
3. Exploratory Study on Social Research

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Abstract:

Curiosity or inquisitiveness is a unique characteristic of human beings. We are curious to recognize ourselves, our environment, our institution, our planet and even the universe. Whenever any questions arise in our mind, we seek answer to them. Whenever we come across a problem, we attempt to find out keys to address them. Research seeks answer to certain questions which have not been answered so far and which depend upon human efforts but research answers only those questions of which the answers are not available in literature.

Social research focuses to discover the casual relationships in human behavior, and it is systematic and critical investigation into a social phenomenon through scientific methods. It is generally acknowledged that in human behavior as much as a natural phenomenon, a large degree of measurable and predictable sets of associations occurs. Social research, like a research in physical and natural sciences, seeks to establish measure, analyze and predict these associations in their variety and intensity. Social research assumes a distinct character of its own in a significant measure when it comes to its applications scientific process, characteristics of research in natural and physical sciences to social phenomena. Unlike physical and natural sciences, the objects are conscious and active human beings. This chapter covers the definition, objectives, importance, scope and characteristics, types and methods of social research.

3.1 Meaning and Significance of Social Research:

According to C. A. Moser “Social research is systemized investigation to gain new knowledge about social phenomena and problems.”

According to PV Young “Social research is scientific undertaking which by means of logical methods, aim to discover new facts or old facts and to analyze their sequences, interrelationships, casual explanations and natural laws which govern them”.

Social Research is a technique used by social scientists, scholars, and researchers to examine about the people and humanities so that they can design products/services that will cater to various desires of the people. Different socio-economic groups and sections belonging to different parts of a county think in different ways. Various aspects of human behaviors need to be addressed to understand their thoughts and feedback about the social world, which can be done using Social Research. Any topic could trigger social research – new feature, new market trend or an upgrade in old technology.

Social research concerns with social data which are much more complex than that of physical data. Most of the subject matter of social research is qualitative and doesn't admit quantitative measurement.

Social research is not a mere compilation, but a purposive investigation it aims at describing, interpreting and explaining a phenomenon. It is objective and logical, applying possible tests to validate the measuring tools and the conclusions reached. Social research is based on observable experiences or empirical evidence and directed towards finding answers to pertinent questions and solutions to the problems.

Social research emphasizes the development of generalization, principles or theories. The purpose of social research is not to arrive at an answer which is personally pleasing to the researcher, but rather one which will stand up the test of criticism.

3.2 Objectives of Social Research:

The purpose of the research is to find out answer to the questions by the applications of scientific procedures. The main aim of the social research is to find out the truth which is hidden and which is not been discovered as yet (Brooks et al., 2020). Though each research study has its own specific purpose, Social research extends the knowledge of human beings, social life and environment. Researcher and scientists build up wealth of knowledge through the research findings. They search answers for various types of questions –what, when, where, how and why of various phenomena and enlighteners the body of knowledge have been developed by research in general and pure or fundamental research in particular. Objectives of social research are shown in Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1: Objectives of Social Research

Social research brings to light information that might never be discovered fully during the ordinary course of life. For example-marketing research could result in discovery of new users for an old product.

Social research establishes generalizations and general laws and contributes to theory building in various field of knowledge. Our knowledge of separately known events, is connected together to draw generalizations and general laws.

Law of gravitation, law of demand, the theories of consumer behavior, motivation, and learning are some examples of such generalizations and theories.

Social research verifies and tests the existing facts and theories and these help in improving our knowledge and ability to handle situation and events. Robert K Merton argues that empirical research goes far beyond the passive role of verifying and testing theory. Research plays active role, it performs four main functions-Initiates, formulates, deflects and clarifies theory.

General laws developed by social research may enable us to make reliable predictions of events yet to happen.

Social research aims to analyze interrelationships between the variables and to derive casual explanations and thus enables us to have a better understanding of the world in which we are living.

Social research focuses to finding solutions socio-economic problems such as social unrest, unemployment, poverty, health and human relations.

Social research develops new tools, concepts and theories for better study of unknown phenomenon.

Social research aids planning and thus contributes to national development and brings out the factual data on prevailing situations and problems for drying up plans and schemes on realistic basis, it uncovers needed facts on which sound decision can be made before committing the resources. Studies open up the possibility of testing the validity of planning assumptions or premises (Hall and Wise, 2019). Research studies enable the planners to evaluate alternative strategies and choose the most appropriate strategy for development of the various sectors like agriculture, industry, education, health and social welfare.

