

Significance of Techniques of Primary Data Collection in Sociological Studies (With Special Reference to Schedule, Questionnaire & Interview)



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Abstract

Social research is proving itself in identifying and solving the social occurrences that are positively or negatively affecting the society at large. As we know, every moment hundreds and thousands of incidents occur around us. Some of them are good for the people of the society as they result in social welfare, while some of them are in the form of problems that need some immediate solution for the smooth working and running of the society.

Sociological studies are specified social research studies that are carried out by the sociologists in order to develop an understanding about the events occurring in the society and to study them scientifically in a way that they may be controlled accordingly. Sociological studies are carried out under a set process that includes selection of the problem, study of related literature, content analysis, determination of objectives, formulation of hypothesis about the study area, population, sampling, sample size, determination of tools and techniques of data collection, collection of data, classification of data, tabulation of data, analysis of data, generalization.

For sociological studies, both the primary and the secondary data are important. The secondary data provide a feed back of the problem to the study maker, while the primary data gives new knowledge to him. Both have their own sources and techniques, and both have their own significance in sociological studies.

The paper surveys the significance of schedule, questionnaire and interview as the major techniques of primary data collection in sociological studies.

Keywords: Research Design, Primary data, Secondary data, Tools & techniques, Methods, Schedule, Questionnaire, Interview.

Introduction

Sociological studies approve the authenticity of primary data that are collected through schedule, questionnaire, interview and observation. Here let us discuss schedule, questionnaire and interview in a way that their significance in sociological studies can be realized.

Schedule and Its Use in Sociological Studies

Schedule is probably the most reliable technique of primary data collection to the researchers. It is a structure of a set of questions on the selected topic for the study. The questions of the schedule are asked by the researcher personally without making any change in the sequence in the questions. It is used especially in those sociological studies that are made in terms of a limited study area which the researcher finds accessible enough to interact with the respondents frequently. In case, the units of information to the study face any problem in understanding the question, the researcher is there to assist him understand it.

Both the open-ended and close-ended questions are given room in schedule. Open-ended questions allow the respondent considerable freedom in answering. However, questions are answered in details. Close-ended questions have to be answered by the respondent by choosing an answer from the set of answers given under a question just by ticking. Village or community schedule meant to be used by the census researchers to collect demographic details, family or household schedule used to have full demographic details of households, and the opinion or

attitude schedule to get the opinion of the people are some of the types of schedule.

Questionnaire and Its Use in Sociological Studies

Questionnaire, like the schedule, is a set of open-ended and close-ended questions. It is used for those studies that have a wide study area, or to say, an inaccessible area having a large population meant for the study. Unlike the schedule, Questionnaire is sent to the respondents by post or by mail, and the researcher has not to make direct contact or interaction with the units of information. While filling the questionnaire or while answering the questions, the respondents are liberty to write what they please without the poking of researcher's nose. No doubt, it does not cost much, but the answers given by the respondents are often found irrelevant. Moreover, often, the non-serious respondents do not send back the questionnaires to the researchers. Still, its significance in sociological studies cannot be underestimated because it can be administered in large numbers and is cost-effective; it can be used to compare and contrast previous research to measure change; it is easy to visualize and analyze; it offers actionable data; identity of the respondent is protected; it can cover most of the aspects of the topic, and it is less expensive.

Interviews and its Use in Sociological Studies

Sociologically speaking, interview technique of primary data collection is exercised in qualitative research which aims at collecting qualitative data about the respondents to the study. An interview is a formal conversation between the researcher (interviewer) and the respondents or units of information to the study (interviewee/ interviewees). During the interview organized for the sociological studies, questions are asked to elicit information. The researcher keeps with him an interview guide with different sets of questions for the interviewees. However, he is at liberty to ask any question other than the ones that there are in the interview guide. The good thing about the interview is that the respondents fail to avoid the questions asked by the researcher. This is the very reason why it is accepted as a reliable technique of primary data collection in sociological researches.

