

Observation Method: Role in Data Collection Types Advantages and Disadvantages

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Abstract

The term observation stands for watching something or someone carefully, attentively and systematically. We as common men often come across many things, situations in our everyday life, but we do not pay enough attention to each of them. We see them mostly from a casual point of view hardly having any particular motive behind it. But when we talk about the observation method in the context of research, it is counted in a different way altogether as the same thing is done differently and meticulously than from the casual seeing. There is a chain of systems which is followed by the researchers. Observation method of collecting data is one of the oldest techniques, and it is used mainly by both the scientists and social scientists. Through this paper attempts have been made how This method despite having certain limitations plays a crucial role in the field of research especially in social sciences.

This paper highlights the certain aspects of Observation method its role in data collection, significance in the research arena how it works what are its key benefits as well as some of its major drawbacks.

Keywords: Observation, Data Collection, Research, Techniques, Significance

Introduction

Observation method is one of the best scientific tools which is adopted for collection of data in a research. Although the term observation sounds pretty simple and gives us an impression that collection of data through this method should be very straight and easy yet it is not that true in a scientific investigation. In a broader sense, observation method is the gathering of primary data by investigator's direct observation of relevant people, actions, or situations without asking from the respondents. When we apply this approach it works as a scientific tool and the method of data collection for the researcher and then it serves a formulated research purpose which is systematically planned and recorded and is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability.

Observation method can provide information which people are normally reluctant or unable to give. The observer has to plan carefully and to execute them to collect accurate data and information. The observation could be supported with interaction. This method gives the observer an opportunity to gain an insight of the group and naturally, the observer will be able to obtain the factual data compared to other methods of data collection.

In order to conduct this method appropriately the observer needs to be well equipped with the essential skills and knowledge of the tools, its techniques which are applied in the observation

method. It is not just limited to the observers even the investigators do need to have knowledge of the subject and should have an intimation to join into the group with ease, and if needed the training should also be given to the observers and while selecting them one has to assess evaluate their capabilities also. And also when the researchers use the observation method the few points should be kept into account such as: What should be observed? How the observation should be recorded?, or how the accuracy of observation can be ensured?

Role or Importance of Observation Method

Observation Method is an important way to collect primary data. This method comprises a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place. There are many situations in which observation is the most appropriate method of data collection; for example, when you want to learn about the interaction in a group, study the dietary patterns of a population, ascertain the functions performed by a worker, or study the behaviour or personality traits of an individual. It is also appropriate in situations where full and or accurate information cannot be obtained by questioning, because respondents either are not co-operative or are unaware of the answers because it is difficult for them to detach themselves from the interaction. In summary, when you are more interested in the behaviour than in the perceptions of individuals, or when subjects are so involved in the interaction that they are unable to provide objective information about it, observation is one of the best approaches to collect the required information. It helps the researchers in defining the research objective as it defines clearly the purposes and goals of the observation.

It also determine what we want to observe and the specific research questions we aim to answer through the observation method while collecting the required data.

It is also useful in determining the variables by Identifying the key variables or behaviors that the researchers will observe and record. Though it's essential that these variables should be relevant to our research objective and provide meaningful data for analysis.

The effectiveness of observation isn't solely reliant on people being open to sharing personal information. Numerous participants might hesitate to disclose personal details to someone they don't know, might be pressed for time, or might lack the expertise to offer relevant insights to researchers. Although observation doesn't completely eliminate these obstacles, it generally requires less direct involvement and cooperation from participants. Additionally, observation can be conducted without the subjects realizing they're being observed.

It's one of the simplest and the commonest methods for collecting the data. It requires minimal technical knowledge. It's open nearly to everyone. Unlike some other research methods this observation method is a widely adopted practice especially in the field of social sciences. Its broad application highlights its flexibility and universal relevance. Observation method is commonly adopted and employed in the fundamental methodological approach.

Some Important Types of Observation Method

Structured Observation and Unstructured Observation

If the observation is characterized by a careful definition of the units to be observed, the style and recording the observed information, standardized conditions of observation and the selection of pertinent data for observation, then this method is known as structured method. This type of observation method is mainly used in descriptive research.