3.3 Scope and Importance of Social Research:

Research is essential to diffuse knowledge and to expand its horizon. Social research is an important source of knowledge which opens new ways of knowledge and wisdom. Social research plays an important role in improving the quality of life through new experimentation and discovery.

Social research helps to confirm or reject the existing theories. Industries, business firms can get a lot of information about the society by conducting social research before launching new products in the market (Akanle et al., 2020).

Social research can provide all the facts to administrators to adopt and undertake appropriate policies and program. Social research provides new insights in to the organized society and its social structure.

Social research also provides a new horizon in scientific explanation, advanced and tested principles of procedure and suggested new concepts. Another scope of social research is that exemplified by studies and attempt to test and challenge existing theories and revise them.

3.4 Nature or Characteristics of Social Research:

Social research is directed towards the solution of the problems. The ultimate goal is to discover cause-effect relationships between the problems.

It emphasizes the development of generalizations, principles or theories that will be helpful in predicting future occurrences. It is based on observable or empirical experience.

It demands accurate observations and descriptions. Researchers may choose from a variety of non-qualitative descriptions of their observations.

Main characteristics of social research are shown in Figure 3.2.

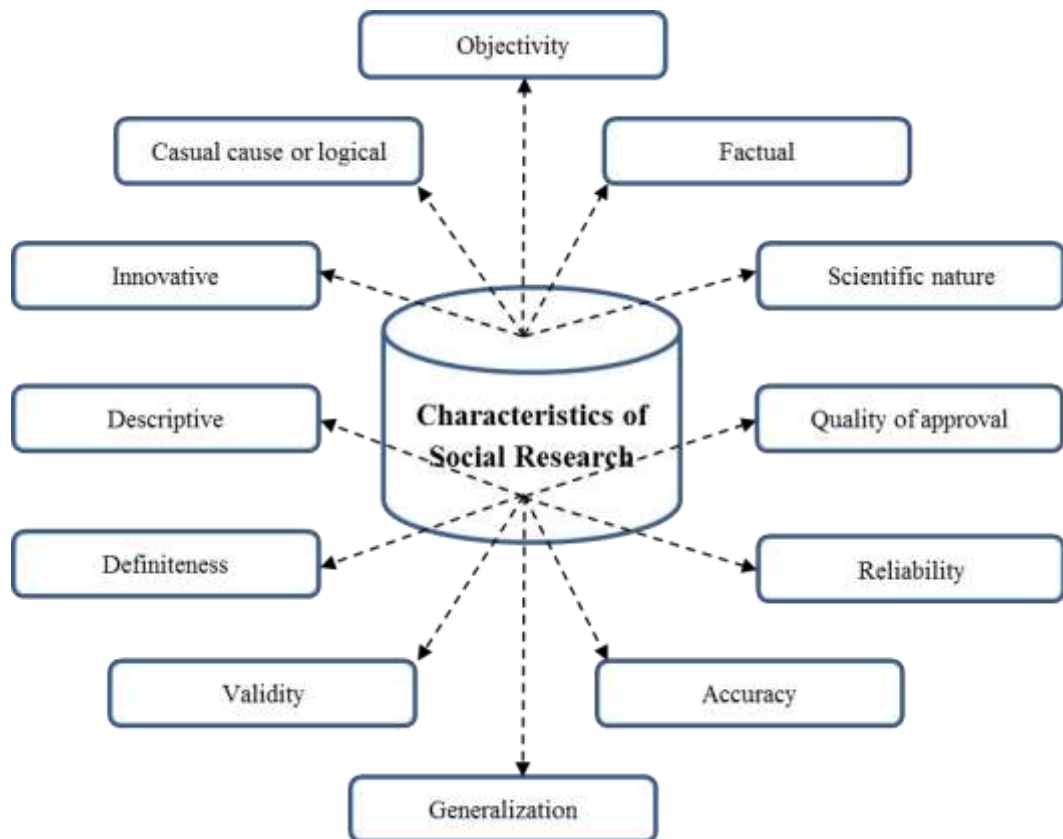


Figure 3.2: Characteristics of Social Research

3.5 Process or Steps of Social Research:

Steps of social research are shown in Figure 3.3. After realization of the problem, the problem is identified, and theoretical framework is designed.

