

SOCI 323

Social Psychology

Session 2 – Doing Research in Social Psychology-
Part 1

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Session Overview

We established in Session one that Social Psychology is scientific in nature because it employs scientific principles and methods of research in the study of human behavior.

- In this session we shall look at some of the methods of research used in Social Psychology namely; the observation method, the ethnographic method, archival method, and the survey method

At the end of the session, you should be able to:

- Explain what each of these methods are and how they are used to conduct research in Social Psychology
- Identify the strengths and shortcomings of each of the methods

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Why conduct research?
- Systematic Observation Method of Research
- Ethnography
- Archival Research
- Surveys
- Sample Question
- Summary of Session
- References

Reading List

- Read chapter one (1) of the recommended text and the journal article posted on Sakai on this session



Topic One

WHY STUDY RESEARCH METHODS?



Why Study Research Methods?

- Social Psychology research illuminates causes of human behavior. Social Psychology shows us that some of the beliefs about ourselves and others are mistaken.
- Knowledge of research methods helps you to conduct thought experiments: critical thinking ideas you are not able to test because of insufficient resources and/or because they are unethical.
- Knowledge of research methods helps you to understand the discussions in any Social Psychology textbook or literature you read.



Why Study Research Methods?

- Knowing and understanding research methods makes you a better consumer of knowledge. For instance, if you should read an article, newspaper or any data concerning any social behaviour or issue, you can assess the appropriateness of the methods used and thus the reliability of the information obtained.
- Additionally, knowledge of research methods will help you to avoid some common mistakes that others make. For instance, many people cannot differentiate between correlation and causation. They often assume that once two variables are related, one must have caused the other. But, you will know the difference at the end of this current session and the next.
- Finally, Knowledge of research methods can help you choose your own subject of human behaviour and investigate it scientifically.

Topic Two

THE SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION METHOD



Defining Systematic Observation

- It is not a mere informational kind of observation but a careful, accurate and measured observation of human and social behaviour.
- One of such is by Baron et al (2006) which say observation “is a method of research in which behaviour is systematically observed and recorded”.
- Aronson et al (2007) define it as “a technique whereby a researcher **observes people and systematically records measurements of impressions of their behaviour.**”
- An approach that merely looks at a phenomenon in some reasonably systematic way, with a view to understanding what’s going on and coming up with hypothesis about how things are happening they are.(Gilovich et al, 2016).



The Process of Systematic Observation

- Participant Observation: observing some phenomenon at a close range
- Observations may be done in a semi-formal way-taking notes and interviewing participants
- Noting down impressions obtained from participant observation

Limitations of the Observation Method

- The observation method though very useful in describing social behaviour is limited in the sense that not all behaviour can be observed as they **occur** or if they do, **they happen in private**.
- For instance if a researcher wants to observe people reactions to earthquakes in Ghana, that researcher may have to wait forever because earthquakes are a rare occurrence in Ghana.
- Or let's say a researcher wants to know if Ghanaian men enjoy violent sex- it will be difficult to know since sex is a rather very private matter. Wanting to definitely investigate it may raise ethical issues (the researcher as a voyeur).
- Observations are thus, often misleading requiring other methods to verify social phenomenon.

Topic Three

ETHNOGRAPHY



DEFINING ETHNOGRAPHY

- Ethnography is “the method by which researchers attempt to understand a group or a culture by observing it from the inside without imposing any preconceived notions that they might have’ Aronson et al (2007)
- Simply, what ethnography seeks to do is to understand people from the people’s own point of view.



Limitations of Ethnographic Studies

- The challenge is how to ensure that an observer is accurate in his observations and recordings of what he observed. This is because sometimes an observer may overlook a detail or record it wrongly. Even though objectivity is required, sometimes observer's personal and subjective opinion may intrude in their observations.
- You can counter this challenge with what is known as **inter-judge reliability**. This refers to the level of agreement between two or more people who independently observe and code a set of data.
- By showing that two or more people or judges independently come up with the same observations, researchers ensure that the observations are not the subjective, distorted impressions of one individual.

Topic Four

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH



What is Archival Research?

- Archival analysis is another form of the observational method.
- Here, the researcher examines the accumulated documents and archives of a culture.
- These documents depict and tell a great deal about a people and their society's values and culture.



Sources of Archival Research

- There exist several sources of archival documents. These include diaries, novels, music, movies, television shows, newspaper articles, advertising, census reports, police records, sports statistics, databases historic and ethnographic (anthropological descriptions of people in different cultures)
- These sources provide immense information about a people's beliefs and life to a large extent.

Archival Research-Limitations and Solutions

- The researcher is at the mercy of the original compiler(s) of these documents. Exactly how accurate these documents are may not be easy to ascertain. Thus if a compiler provides inaccurate or subjective information, they could be mistaken to be a reflection of way of life of a people which may not be exact.
- This perhaps is the case with how Africa is depicted to the world (often negatively) even though a myriad of inspiring positive stories could also be told about Africa.
- The solution however is to consult several sources and documents before one draws any conclusions. Certainly, all compilers of these documents would not be biased. Thus, a more detailed comparative analysis of various types of documents will lead you to more accurate conclusions.

Topic Four

SURVEYS



Surveys

- Involves simply asking people questions using written questionnaires or interviews.
- Often used when researchers want to investigate beliefs and attitudes of people towards a phenomenon. Samples may be large or small.
- The people in a survey are often a random sample of the population as a whole giving everybody an equal chance of being selected
- The sample for a survey may also be purposively selected if the research objectives are targeted at a specific group of people-say gays.

Sample Question

- Imagine you are a researcher interested in studying peoples perceptions of corruption in Ghana. Which of the methods discussed here would be appropriate for this study and why?

Summary of Session

- This session introduced you to four methods used in Social Psychological research.
- Each of these methods involves a careful observation of phenomena by the researcher.
- Whilst the observation, ethnographic and survey methods seek to obtain primary data, the archival method uses secondary data
- Thus depending on the nature of the research on is engaged in, one method may be more suitable to use than another. No one method is thus superior to another.

References

- Robert, B. and Branscombe, N. (2012). Social Psychology. 13th Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2007) Social Psychology. 6th Edition. Pearson Education Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2010) Social Psychology. 7th Edition. Pearson Education Inc.