When the observation is conducted without these characteristics (of structured observation's), It is known as unstructured observation. This method is most likely to be used in an exploratory research.

Direct and Indirect Observation – Taking help of the direct method of observation, we come to know how the observer is physically present in which type of situation is he present and then this type of observation monitors what takes place. While in Indirect method of observation includes studies of mechanical recording or the recording by some of the other means like photographic or electronic. Direct observation is relatively more straight forward as compared to the indirect observation.

Participant Observation and Non Participant Observation

In Participant observation the observer observes by involving himself more or less to a number of group he observes so that he can gain the same experience through observation as the members of that group feel or experience. In a more simple manner this method is related to the involvement of the observer himself. While In the non participant observation method an observer observes without making an attempt to be a direct participant of the group that is to be observed.

Controlled and Non Controlled observation:

Controlled observations are such observations that are done under the influence of some external forces and such observations hardly lead to improvement in the precision of the research results. But still these observations can be very effective in the working if these are made to work in the coordination with mechanical synchronizing devices, film recording etc. Non controlled observations are made in the natural environment and are opposite to the controlled observation these observations don't rely on any outer influence, guidance of any type of external factors.

Subjective and Objective observation

All the observations consist of the two main components, the subject and the object. The subject refers to the observer whereas the object refers to the activity or any type of operation that is being observed. Subjective observation involves the observation of the one's own immediate experience whereas the observations involving observer as an entity apart from the thing being observed, are referred to as the objective observation. Objective observation is also called as the retrospection.

Another important method of Observation method is known as disguised method because this type of observation method is about the data collected by the observers observed in such a way that their presence may be unknown to the people or group they are observing.

Advantages and Disadvantages Of Observation Method

It is often said that every coin has two aspects, each method has some positives and some negatives so does the observation method have. Observation method enables the researcher to examine people in their natural settings without their behavior being influenced by the presence of the researcher. Other methods of observation may not allow the researcher to observe groups of people together but observation methods does so. Observation method is done on the basis of perception it is not on inferences, hence it has better reliability. It is direct and helps the observer study the behavior as it appears. The observer need not ask anyone about the behavior because it can be done by self watching and collecting the data. Chances of accuracy of data is increased as it is collected out of intimate and informal relationship. It helps the observer collect those data also which the respondents are reluctant to cooperate to provide the required information. The main advantage of this method is that subjective bias is eliminated as it is objective and impersonal in character. Last but not the least important, this method gives the information free from any complications of the past behavior, or future intentions or attitudes. The data collected through this method is purely related to what is currently happening.

On the other hand Since Observation method has certain limitations, like the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, that motivate buying behavior and infrequent behavior can not be observed that is why it is considered as an expensive method because of these limitations, researchers often supplement observation method with survey method, as that method is mostly suited for gathering disciplined information. The data collected through this method is very much limited because it may not be possible to study and observe everything simultaneously and hence the study could be limited. Sometimes unforeseen factors may interfere with the task of observation, because at times the fact that some people are rarely accessible to direct observation which can create obstacle for this method of collecting data accurately and effectively. It is slow and time consuming method as it may become essential for the observer to wait till the events take place for the observation process to get underway. For instance in order to study marriage customs the observer has to wait till such an event takes place. It does not offer control measures. The observer's ability, consistency, knowledge, bias and familiarity may influence the collected data.

Conclusion

In the arena of research, the observation method can play a pivotal role due to its ability to capture the subtleties of human behavior and its major strengths which enable the researchers to gain a deep insight into the contextual understanding of the subject matter, though due to its various disadvantages it may create obstacle in data collection, if researchers do not pay meticulous consideration and show better skills to overcome them. Despite having some disadvantages, by adopting a balanced approach observation method in data collection can help in producing better results and to gain profound insights into the subject matter what the researchers are looking for to serve their purpose and it will allow them to fulfill their

requirements in collecting data for their research process to move freely as in any good research accurate data collection paves the way for conducting a purposeful research.

Reverences

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