

Observation Method

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines observation as, ‘accurate watching and noting of phenomena as they occur in nature with regard to cause and effect or mutual relations’. Thus observation is not only a systematic watching but it also involves listening and reading, coupled with consideration of the seen phenomena.

It involves three processes. They are: sensation, attention or concentration and perception. Under this method, the researcher collects information directly through observation rather than through the reports of others. It is a process of recording relevant information without asking anyone specific questions and in some cases, even without the knowledge of the respondents. This method of collection is highly effective in behavioural surveys.

For instance, a study on behaviour of visitors in trade fairs, observing the attitude of workers on the job, bargaining strategies of customers etc. Observation can be participant observation or non-participant observation. In Participant Observation Method, the researcher joins in the daily life of informants or organisations, and observes how they behave. In the Non-participant Observation Method, the researcher will not join the informants or organisations but will watch from outside.

Merits

- 1) This is the most suitable method when the informants are unable or reluctant to provide information.
- 2) This method provides deeper insights into the problem and generally the data is accurate and quicker to process. Therefore, this is useful for intensive study rather than extensive study.

Limitations

Despite of the above merits, this method suffers from the following limitations:

1) In many situations, the researcher cannot predict when the events will occur. So when an event occurs there may not be a ready observer to observe the event.

2) Participants may be aware of the observer and as a result may alter their behaviour.

3) Observer, because of personal biases and lack of training, may not record specifically what he/she observes.

4) This method cannot be used extensively if the inquiry is large and spread over a wide area.

Interview Method

Interview is one of the most powerful tools and most widely used method for primary data collection in business research. In our daily routine we see interviews on T.V. channels on various topics related to social, business, sports, budget etc. In the words of C. William Emory, 'personal interviewing is a twoway purposeful conversation initiated by an interviewer to obtain information that is relevant to some research purpose'. Thus an interview is basically, a meeting between two persons to obtain the information related to the proposed study. The person who is interviewing is named as interviewer and the person who is being interviewed is named as informant. It is to be noted that, the research data/information collect through this method is not a simple conversation between the investigator and the informant, but also the glances, gestures, facial expressions, level of speech etc., are all part of the process. Through this method, the researcher can collect varied types of data intensively and extensively.

Interviews can be classified as direct personal interviews and indirect personal interviews. Under the techniques of direct personal interview, the investigator meets the informants (who come under the study) personally, asks them questions pertaining to enquiry and collects the desired information. Thus if a researcher intends to collect the data on spending habits of Delhi University (DU) students, he/ she would go

Indirect personal interview is another technique of interview method where it is not possible to collect data directly from the informants who come under the study.

Under this method, the investigator contacts third parties or witnesses, who are closely associated with the persons/situations under study and are capable of providing necessary information. For example, an investigation regarding a bribery pattern in an office. In such a case it is inevitable to get the desired information indirectly from other people who may be knowing them. Similarly, clues about the crimes are gathered by the CBI. Utmost care must be exercised that these persons who are being questioned are fully aware of the facts of the problem under study, and are not motivated to give a twist to the facts. to the DU, contact the students, interview them and collect the required information.

Another technique for data collection through this method can be structured and unstructured interviewing. In the Structured interview set questions are asked and the responses are recorded in a standardised form. This is useful in large scale interviews where a number of investigators are assigned the job of interviewing. The researcher can minimise the bias of the interviewer. This technique is also named as formal interview. In Un-structured interview, the investigator may not have a set of questions but have only a number of key points around which to build the interview. Normally, such type of interviews are conducted in the case of an explorative survey where the researcher is not completely sure about the type of data he/ she collects. It is also named as informal interview. Generally, this method is used as a supplementary method of data collection in conducting research in business areas.

Now-a-days, telephone or cellphone interviews are widely used to obtain the desired information for small surveys. For instance, interviewing credit card holders by banks about the level of services they are receiving. This technique is used in industrial surveys specially in developed regions.

Merits

The major merits of this method are as follows:

- 1) People are more willing to supply information if approached directly. Therefore, personal interviews tend to yield high response rates.

2) This method enables the interviewer to clarify any doubt that the interviewee might have while asking him/her questions. Therefore, interviews are helpful in getting reliable and valid responses.

3) The informant's reactions to questions can be properly studied.

4) The researcher can use the language of communication according to the standard of the information, so as to obtain personal information of informants which are helpful in interpreting the results.

Limitations

The limitations of this method are as follows:

1) The chance of the subjective factors or the views of the investigator may come in either consciously or unconsciously.

2) The interviewers must be properly trained, otherwise the entire work may be spoiled.

3) It is a relatively expensive and time-consuming method of data collection especially when the number of persons to be interviewed is large and they are spread over a wide area.

4) It cannot be used when the field of enquiry is large (large sample).

Precautions : While using this method, the following precautions should be taken:

- obtain thorough details of the theoretical aspects of the research problem.
- Identify who is to be interviewed
- The questions should be simple, clear and limited in number.
- The investigator should be sincere, efficient and polite while collecting data.
- The investigator should be of the same area (field of study, district, state etc.).

Questionnaire and Schedule Methods

Questionnaire and schedule methods are the popular and common methods for collecting primary data in business research. Both the methods comprise a list of questions arranged in a sequence pertaining to investigation.

Questionnaire Method

Under this method, questionnaires are sent personally or by post to various informants with a request to answer the questions and return the questionnaire. If the questionnaire is posted to informants, it is called a Mail Questionnaire. Sometimes questionnaires may also be sent through E-mail depending upon the nature of study and availability of time and resources. After receiving the questionnaires the informants read the questions and record their responses in the space meant for the purpose on the questionnaire. It is desirable to send the questionnaire with self-addressed envelopes for quick and high rate of response.

Merits

- 1) You can use this method in cases where informants are spread over a vast geographical area.
- 2) Respondents can take their own time to answer the questions. So the researcher can obtain original data by this method.
- 3) This is a cheap method because its mailing cost is less than the cost of personal visits.
- 4) This method is free from bias of the investigator as the information is given by the respondents themselves.
- 5) Large samples can be covered and thus the results can be more reliable and dependable.

Limitations

- 1) Respondents may not return filled in questionnaires, or they can delay in replying to the questionnaires.
- 2) This method is useful only when the respondents are educated and cooperative.
- 3) Once the questionnaire has been despatched, the investigator cannot modify the questionnaire.
- 4) It cannot be ensured whether the respondents are truly representative.

Schedule Method

As discussed above, a Schedule is also a list of questions, which is used to collect the data from the field. This is generally filled in by the researcher or the enumerators. If the scope of the study is wide, then the researcher appoints people who are called enumerators for the purpose of collecting the data. The enumerators go to the informants, ask them the questions from the schedule in the order they are listed and record the responses in the space meant for the answers in the schedule itself. For example, the population census all over the world is conducted through this method. The difference between questionnaire and schedule is that the former is filled in by the informants, the latter is filled in by the researcher or enumerator.

Merits

- 1) It is a useful method in case the informants are illiterates.
- 2) The researcher can overcome the problem of non-response as the enumerators go personally to obtain the information.
- 3) It is very useful in extensive studies and can obtain more reliable data.

Limitations

- 1) It is a very expensive and time-consuming method as enumerators are paid persons and also have to be trained.
- 2) Since the enumerator is present, the respondents may not respond to some personal questions.
- 3) Reliability depends upon the sincerity and commitment in data collection.

The success of data collection through the questionnaire method or schedule method depends on how the questionnaire has been designed.