



RESEARCH DESIGN: INNOVATIVE METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

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Abstract

The fields of social science research are unlimited and the materials of research are endless. Every group of social phenomena, every phase of human life and every stage of past and present development are materials for the social scientist. The area of research in various social sciences provides vast scope for research in social sciences. As we know that, Research is an endeavor to discover, develop and verify knowledge. It is an intellectual exercise and problem-solving process. Bassey (1990) defines research “as a systematic, critical and empirical inquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge”. Moreover, it is studious inquiry or examination especially the investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws. After reading this paper, the reader will be familiarised and able to apply the innovative research designs in social science to identify new and novel ways of undertaking qualitative research in social science, as well as being able to integrate innovate designs with social science design designs.

Introduction

Social science research is a systematic method of exploring, analysing and conceptualizing human life in order to extend, correct or verify knowledge of human behaviour and social life. Social research seeks to find explanations to unexplained phenomena, to clarify the doubtful and correct the misconceived fact of social life. It involves the application of scientific method for understanding and analysing of social life in order to correct and verify the existing knowledge as a system. The main idea behind social research is to discover new inter relations, new knowledge, new facts and also to verify old ones. Human behaviour may be involved by certain values and laws. The main purpose of social research is to discover those laws which can be proper guidelines for studying human contact and behaviour. According to P.V. Young, we may define social research as “the systematic method of discovering new facts and verifying old facts. Their sequences inter relationship, causal explanations and the natural laws govern them”.

Research is central to study of social sciences. Social science is an umbrella term to refer to a plurality of

fields of economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, cultural studies, education, history, criminology, women studies, rural development etc. Gay (1981) defined social science research as “the formal systematic application of the scientific method to the study of social problems”

Social scientists undertake research... mainly for

- Quest for knowledge,
- Improve the quality of life
- Policy, programmes and practices
- Welfare and development of society
- Interdisciplinary and trans disciplinary model
- Schemes for sustainable development (SDG's)
- Etc

Nature of Social Science Research

In contrast to the physical science the social science lack the power of exact prediction; this is attributed to the “erratic” and irregular nature of human behaviour. Social scientist points out that the low predictable potential in social science is due to our limited knowledge of relevant variables operative in the group like customs, traditions etc.

The cause and effect are difficult to be segregated clearly. The present state of development of social science is far behind physical science. Merton advises to social scientist against their despair; it is possible to develop border applicability.

Objectives of Social Science Research

The major objectives of social research are listed as follows:

- a) The aim of social research is to discover new facts and verifying or testing old facts.
- b) It tries to understand the human behaviour and its interaction with the environment.
- c) It tries to find out the casual connection between human activities and natural laws governing them.

Functions of Social Science Research

The important functions of social science research are discussed below;

a) Discovery of facts and their interpretation.

Social research provides answer to questions of what, when, how and why of man, social life and institutions. Discover of facts and their inter relationship help us to discard distortions and contribute to our understanding of social reality.

b) Diagnosis of problems and their analysis.

Our society has innumerable problems such as poverty, unemployment, economic inequality, social tension etc. The nature and dimensions of such problems have to be diagnosed and analysed. An analysis of problems leads to an identification of appropriate remedial actions.

c) Systematization of knowledge.

The facts discovered through research are systematized and the body of knowledge is developed. It contributes to the growth of theory building.

d) Control over social phenomena.

Research in social science provides first-hand information about the nature of social institutions. This knowledge helps us to control over the social phenomena.

e) Prediction.

Social research aims at finding an order among social

fact and their casual relations. This affords a sound basis for prediction in several cases

f) Development planning.

Systematic research can give us the required data base for planning and designing developmental schemes and programmes.

g) Social welfare.

Social research can identify the causes of social evils and problems. It can thus help in taking appropriate remedial actions. It also provides guideline for social welfare.

Innovative Research Design in Social Science

Innovative research is a search for new business and strategic techniques and methods. They develop and optimize well-known methodologies, enabling the implementation of new and better solutions. Innovative research focuses on creating new ideas, analysing problems, diagnosing them and identifying their causes. A research design provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process. It involves research method. Research method is simply a technique for collecting data. It can involve a specific instrument such as a self-completion questionnaire or a structured interview etc.

