

# Social research methods

[Science](#), [Statistics](#)



## Social Research Methods/Unobtrusive Research

Introduction - Unobtrusive measures are ways of studying social behavior without affecting it in the process. Unobtrusive research is simply the methods of studying social behavior without affecting it. - There are three types of unobtrusive research: Content Analysis Analysis of existing statistics Comparative and historical analysis Content Analysis - With content analysis you focus on the details of recorded human communications.

For example you would analyze a painting a written document, photos, films, and things like face book. - Appropriate topics include who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect. For example, if our unit of analysis is writers, then we can use units of observation like novels written by them, chapters and paragraphs of the novels, etc. - Variable identification and measurement in content analysis depend on clarity of the unit of analysis. - Content Analysis involves coding which may attend to both manifest and latent content.

The determination of latent content requires judgements by the researcher. - Both quantitative and qualitative techniques are appropriate for interpreting content analysis data. - There are four characteristics that are usually coded in content analysis: 1) Frequency - a count of the number of occurrences of a word, phrase, image, etc 2) Direction - the direction in meaning of the text content (e. g. positive vs negative or active vs passive) 3) Intensity - degree or strength of a text reference 4) Space - the size of the passage, image, or other content Strengths of content analysis:

- Research poses little to no harm on subjects

- Time efficient, cheap
- Allows researcher to correct mistakes
- Can look at processes occurring over time
- Good reliability

Weaknesses of content analysis:

-Limited to what the researcher is able to record -Validity can be limited - In content analysis we could employ any conventional sampling technique like random, systematic, stratified, or clustered sampling. When concerning sub-sampling, sampling needs not to end with our unit of analysis.

For example, if our unit of analysis is writers, then we can use units of observation like novels written by them, chapters and paragraphs of the novels, etc. Analyzing Existing Statistics - With analysis of existing statistics, your focus would be mainly statistics of different studies without confusing this with secondary analysis which is just obtaining a copy of somebody's data and carrying out ones own analysis. - When analyzing existing statistics, it may be the main source of data or a supplemental source of data. Most existing statistics come from governments and large intergovernmental organizations.

When describing the units of analysis, existing statistics describe groups. You must be aware of the ecological fallacy. This means making assumptions regarding individuals based on characteristics of entire population. - Whenever we base research on an analysis of data that already exists we're limited to what exists. The existing data do not cover exactly what we are interested in, and our measurement may not be altogether valid

representations of the variables and concepts we want to make conclusions about. Two characteristics of science are used to handle the problem of validity in analysis of existing statistics: logical reasoning and replication. - Problems of validity in the analysis of existing statistics can often be handled through logical reasoning and replication. -

Existing statistics often have problems of reliability, so they must be used with caution. Comparative and Historical Research - And lastly comparative and historical research which is the examination of societies (or other social units) over time and in comparison with one another. - An example of comparative and historical research is the U. S. anthropologist, Lewis Morgan, who saw a progression in societies from " savagery" to " barbarism" to " civilization. " Also Robert Redfield noticed the progression from " folk society" to " urban society. " Pitirim Sorokin however represents a different form of this research. He theorizes that societal trends follow a cycle pattern between two points of view. One he called " ideational" and the other " sensate. "

Later he developed third point of view, which he called " idealistic. " - Historical research and sociology often use the same tools and datasets as history, but they have different goals. historiography - methodology of doing historical research The comparative historical method was the backbone of 19th century sociology. Sociologists such as Durkheim and Weber focused in on societies and studied and categorized them during different stages of development. In the mid-twentieth century, as the United States became the center of sociological research, the comparative historical method virtually disappeared.

It has been revived in the U. S. in the past 35 years by researchers inspired by the European sociological classics. - There are two types of sources a researcher can use when conducting historical research. 1)primary sources - physical artifacts of human societies; (ex. documents, letters, official records, personal recollections) 2)secondary sources - books and papers published by governments and historians; (ex. statistical running records) Examples of famous studies include Durkheim's Study of Suicide and Kentor's Consequences of Globalization. - The unit of analysis of existing statistics describe groups.

Means you must be aware of the ecological fallacy which involves making assumptions regarding individuals based on characteristics of entire population. Although often regarded as a qualitative method, comparative and historical research can make use of quantitative techniques. - Archives are the most important type of comparative and historical research because they are well maintained by reliable organizations. However, they can be biased or partially incomplete. Ethics and Unobtrusive Research - While the use of unobtrusive research does avoid many ethical issues that are frequently present in other techniques of data collection and analysis, potential ethical risks still exist.

For example, the use of diaries or private communications in content analysis give rise to questions of confidentiality. - Sometimes even unobtrusive measures can raise the possibility of violating subjects privacy. - The general principles of honest observation, analysis, and reporting apply to all research techniques. - Traditional Approaches - To conduct field research of the past, primarily using materials such as letters, diaries, documents, oral

histories, etc. (often these are case studies and are not necessarily comparative)

To study different societies, using the differences and similarities to highlight macro-social theories, primarily using history books and newspapers (the facts of history themselves). Often these are studies of current history and are not necessarily truly historical. - The actual comparative study of societies and their development over long stretches of history using a variety of resources. This produces research that is both comparative and historical.

- Coding: Procedure of turning raw data into a standardized form that can be interpreted by a machine and processed/analyzed.

E. g. A processed scantron for an exam. Coding is the process whereby raw data are transformed into standardized form suitable for machine processing and analysis. Content analysis is essentially a coding operation. In content analysis, communications- oral, written, or other- are coded or classified according to some conceptual framework. Coding in content analysis involves the logic of conceptualization and operation, as in other research methods, you must refine your conceptual frameworks and develop specific methods for observing in relation to that framework.

Latent Content: In connection with content analysis, the underlying means of communication. E. g. In a war movie, how effective the movie depicted actual combat via the flow of the movie scenes or the general reality of how well the war was captured on a subjective interpretation. Latent content is as used in connection with content analysis, the underlying meaning of communications, as distinguished from their manifest content. - Manifest

Content: In connection with content analysis, the actual concrete terms within human communication.

E. g. In a war movie, how many times " fire", " shoot", or " bomb" is said (concrete, objective terms). Coding the manifest content, the visible surface content, of a communication is analogous to using a standardize questionnaire. Manifest coding is more reliable than latent coding, but is generally less valid - Archives are the most important source for this type of research. They are maintained by governments, private foundations, and some corporations and