

Naturalistic observation research results



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Observation is categorised as one of the core skills of user research.

Naturalistic Observation is a research method that involves observing the subjects in their natural environment without intruding or changing it in any way. The observer is required to carefully watch the naturally occurring behaviour without letting the subjects know that they are being observed. This type of research is advantageous primarily because it permits the researcher to directly observe the subject in a natural setting. It allows the researcher/observer to study aspects that cannot be manipulated in a laboratory due to ethical concerns. It also serves the purpose of supporting the external validity of the research as the findings that are observed are occurring in the natural environment.

Study: 1

Date: 19th July, 2014. Day of the week: Saturday. Time: 11: 00 A. M. - 12: 00 P. M. (morning) and 6: 00 P. M. - 7: 00 P. M. (evening). Location: Café Coffee Day, C G S Chamber, Ground Floor, Nagarjuna Hills, Near Road Number 1, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad - 500034. Near GVK One. Duration of observation: each session was of an hour each (60 minutes). Collectively, two hours (120 minutes) of observation.

Not so important, yet Observer: Prakriti Dasgupta.

Background: I did two sessions of observation of both an hour each and on the same day at Café Coffee Day, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. The first at 11: 00 A. M. - 12: 00 P. M. in the morning and the second one at 6: 00P. M. - 7: 00P. M. in the evening. The whole purpose of carrying out two sets of observation was solely based the concept of finding out whether there is a

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difference in the crowd and the way they behave when they visit the Café in the late hours of the morning in contrast to those that visit the Café in the evening.

Layout of the Café: The Café remains open for the most part of the day as well as night. It is located in one of the busiest streets in the city and therefore caters to a large variety of customers ranging from early morning office goers to college students. It can be identified as a “ hang-out spot” for a group of friends or just a place where lonely soles sit down with a cup of coffee and a book, spending their time the way they desire.

Within the first fifteen minutes, I observed different kinds of customer behaviour patterns. The first session consisted of people who were present at the Café to attend an official meeting with their fellow office co-workers presumably over breakfast, while there were others who were resting which I assume is due to the hectic night shifts at their workplace. This is more or less confirmed by the way they were dressed and the tired look on their faces.

Stages of observation:

Systematic observation of the Customers:

1. Entry of the customers
2. Abiding by the social norm of standing in a queue
3. Purchase
4. The wait after the purchase is made
5. Finding seats preferably

Between 11: 00 A. M. - 12: 00 P. M.

Entry of the customers: With due respect to the fact that every individual is different and behaves differently, we can categorise them into those which are in great hurry and those which have plenty of time in their hand. On entering the Café, some of them directly stood in the queue, without wasting a single moment to even look around, while there were some who directly grabbed food from the compartments and then stood in the queue. Ignoring the ones that were in a hurry, when we shift our attention to the ones which aren't, we find them to be looking around, with calm expression on their faces. They look like the ones who do not have to meet any deadlines. There were also a small group of girls who had friends waiting for them. They were carrying school bags and were dressed in casuals which indicates that they were college students.

While in a queue: There was no interaction between the people who were standing in the queue. They kept themselves busy by looking at their phones and listening to music. Some attended calls while one lady kept justifying over the phone as to why she was late and wasn't at her workplace yet. Two men and one woman took out their wallets and purse respectively. The group of young girls kept giggling and laughing about a certain boy whom they find attractive, back in college.

At this point, at around 11: 33 A. M. a well dressed woman (L 1) rushes into the Café and tries to persuade a slightly older man, ahead in the queue if he would allow her to make her purchase before he did. She justified her request by saying that she was late for work and had two kids waiting in the

car and they had to be dropped to school. The man, seemed to be in two minds which I assumed, owing to his facial expression but however was convinced and allowed the lady to stand in the queue before him. At this point, another woman (L 2) who had been waiting in the queue for the past 15 minutes, raises her voice to object and asks the lady (L 1) to go back and stand in the queue. Clearly she (L 2) was late for work as well. As soon as she (L 2) objected, all the others standing in the queue begin to support her. This was followed by several other verbal objections from other people standing in the queue. Some of them even exchanged dirty looks. A small argument took place among them where the lady with the kids (L 1) used her kids as bait and the other (L 2) asked her not to use her children as an excuse for violating certain social norms. Ultimately the lady (L 1) was forcefully ejected from the line. Having no choice, she went and stood right at the end of the queue and awaited her turn.