Objectives of The Study

1. To describe social research and its aspects
2. To bring forth the legitimate research design and research methodology
3. To discuss the importance of data in sociological studies
4. To discuss the data, types of data and the sources of data
5. To concentrate on techniques of primary data collection
6. To discuss in detail Schedule as a significant technique of primary data collection in sociological studies
7. To discuss in detail Questionnaire as a significant technique of primary data collection in sociological studies
8. To discuss in detail Interview as a significant technique of primary data collection in sociological studies

9. To make a detailed discussion on the importance of schedule, questionnaire and interview as effective techniques of primary data collection in sociological studies

10. To specify when and how schedule, questionnaire and interview need to be used in sociological studies

Review of Related Literature

Seidman (1998), in *Technique* isn't everything, but it is a lot in Interviewing as qualitative research, listening at the time of interview is both the hardest as well as the most important skill in interviewing. Furthermore, interviewers must be prepared to listen on three different levels: they must listen to what the participant is actually saying, they must listen to the inner voice or subtext of what the participant is communicating, and they must also listen to the process and flow of the interview so as to remain aware of how tired or bored the participant is as well as logistics such as how much time has already passed and how many questions still remain. Obviously, the study emphasizes the role of listening skill of both the interviewer and the respondent. If the respondent fails to listen to the interviewer properly, he cannot answer the questions asked by the interviewer.

Irving (1998), in *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, asserts that compared to something like a written survey, interviews allow for a significantly higher degree of intimacy, with participants often revealing personal information to their interviewers in a real-time, face-to-face setting. As such, this technique can evoke an array of significant feelings and experiences within those being interviewed. Rightly, interview is an approved technique of the collection of primary data relating to the qualitative research. The aim of interview is to understand both the external and the internal behavior of the respondents. There are times when the person is physically present before someone, but mentally he is somewhere else. In such a situation, he fails to respond properly and promptly. In order to peep into the inner-personality of the individual, interview can prove to be very useful.

Emily Keightley, Loughborough University, Michael Pickering, Nicola Allett (2012), in *The self-interview: A new method in social science research*, present the new method of self-interviewing as an empirical tool specifically for use in memory studies research. The study traces some of the empirical limitations specific to the field of memory studies and reviews the existing tools used in this area. It particularly focuses on some of the limitations of qualitative interviewing, the memory work method and diary methods in generating data on the processes of vernacular remembering at the same time as making visible the meaning that remembering has for participants in their everyday lives. The study says that the self-interview is a method which addresses some of these limitations.

Nurussobah Hussin, Rusnah Johare (2014), in *Concepts and Advances in Information Knowledge Management* assert the significance of methods to

develop functional requirements in research. To date, various data collection methods have been employed and introduced to analyse and develop functional requirements such as document analysis, interviews, questionnaires and observation. Each technique, namely, interview, questionnaires, observation and schedule play a significant role in developing functional requirements.

Shazia Jamshed (2014), in Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation, holds the idea that research can be visualized and perceived as painstaking methodical efforts to examine, investigate as well as restructure the realities, theories and applications. Research methods reflect the approach to tackling the research problem. Depending upon the need, research method could be either an amalgam of both qualitative and quantitative or qualitative or quantitative independently. By adopting qualitative methodology, a prospective researcher is going to fine-tune the pre-conceived notions as well as extrapolate the thought process, analyzing and estimating the issues from an in-depth perspective. This could be carried out by one-to-one interviews or as issue-directed discussions. Observational methods are, sometimes, supplemental means for corroborating research findings. Sociological studies are generally qualitative that are conducted in order to collect qualitative data about the units of information to the study. However, quantitative data too form the part of sociological researches.

Murtala Ganiyu Murgan (2015), in A Critical Analysis of the Techniques for Data Gathering in Legal Research, holds that Questionnaires are prepared, organized designed questions which are to be answered by respondents in the process of formulating general opinion about a phenomenon. Questionnaires are common form of data collection and also common instruments of investigation in the social sciences. They are used for collecting information from a whole population or a representative population. As in legal studies, in sociological studies too, questionnaires prove themselves to be very important. Being less expensive, it can be used to study even those who live far and wide, and to study the population living on a very wide study area. In fact, while using questionnaire technique, the researcher need not contact or interact the respondents. Just by staying at home and by sending the questionnaires to the selected units by post or mail, the questionnaire technique can be used successfully and required data about the various aspects of the problem can be collected.