In the third stage of social research hypothesis is formulated followed by research design. Further, study area is selected. Other steps are also shown in Figure 3.17%

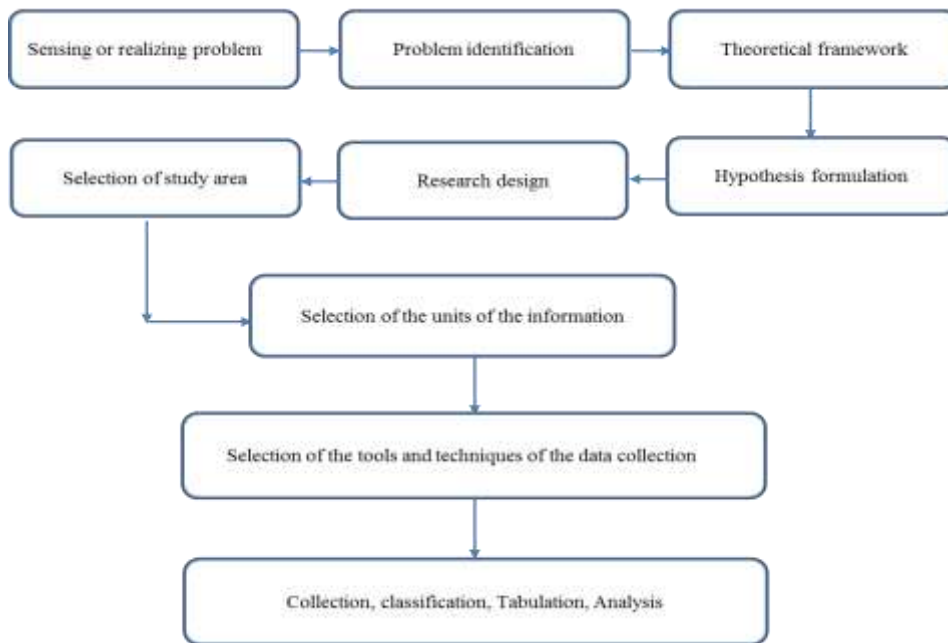


Figure 3.3: Steps in Social Research

3.6 Types of Social Research:

There are four main types of Social Research:

3.6.1 Qualitative Research:

Qualitative Research is method used to accumulate data through open-ended and conversational deliberations; there are five main qualitative research methods- ethnographic research, focus groups, one-on-one online interview, content analysis and case study research. Usually, participants are not taken out of their ecosystem for qualitative data collection to gather information in real-time which helps in building trust. Researchers depend on multiple methods to gather qualitative data for complex issues.

3.6.2 Quantitative Research:

Quantitative Research is an extremely instructive source of data collection steered through mediums such as surveys, polls, and questionnaires. The gathered data can be analyzed to conclude numerical or statistical results. There are four distinct quantitative research methods: survey research, correlational research, causal-comparative research and experimental research. This research is carried out on a sample that is representative of the target market usually using close-ended questions and data is presented in tables, charts, graphs etc. For example, a survey can be conducted to understand Climate change awareness among the general population. Such a survey will give in-depth information about people's perception about climate change and also the behaviors that impact positive behavior. Such a questionnaire will enable the researcher to understand what needs to be done to create more awareness among the public.

3.6.3 Primary Research:

Primary Research is conducted by the researchers themselves. There are a list of questions that a researcher intends to ask which need to be customized according to the target market.

These questions are sent to the respondents via surveys, polls or questionnaires so that analyzing them becomes convenient for the researcher. Since data is collected first-hand, it's highly accurate according to the requirement of research.

For example:

There are tens of thousands of deaths and injuries related to gun violence in the United States. We keep hearing about people carrying weapons attacking general public in the news. There is quite a debate in the American public as to understand if possession of guns is the cause to this.

Institutions related to public health or governmental organizations are carrying out studies to find the cause. A lot of policies are also influenced by the opinion of the general population and gun control policies are no different.

Hence a gun control questionnaire can be carried out to gather data to understand what people think about gun violence, gun control, factors and effects of possession of firearms. Such a survey can help these institutions to make valid reforms on the basis of the data gathered.

3.6.4 Secondary Research:

Secondary Research is a method where information has already been collected by research organizations or marketers. Newspapers, online communities, reports, audio-visual evidence etc. fall under the category of secondary data.

After identifying the topic of research and research sources, a researcher can collect existing information available from the noted sources.

They can then combine all the information to compare and analyze it to derive final conclusions.

3.7 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. It leads 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/platforms (Goode and Hatt, 1952).

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.

