results produced are specific to that small group of people and is a personal opinion of the researcher (personal perspective). This makes it extremely difficult for the researchers to compare results even if they are studying the same group of people.

One has to bare in mind what type of research method to choose, either qualitative or quantitative, or ideally a mixture of both as in interviews, called Triangulation. Therefore, the researcher has to see the validity and the reliability of data, since the collected data will give light on the research process.