Syed Muhammad & Sajjad Kabir (2016), in Methods of Data Collection, surveys the various methods and techniques of data collection in sociological studies. Concept of Data Collection; Types of Data; Issues to be Considered for Data Collection; Methods of Primary Data Collection; Questionnaire Method; Interviews Method; Focus Group Discussion (FGD); Participatory Rural Appraisal/ Assessment (PRA); Rapid Rural Appraisal/ Assessment (RRA); Observation Method; Survey

Method; Case Study Method; Diaries Method; Principal Component Analysis (PCA); Activity Sampling Technique; Memo Motion Study; Process Analysis; Link Analysis; Time and Motion Study; Experimental Method; Statistical Method; Methods of Secondary Data Collection; Methods of Legal Research. Obviously, sociological research is performed through a process which lays and prescribes certain to be adopted and observed for the purpose.

Huma Parveen & Nayeem Showkat (2017), in the chapter Data Collection, present a holistic view of the various tools and techniques employed by researchers for the collection of data. Beginning with a description of primary and secondary data, qualitative and quantitative data; each method of data collection has been described elaborately. The different methods that have been explained include interview, focus groups, questionnaire and schedule, observation, case study, ethnographies, oral history and projective techniques. Each of these techniques and methods is important in itself from the sociological study point of view. It depends on the researcher which technique he uses and employs for the purpose of study in accordance with the nature of the problem under consideration.

Hypothesis

1. Social research studies the social phenomena systematically
2. For the understanding and controlling the social problems social research is essential
3. Sociological studies may be both qualitative and quantitative
4. Data play a vital role in sociological studies
5. Sociological studies are made under a prescribed process observing the prescribed steps that are involved in the process
6. Both the primary and the secondary data are employed in sociological studies
7. Primary data are associated with the originality and authenticity of sociological studies
8. There are certain tools and techniques of collecting primary data
9. Schedule, Questionnaire, Interview etc. are some of the popular tools of collecting primary data in sociological studies
10. Schedule, Questionnaire and Interview have their own merits and demerits

Methodology

Designed on the secondary data on the selected theme and title, the study was made through the descriptive method using the inductive approach. For the purpose of the study, the contents were derived from some of the appropriate studies on the theme that were found available on the various internet sites in the form of research papers, chapters of books or books at large. The steps such as, selection of the title or problem, study of the related literature on the theme, selection of the appropriate studies on the theme under consideration, content analysis etc. were worked out in order to keep up and maintain the scientific spirit of the work. Finally, findings were drawn on the basis of the available literature on the selected theme for the study.

Findings & Conclusion

1. Social research relates to the systematic and scientific study of the complex social phenomena
2. Sociological studies reflect the social occurrences that occur from time to time, the seeds of which lie in society itself and that affect the society partially or fully.
3. Sociological studies are conducted in a planned way through approved methodology
4. All the aspects of sociological studies are important in themselves, but unquestionably, data and the process of data collection are the most important aspect
5. Data are the soul of a sociological study, as it is through the collected data that the researcher explores the causes of a problem, and finds out the effects of the problem
6. There are two types of data- Primary data and the Secondary data
7. Primary data are the data that are nowhere available, nor have they been used by any other researcher in any other work
8. Secondary data are the data that have already been used at least once, and that are available in books, journals, theses, newspapers etc.
9. In sociological studies, both the primary and the secondary data are used
10. Observation, Schedule, Questionnaire, Interview etc. are the sources of the primary data, while diary, letters etc. are the sources of secondary data
11. Schedule, Questionnaire and Interview are very popular techniques of primary data collection
12. Schedule technique is useful for the sociological studies that relate to a limited and accessible study area where the researcher can reach comfortably and can fill the schedules on the basis of face-to-face interaction with the units of information
13. Questionnaire technique is useful for the sociological studies that relate to an unlimited and inaccessible study area which cannot be visited by the researcher easily. Questionnaires are sent by post or mail to be filled by the units of information independently without the interference of the researcher
14. Interview technique is useful for the studies which allow the researcher to visit the study area, to

interact the units of information and to hold formal talks individually or in groups

15. Each of the three given techniques, namely, schedule, questionnaire and interview are important for sociological studies.
16. Schedule technique is the most reliable technique of primary data collection as the researcher does not allow the respondents to the study to write anything in the schedule or to have liberty of answering
17. Questionnaire technique is useful and appropriate technique of primary data collection for those studies that relate to a wide study area with a large population on it living in a scattered way.
18. Interview allows the researcher to make interaction with the respondents as well as to ask them any question that he feels to be relevant and necessary for the study of the problem.

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