

Social Psychology

Paper V

B.A.III (Hons.)

Types of Observation Method

1. Participant Observation

Participant Observation is one of the most common methods for qualitative data collection. It is also one of the most demanding techniques of observation. It requires that the researcher become a participant in the culture or context being observed. Participant Observation incorporates how to enter the context, the role of the researcher as a participant, the collection and storage of field notes, and the analysis of field data. Participant observation often requires months or years of intensive work because the researcher needs to become accepted as a natural part of the culture in order to assure that the observations are of the natural phenomenon.

Merits and Demerits of Participant Observation

Merits:

- Researcher can control some of the variables by being part of the natural environment.
- Researcher can still observe participants in their natural habitat, even if they know he/she is a part of the study.
- Researcher can avoid incorrect self-reported data through this method of observation.

Demerits:

- It can be challenging to take notes openly without blowing his/her cover as the market researcher.
- If the researcher can't take notes openly, he will have to rely on memory for note-taking, and memory can be faulty.
- If a researcher becomes too involved in the study, he could become less objective. This could threaten the validity of the study.

2. Naturalistic Observation/ Non-Participant Observation

Naturalistic observation is another type of observation research method used by market researchers. This type of observation is when market researchers study the behaviours of participants in natural surroundings. There are typically no predetermined behavioural codes. Instead, the researcher will take rigorous notes and code the data later.

Merits and Demerits of Naturalistic Observation

Merits:

- The study ensures validity when participants are in their natural setting.
- This type of study can generate new ideas and research questions.

- It opens researcher's minds to possibilities they might not have considered before.
- Researchers can collect authentic data and avoid any potential problems with self-reported data.

Demerits:

- Researchers cannot control different variables, making it difficult to replicate the study and test for reliability.
- It may be challenging to conduct this type of study on a wide scale.
- They have to use skilled researchers, so that they do not risk missing critical behavioural data.
- They aren't able to manipulate any variables.

3. Controlled Observation

Controlled observations are typically a structured observation that takes place in a psychology lab. The researcher has a question in mind and controls many of the variables, including participants, observation location, time of the study, circumstances surrounding the research, and more.

During this type of study, the researcher will often create codes that represent different types of behaviours. That way, instead of writing a detailed report, they can classify behaviour into different categories and analyze the data with more ease.

Merits and Demerits of Controlled Observation

Merits:

- Researcher can make an observation schedule for his sampling, and have other market researchers use the same codes if they replicate the study. This helps test for reliability.
- The coded data is easy to analyze and quantify.
- Controlled studies aren't as time-consuming.

Demerits:

- It may be challenging to determine the validity of the study if participants know they are being watched.

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