

research methods

Sociology



Examine the problems some sociologists find with using postal questionnaires in their research.

Questionnaire is a simple list of questions that are gathered and organised in advance to get needed answers. Questionnaires produce quantitative data as questionnaires don't ask you to elaborate your answers and are more focuses on quantity rather than quality. Because of this positivists will be the ones who will like to use questionnaires as it produces accurate quantitative data. Questionnaires are also a primary type of research method as you have to go and gather all the information yourself including making the questionnaire to fit your research topic. This means that it will take more time for you to collect all the data rather than using secondary data that is already there.

The first problem with a postal questionnaire and why some sociologists don't use them is due to their low response rate. People tend not to send postal questionnaires back and just don't even bother filling them in due to lack of time or lack of motivation to do so. This results in the research having low numbers of samples meaning that the research won't be as valid as it only comprises a small sample of views on the research topic. To add to that not all sociologists like using quantitative data in their research as they might value qualitative data much more due to its depth. Because of this only positivist sociologists would use a postal questionnaire as interpretivists would rather conduct a detailed interview than a questionnaire.

Another disadvantage of using a postal questionnaire is that it can be very time consuming as you don't know when the responders will post the questionnaire back. This makes it hard to plan when you will finish your

research. This can result in sociologists discontinuing the research if people don't send the questionnaires back in a suitable amount of time. This makes postal questionnaires unreliable as you can't be sure that you will get enough responses in suitable amount of time to conduct your study.

The third disadvantage of a postal questionnaire is that the body language of the respondents cannot be observed as the respondents cannot be seen. By observing respondents body language you can discover more about the respondent, the way they behave etc. That adds an extra layer of information to your study; however this cannot be achieved in a questionnaire. This once again brings up the issue with using quantitative data which is that it's very limited, you only get straight responses to questions that are the same for everyone, whereas when using qualitative data collection methods you can alter the questions to fit each individual based on their answers as well as observe their body language as it can reveal some interesting information. Because of this lack of depth when using postal questionnaires interpretivist sociologists won't be likely to use such research methods.

To conclude: the main problems that sociologists find when using postal questionnaires are low response rates, time consumption as you don't know when someone will send you the questionnaire back and finally lack of depth as you can observe respondents body language.

All these disadvantages makes postal questionnaires look like a waste of time and resources, however that isn't true as these disadvantages can be overcome making postal questionnaires a perfectly good research method to use. The way you can overcome these disadvantages is: In order to <https://assignbuster.com/research-methods-research-paper-samples/>

overcome the low response rate you could follow up on people who you send the questionnaire to and send a gentle reminder asking them to fill in the questionnaire and send it out. This can persuade people to actually fill in the questionnaire and send it, however you don't want to be too annoying and send the reminders every day as that will just make people angry. To add to that because postal questionnaires are fairly cheap you could try to compensate the low response rate by sending out more questionnaires to more people. This would make it so overall you will receive more responses which will hopefully be enough to conduct the study.

The way you can overcome time consumption is by adding a date that people need to send out the questionnaire. This will make it people who are willing to spend their time on the questionnaire will send it out in time and people who don't won't send it. This will allow you to continue with the study at a planned date as by that time you will have the responses.

Overcoming body language isn't possible in a questionnaire however sociologists who want to use this research method won't be concerned about the body language of respondents as otherwise they would use interviews instead.

Overall I think that postal questionnaire is a suitable research method if you want to gather quick quantitative data. And even though it has its own disadvantages these can be overcome with certain measures.