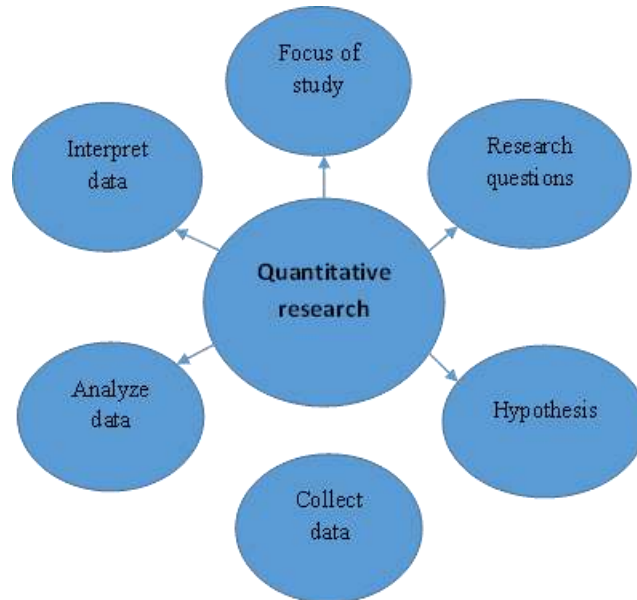


Figure 3.4: Steps of Quantitative Research

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 counselors or psychiatrists is increasing. Sometimes it gets tricky to understand what the cause for a relationship falling apart is. A screening process to understand an overview of the relationship can be an easy method. A marriage counselor 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.

- a. **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.
- b. **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 laity the reasons they attend Church and if it meets their spiritual needs.56%

- c. **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 and recorded and careful observations are made to decide factors such as whether a change in law will impact their lifestyle or whether a new feature will be accepted by individuals.

3.7.1 Quantitative Method:

A. Quantitative Observation Definition:

Quantitative observation is an objective collection of data which is primarily focused on numbers and values – it suggests “associated to, of or depicted in terms of a quantity”. Results of quantitative observation are derived using statistical and numerical analysis methods. It implies observation of any entity that can be associated with a numeric value such as age, shape, weight, volume, scale etc.

This technique is conducted on a sample which best represents the target market. It is important to have a larger sample size so that the observations can be made considering most of the diversities that exist in a population.

By considering a large population, the observation results are most likely to have higher credibility. Once a market researcher collects data from the sample, the process of analysis begins and observed results are obtained.

The University of South Alabama has termed Quantitative Observation as “Standardized Observation” and it is mostly used in scientific research as it produces statistically observed information. Quantitative observation is usually conducted by sending out surveys, questionnaires or polls.

B. Quantitative Observation Characteristics:

- **Accuracy:** Under quantitative observation, data can be quantified and so, it produces accurate results in comparison to other methods such as qualitative observation which produce results that can't be quantified. For example, the boiling temperature of water at sea level is 100°C is a quantitative observation.
- **Constant Results:** Results of this observation method are constant – the boiling point of water at sea level will be 100°C and will not change with other variables remaining constant.
- **Sample Creation:** A sample should be formed for quantitative observation and the size of this sample should be considerably large for researchers to generalize the observation to the entire population.
- **Scientific Research:** This method measures and “quantifies” multiple aspects mainly for scientific research.

- **Bias-free Results:** As the results are quantified, the observations derived from those are free from bias but have a margin of error involved and is usually based on a hypothesis.
- **Improve Reliability of Results:** For a marketer to have a quantity linked to his/her qualitative observation, he/she needs to conduct quantitative observation as well. A quantitative result can be derived for the qualitative observation to increase reliability on the results.
- **Conduct statistical analysis:** Quantitative observation verifies details by conducting statistical analysis of a statement.
- **Numerical Results:** All the results of quantitative observation are numerical.
- **Use Various Instruments:** Instruments such as rulers, thermometers, balances etc. are used for quantitative observation.

C. Methods to Process and Analyze Data:

There are various methods and to process and analyze collected information. Rich quantitative observational data could be processed using codes/scores, for example, evaluation scales, checklists, tables etc. can be created to analyze collected data.

- **Create A Plan:** Based on the purpose of observation, a quantitative observation plan is created. On this basis of this plan, settings are changed and method of conducting this observation is decided.

D. Quantitative Observation Examples:

There are several situations under which quantitative observation can be implemented. Here are some examples of quantitative observation:

If a market researcher intends to understand his/her brand share ability, they can ask a Net Promoter Score question: “Considering your complete experience with our company, how likely would you be to recommend us to a friend or colleague?” with a scale from 0-10. 0 indicates highly unlikely and 10 indicate highly likely.