The research design refers to the overall strategy that we choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring how we will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. Note that our research problem determines the type of design we should use, not the other way around. The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to effectively address the research problem logically and as unambiguously as possible. In social sciences research, obtaining information relevant to the research problem generally entails specifying the type of evidence needed to test a theory, to evaluate a program, or to accurately describe and assess meaning related to an observable phenomenon. Nowadays there are number of innovative research design emerged in every research field. Here the author detailing the important research design

especially in the field of social science research which satisfy the above said conditions. They are mainly

1. SWOT Analysis
2. Focus Groups
3. Narrative Analysis
4. Content Analysis
5. Appreciative Inquiry

1. SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a process that identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an organization. A strategic tool to assess success based on internal and external factors. Developed at Stanford and took 9 years to develop into qualitative method. A SWOT matrix separates and compares internal and external influencers:

Internal: strengths, weaknesses

External: opportunities, threats (challenges)

A strength is a competitive advantage while a weakness is a disadvantage. An opportunity is a regulatory mechanism to develop untapped resources and to overcome the deficiencies/ gaps. But in the case of a threat, it is due to unfavourable conditions from external sources.

2. Focus Group

A carefully planned discussion designed to obtain the perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment, where participants share and respond to comments, ideas and perceptions

Types of Focus Group

- Full focus groups (6-10 people)
- Mini focus groups (4-6-people)
- Telephone focus groups (4-6 people)
- Video-conference focus groups (15-20 people)
- Online focus groups (15-20 people)

Good for generating new ideas and consolidating old knowledge. Used as primary and or a supplementary source of data during exploratory and later stages of research. Gives insight on insight on multiple and different perspectives,

interaction and power dynamics within a group

3. Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a strategy to analyze qualitative data. It is an approach that emphasizes the stories of people tell in the course of interviews and other interactions with researcher. Through this we can better understanding of the participants lives and world around them.

Types of Narrative Analysis

1. **Thematic analysis**- emphasis on ‘what is said’
2. **Structural analysis**- emphasis on ‘the way a story is related’
3. **Interaction analysis**- emphasis on ‘dialogue between teller and listener’
4. **Performance analysis**- emphasis on ‘narrative as a performance that explores the use of words and gestures to get across a story’

Narratives can be derived from journals, letters, conversations, autobiographies, transcripts of in-depth interviews, focus groups, or other types of narrative qualitative research and then used in narrative research.

4. Content Analysis

Content analysis is the examination of documents, transcripts, newspapers, or even of audio or of video media to obtain the concepts and categories of words, phrases and inner meanings

Types of Content analysis

1. Life history analysis
2. Discourse analysis
3. Oral history analysis
4. Text book analysis
5. Curriculum discourses

Key process of content Analysis

Unitizing: Establish the unit of analysis (word, meaning, sentence, paragraph, article, news clip, document, etc.).

Sampling: Units must be sampled, sampling involves counting

Reducing: Data must be reduced to avoid complexity by coding and categorising

Inferring: Phenomena must be analysed to arrive at the findings.

Narrating: Conclusions communicated for further reference.

Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts. As an example, researchers can evaluate language used within a news article to search for bias or partiality. Researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding the text.

5. Appreciative inquiry –

It is a major breakthrough from traditional approach. Development agencies use these approaches for planning programs and identify community problems. Its main Interventions is to address the problems are developed. Development organizations apply these methods. Using this method is to understand human nature differently, more optimistically. Appreciative inquiry turns the problem-solving into development approach. It is Developed in early 1990s by David Cooperrider at Case Western Reserve University. Its main focuses on a development of community rather than its problems.

Appreciative inquiry is a strategy for purposeful change, pursue dreams and possibilities of "what could be". It provides the opportunities for co-operative search for strengths and life-giving forces. The appreciative approach involves collaborative inquiry and it is based on interviews and affirmative questioning. Whether you're using Appreciative Inquiry one-on-one, or with 1,000 people, the AI process will follow four distinct phases, called the 4-D Cycle:

Discovery: participants explore "the best of what is," identifying the organization's strengths, best practices, and sources of excellence, vitality, and peak performance.

Dream: participants envision a future they really want – a future where the organization is fully

engaged and successful around its core purpose and strategic objectives.

Design: participants leverage the best of what is and their visions for the future to design high-impact strategies that move the organization creatively and decisively in the right direction.

Destiny (sometimes also called *Deploy*): participants put the strategies into action, revising as necessary.

Conclusion

This paper explained the innovative research design to generate knowledge in social research. Researchers always tend to use methods that work, rather than trying something new which might not guarantee specific research results. Emerging innovative qualitative research design in social sciences were briefly identified. Further research is also needed to explore how a researcher's imagination can be used to generate innovative research designs, as well as how these designs can be implemented to enhance knowledge creation, storage and transfer.

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