CHAPTER 1 – INTODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODS

Primary Data:

- First hand data collected.
- Information was not present before the research began.
- Includes questionnaires, interviews and observations.

Secondary Data:

- Second hand data which already exists.
- Includes historical records, official statistics, diaries, etc.

Quantitative Data:

- Data in the form of numbers.
- Useful for measuring the precise relationships between various factors.
- Often allows for comparisons to be made.
- **Positivists** favour the use of this data as it's often higher in **reliability** and **representation**.

Qualitative Data:

- All types of data not in the form of numbers.
- Often provides a richer and more in-depth view of social life.
- **Interpretivists** favour the use of this data as it's often higher in **validity** and allows **verstehen** to be established.

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PRACTICAL – INFLEXIBILITY

- A **practical** limitation is that structured questionnaires are inflexible.
- The researcher has already decided what is important however the participant's answers may not coincide with the pre-selected ones given.
- Therefore findings may not truly reflect their views and opinions.

STUDY LINK – CENSUS

- The **Census** is a government questionnaire carried out every 10 years and sent to all households in the UK.
- It covers range of topics such as migration, employment, accommodations, etc.
- However, the participants are not given the flexibility to write about what they want.

ETHICAL – INFORMED CONSENT

- An **ethical** strength is that structured questionnaires require informed consent from participants who are fully aware of the purpose of the research.
- If they do not wish to participate, they can simply refuse to complete and ignore the questionnaire.
- Furthermore, questionnaires are confidential as nobody knows their personal answers and they just make up a statistical profile.

STUDY LINK - CSEW

- The **CSEW** annually invites around 50,000 households in the UK to participate, the survey measures crime by asking participants about their experiences of crime over the last year.
- Those invited can decide whether or not they wish to participate and remain anonymous.

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GROUP INTERVIEWS / FOCUS GROUPS

DEFINITION:

- **Focus groups** are a form of group interview where the researcher feeds in key questions or ideas for the group to discuss. It usually involves a group of 6 to 12 people.

THEORY:

- Favoured by **Interpretivists** as they use methods which generate detailed, in depth data and attempt to establish social reality.

PRACTICAL – OBSERVING GROUP DYNAMICS

- A **practical** strength of focus groups is that they allow the researcher to observe the group dynamics and how they interact with each other.
- This allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the group being studied and thus verstehen can be established.

STUDY LINK – WILLIS

- **Willis** conducted research into working class 'lads' in a high school.
- He conducted a focus group in which he was able to observe the interactions between the lads and see how they normally behave.
- This method allowed for their natural dynamics to be observed which gave him a more detailed insight into the topic.

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CHAPTER 7 – SECONDARY SOURCES

DEFINITION:

- A **secondary source** interprets and analyses primary sources and are already published by another researcher.

THEORY:

- **Quantitative** secondary sources such as **official statistics** are favoured by **Positivists**,
- **Qualitative** secondary sources such as **diaries** are favoured by **Interpretivists**.

PRACTICAL – CHEAP AND QUICK

- A **practical** strength is that secondary sources are relatively easy to use, as they are already available.
- Therefore, they can be used to check or verify data cheaply and quickly which saves time and money on research.

STUDY LINK – CENSUS

- **The MacPherson report** is a public document available online which highlights racism within the police.
- Elements of the report can be verified as it is cheap and easy to access a wide range of statistical information on the internet.

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ETHICAL – HARM TO PARTICIPANTS

- An **ethical** limitation of life histories is that if the topic is of sensitive nature, then participants may not feel comfortable which can lead to incomplete or dishonest answers being given.
- Furthermore sensitive questions can negatively impact their wellbeing, leading to emotional harm.

STUDY LINK – CHAMBERLAIN

- **Chamberlain** explored the nature and meaning of migration for Barbadian's however this can be a very sensitive topic as they will recall past events such as the racism they faced.

THEORETICAL – VERSTEHEN

- A **theoretical** strength is that life histories allows verstehen to be established as it takes the viewpoint of the participants, leading to fresh insights.
- Interpretivists would favour this as it allows for detailed, in depth data to be gained and therefore social realities are uncovered.

STUDY LINK – BOGDAN

- **Bogdan** researched the experiences of transsexual individuals and conducted 100 hours of informal discussions with Jane.
- He was able to gain a valid and detailed understanding of the topic.

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QUANTITATIVE DATA

Research problem:

As part of my A Level Sociology course, I have been asked to design a research project to collect data on…
I have chosen to conduct a quantitative study due to the topic's focus being on the amount of…

Background research:

In order to carry out this research, I must first conduct background research into the topic using secondary sources such as the Office for National Statistics and the British Sociological Association.
This will allow me to devise a hypothesis and compare my data in the final write up.

Operationalise:

Firstly, there are some key concepts within the topic which are ambiguous and must be operationalised to make the topic more measurable.
In particular I need to operationalise…
The final concept to define is my local area which is Manchester.
Being a busy A Level student that does not drive, I do not have the means of transport nor the time to travel a lot.
However, one problem with operationalising key concepts is that it is my subjective view of…
Manchester as my local area which will not allow for the data collected to be representative of my wider geographical area in the UK and therefore generalisations cannot be made.

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