Purchase: Most of the customers carried a bag with them and not a single customer was standing in the queue without a phone in their hand. This reflects how man is unable to move around without technology. It has become a necessity more than luxury. One important thing that I noticed was that none of them took a look at the menu card or what the cafe served which indicated that they were regular customers at the cafe and they were aware of what was available. However, there were four young boys who were seated at one corner of the cafe, intently looking at the menu and discussing what each of them would like to have. Most of the people in the cafe took the coffee and sandwiches they purchased and ran out of the cafe while only a few sat at the cafe and had their food. There was this little girl with her

mother who looked at the cupcakes on the counter and then very carefully and ordered one for herself.

The wait: Most people crowded around the counter, awaiting the food that they had just ordered with numbered bills in their hands. They were restless and impatient. They kept taking a glance at their watch in a frequent manner. The group of college girls kept enquiring for their order every five minutes and they ultimately managed to annoy the manager seated at the counter. Most of them opened their bags and wallets and kept the excess change they had inside it. Along with that they either kept their phones in their pockets or inside their bag. Since, almost all of them had ordered a cup of coffee irrespective of whether they had purchased anything else to eat with their hot beverage or not, it was seen that they took the coffee with their right hand and simultaneously picked up a lid and a straw with their left. These were the ones that were in a rush and as they ran out of the cafe as soon as they received their order. The ones that were eating in the cafe carefully carried the tray to their seats making an effort not to spill the coffee.

Finding preferable seats: It was observed that if people did not get the seats of their choice they simply stepped out of the cafe. Nobody waited for the seats to become empty. This indicated that there were other choices available outside as well from where they could acquire food. There was a group of five men, who entered the cafe at around 11: 47 A. M. who left as soon as they failed to find a completely empty table. This also indicates the fact that people are not ready to sit with other unknown people even when one or two seats were empty in the other occupied tables.

Difference in the ' Type' of customers that visited the café from 11: 00A. M. - 12: 00P. M. in the morning and those who visited the café in the evening from 6: 00P. PM. - 7: 00P. M. : It is important to note that the crowd that the cafe catered to, at the peak office hours was different from that they catered to in the evenings. In the evenings, the people who visited the cafe were mostly the young crowd consisting of teenagers in contrast to the office goers in the morning. The cafe catered mostly to single customers in the morning who stop by the cafe to pick up their breakfast but, in the evenings most of the people are in groups who are sitting and talking about different insignificant things that bother them, sipping their piping hot coffees, biting into their sandwiches and partially gossiping. The environment is relaxed and nobody seems to be in a hurry. The manager at the counter also seems to be settling the accounts in peace and there is no time crunch and deadlines that need to be met.

Observations and interpretations:

- The lady objected and stopped the other lady from jumping the queue. As soon as she opposed to it, there were other people in the queue who supported her. Violation of social norms such as cutting into queues is not an appropriate thing to do and is not acceptable by the crowd as such. Perhaps jumping queues would have been an easier thing to do in the evenings when the crowd is more or less understanding and easy going. Early research indicates that people were reluctant to challenge queue jumpers which basically suggests that our spontaneous social order maintenance is weak. Milgram's experiment also concludes that in only 10% of the occasion's queue

jumpers were physically ejected from the line. On about half of the occasion people hardly cared to react or take an initiative to stop it. Milgram attempts to explain that most people are too scared to intervene or challenge a queue jumper because challenging queue jumpers could mean losing your own place in the line. There is chance that a fight may take place and everyone is delayed while it is being sorted out. This reflects on the idea that social systems have to tolerate some deviance otherwise they might hastily collapse. Moreover, when people stand in a queue, in a coffee shop, group formation is difficult and as a consequence of which social order is extremely weak. People tolerate queue jumpers as they themselves want to avoid social disorder.

- People left the coffee shop when they did not find a completely empty table because people do not like to sit and share the table with complete strangers.
- Some of the people took out their wallets as soon as they stepped in to the coffee shop which indicates three things: they might be in a hurry or they are running late for some important work, or they are extremely hungry or they prefer to be prepared before they start on doing anything, in this case, standing in the queue.
- People are very impatient and restless and they do not like waiting. Women are more impatient than men are. Men have a tendency to wait quietly. Although, men remain quiet, their faces give away their restlessness. In spite of that their patience level is higher than that of women. This aspect however, does not fit into the stereotype which says that women are more patient than men.