Respondents will be divided into three categories: Promoters (9-10), Passives (7-8) and Detractors.

Net Promoter Score can be calculated using formula = %Promoters – %Detractors * 100

The result will be a quantitative observation, i.e., a numerical value which will depict customer loyalty and brand share ability.

Another example of quantitative observation is a customer satisfaction survey. “How satisfied are you with our products/services?” This question can be asked on a four, five, six or seven-point Likert Scale– where 1 shows strongly disagree, 2 shows disagree, 3 means neutral, 4 means agree and 5 means strongly agree. Four and six-point scale will not have the neutral point and the seven-point Likert scale will have slightly agree/disagree. Here opinions are directly converted into numbers by connecting them to different numbers, making analysis a simple task for marketers.

3.7.2 Qualitative Observation:

Qualitative Observation is the research method of using subjective methodologies to gather information or data. Since the focus on qualitative observation is to equate quality differences, it is a lot more time consuming than quantitative observation, but the sample size used is much smaller and the research is extensive and a lot more personal.

Qualitative observation deals with the 5 major sensory organs and their functioning – sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing. This doesn't involve measurements or numbers but instead characteristics.

A. Characteristics of Qualitative Observation:

Characteristics of qualitative observational research can very broadly be bucketed under ten overlapping themes that researchers should know of when they analyze the data that has been collected. They are:

- **Inductive analysis:** This characteristic is a major part of qualitative observational research because the interviewer or the researchers immerses himself/herself with the group and gets in sync with the topic. The questions evolve during the research process. The researcher can form any hypothesis through the answers and work backwards to prove or disprove it or even build on it. Another component of this is the researcher evaluates a lot of content which is known as inductive content analysis. This analysis is used to form hypothesis and act as a primary content type. This approach allows for the findings to emerge from raw data without the restraints of structured methodologies of significant, dominant or repetitive themes.

For example, when someone borrows a book from you. They say they will return it in 2 weeks but don't. And then do that a few more times. Every time a date is decided on, that is a premise. But if the book isn't returned after a few such instances, you assume that you are never getting the book back. That is the conclusion.

- **Personal Contact and Insight:** The researcher has to be aware of the "Halo effect" during a research study. Whilst it is important to immerse yourself with the subjects for a study, it is also counter-productive to form a bias. Being emotionally vested in a study helps to derive better answers but it is also a slippery slope if the researcher lets the topic get biased.

A good example for this would be an influencer being the researcher for a sports shoe manufacturer's study with current and prospective customers. The researcher can offer important inputs toward the research but offering personal suggestions or product tweaks would bias the study and the corresponding research.

- **Naturalism or naturalistic inquiry:** This type of qualitative observation and qualitative research is the type of research that focuses on how people react or behave when they are put in a real life situation in a natural environment. This characteristic hinges on the reality that things in general are coherent, consistent and predictable.

Hence the researcher here would try every extent to control the contours of the environment the research study is happening in so that the study happens in context.

For example, if you wanted to understand from students how many of them use e-learning modules, you cannot do this in a cafeteria where all the students may not be taking online courses. It would have to be done in online forums or through video conferencing.

- **Dynamic Systems:** Qualitative observational research focuses on getting multiple answers. There's no right or wrong answer and hence the researcher must prod for every possible aspect towards the study. It is also imperative that the researcher motivates the participants to provide every variant of the answer that they think is right.

An example would be in a sample research with a few participants to discuss a new mobile phone features, the researcher should push the respondents to talk about every feature they think is important or not or add something that is still only on the drawing board.

- **Holistic Perspective:** It approaches that the whole is greater than the sum of all the parts. This means that every action or communication in a research study has to be accounted for as part of their culture or community. But. But if not careful, the researcher assumes every little thing to be relevant and that leads the researcher down the wrong path.

A very good example of this is the use of plastic bags in a certain country. If a lot of the people are interviewed about their plastic usage and discuss how to reduce the usage, the usage would never reduce.

- **Unique Case Orientation:** Researchers must never lose focus of the fact that each research study is different from another and equal importance and time and emotions must be devoted to each research. Researchers must also realize no matter what outcome of a study is required; the same amount of time has to be devoted to the research.

An example of this is a focus group on the color of a clothing item is as important as the focus group on the design, fabric and fit.

- **Context Sensitivity:** The researcher must be sensitive to the fact that different people respond to the same question very differently and he/she should not negate an opinion or thought on the basis of a personal bias. They must also realize that certain demographics, geographical locations or even cultural behavior can influence the variables for each question. The researchers should be able to account for them and see patterns and map them in the analysis.

Focus groups with various people of different ethnicities being asked about their food preferences is an example of this characteristic. People of different religions and different geographies respond to different ways to food because of their upbringing, the nutritional value of the food, religious beliefs etc.

- **Empathetic Neutrality:** Ideally, researchers should be non-judgmental while compiling findings of a research study. But being completely neutral is not possible for a human being, this concept is a controversial topic in qualitative research.

For example, an orthopedic surgeon who was the researcher for a study cannot be biased towards orthopedic doctors who were respondents of the research study whilst putting down the other medical professionals.

- **Qualitative Data:** Many methodologies like interviews, samples and research reports can help triangulate the cultural orientation of a group in a research study. This is summation of the culture the way it is. A researcher can do the ground research work to find a common bond and then conduct the actual interviews to get their point of view – this is qualitative data.

For example, trying to understand why Eastern African runners do well in long distance competitive running. Reports show you the results and the researchers go into a study with that premise and then conduct actual interviews to understand the reasons behind their dominance.

- **Design Flexibility:** Researchers can deep dive into certain threads that come out of a research study even though it may not be directly relevant to the central theme of the study. This is to coerce the recipients of the study to answer being fully invested in the study.

This can be denoted with if a restaurant is coming up with a new venue and the central theme is Mexican food but after the research, there seems to be some interest for South American food too. The researcher should take cognizance of the request and build on it.

To summarize, it is paramount that the researcher has an open mind to the study and can distance himself/herself from any bias or a halo effect. The researcher must also be aware of their own biases and know how to keep those biases away whilst representing a group.

3.7.3 Types of Qualitative Observation:

Even though qualitative observation is subjective, the researcher must define the end result and quantify it so that the research is actionable. The researcher must also be aware of bias and try to not let that engulf the research. It also helps to have more than one researcher so that the accumulated research is holistic in nature. The four types of qualitative observations are:

A. Complete Observer:

In this type of qualitative observation, the researcher is completely unknown to the research audience and cannot even be seen.

This type of research gives the audience more freedom to speak because they think they are not being observed or judged. But this method of qualitative observation is losing ground over other types because of privacy issues. In today's day and world, one cannot observe you without your knowledge.

This model although is the only option in a public place like a lounge, restaurant or a coffee shop. The other alternative to this is to have a camera recording the focus group or discussion that the group is having.

B. Observer as Participant:

In this type of qualitative observation, the researcher is known to the focus group or the people in the sample undergoing the study. In this study type, the end goal of the researcher is known to everyone. In this case the observer can play an active part in the discussion.

C. Participant as Observer:

In this type of qualitative observation, the observer completely indulges the participants and participates in the discussion. Even though the participants discuss in entirety with the observer, they do know that the observer is also a researcher. The observer in this case though is a family member or a close friend and hence that doesn't deter the participants from a discussion. An example of this study type is a medical study on an in-depth but a slightly embarrassing topic where the researcher could be related the participant or participants in any way.

D. Complete Participant:

This research type is used for secretive topics or research areas that you wouldn't want to ruffle feathers with. In this case the researcher is completely in sync with the participants. The discussions are free flowing no holds barred and the researcher indulges in the discussion animatedly. In this research type the participants don't know the researcher or even that a research study is being conducted. A shopping mall trying to understand purchasing and spend habits of the shoppers is an example of this type of study. This is where the researcher is planted in an already group of participants and the researcher can plant thoughts or ideas or coerce participants to speak up.

E. Qualitative Observation – Examples:

Qualitative observation is called intensive. An example is – A vacation rental owner wanted to understand why there were diminishing guest visits, very few repeat guests and negligible referrals. An online community of the vacation rental home was interviewed to understand their holiday and stay habits and preferences. At the end of the interview, it was realized that the reason for non-repeat visits and no referrals was that the home didn't contain a washer dryer, it was far from downtown and getting necessities was tough and the home wasn't pet friendly.

There are many differences between qualitative observation and quantitative observation but some of the major differences are:

- Qualitative observation is objective but quantitative observation is subjective.
- Qualitative observation can be conducted with a small sample but in quantitative observation the number is much higher.
- The sample in qualitative observation is counted as the actual but in quantitative observation; a subset can signify the emotions of a larger audience.
- Qualitative observation portrays an individual opinion, but quantitative observation is a collection of opinions.

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