- Young girls are attention seeking, therefore, they try and attract attention towards themselves by their gestures and the way they speak to one another. They make use of inappropriate words to even greet each other, for example: “ Hi bitch”. The word “ bitch” is being casually used in this context and is not meant literally. The use of crass language among the girls and the boys of this generation is basically an attempt on their part to appear “ cool” and popular among their peers. Also, they cannot stay without taking a glance at their cell phones every now and then.

These assumptions and generalizations are purely made on the basis of this particular observation. They differ in every case.

Study: 2

Date: 19th July, 2014. Day of the week: Saturday. Time: 3: 00 P. M. – 4: 00 P. M. Location: Lamakaan, an open cultural space. In Lane Adjacent To CBay, Opposite GVK One, Road No. 1, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, Telangana 500034. Duration of observation: 2 hours (120 Minutes)

Background: I attended a discussion, on whether the education system kills creativity or not. The discussion was held at Lamakaan. Being an observer I was restricted to participate in the discussion actively. Several eminent educators, mentors, school/college professors and industrialists from different sectors were present, who were willing to share their views and opinions on the matter that had been raised for discussion. There were 36 people who attended the discussion.

Observation and interpretations: The entire event was well organised and effectively carried out by Man1. The discussion proceeded in an orderly manner. Before the discussion began, there was a session where all the people present for the discussion had to introduce themselves. This session was overlooked by Man1 himself. This was the first instance of interaction between the participants present. This session was characterised by appreciation for fellow participants, to a certain extent only. Man1 exhibited leadership qualities. His characteristics were those of a democratic leader. He did not restrict the participants in anyway. The discussion was more or less informal in nature. Although the discussion started on a calm and controlled tone, the environment in the room soon changed. A series of heated arguments, aggressive gestures, difference in opinions and eventually conformity among all the participants is how the discussion can be described.

I observed different social behaviour throughout the course of the discussion. In order to simplify the task of observing, I named a few fellow participants who were actively taking part in the discussion. Members: Man2, Man3, Lady1, Lady2, Lady3, Girl1, Girl2.

To be noted: all the members taking part in the discussion were well read and were aware of the current scenario prevailing in the education sector and the impact of the flawed system.

Man2 was an influential speaker. He managed to convince all the people in the room by stating relevant facts, but failed to convince Lady1. His justification for the statements he had made, did not appeal to her. She

constantly scrutinised his argument. Both were aggressive in nature and constantly argued throughout the discussion. In due course of the argument, Man3 who was intently noting down every statement, interrupted the argument and spoke up in support of the lady1. The only interpretation that can be derived by this is that, lady1 was successful in convincing, if not all, but one participant. Her argument, therefore could not be dismissed. At this point, Man1 intervenes and tries to control the situation. He was still calm, composed and confident and held on to his composure in spite of the chaotic scenario and considered the perspectives of both Man2 and Lady1. He takes the midway path and succeeds in convincing both the participants. He states valid facts and speaks logically. When the situation appeared to be more or less controlled, it still wasn't. Followed by this when lady2 makes a statement, she is opposed by Girl1 and Girl2. Both of them are students and they continue to argue with Lady2 in an aggressive tone. All this while, there was a small detail that I had forgot to mention. The participants were already sitting with people whom they already knew from before. Only the 5 participants who came alone for the discussion sat beside other fellow participants who they did not know. They were in groups throughout the discussion. People were talking among themselves, arguing, and there was complete chaos in the room at one point. People spoke out of chance, raised their voices in an attempt to put their views across. This is when Lady3 takes control of the situation. She makes her statement on another aspect and states her facts out loud thereby, shifting the focus of the argument to another concept related to the same topic. She was extremely persuasive and gave just reasons to the participants to agree with her. It was very interesting to observe how she was single handily successful in putting her

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ideas across. When lady3 entered the discussion, she exhibited all qualities of an influential person. She was confident, consistent, and had unbiased views. Minority influence refers to a form of social influence where the individual with contrastingly different beliefs in comparison to the other people, should have correct ideas and should resist social pressure and abuse. Her views were influential and convincing to such an extent that other people who were confused and were in two minds, along with the ones who had strong contrasting opinions conformed to Lady3. Conformity refers to any change in behaviour that is caused by another person or a group of people i. e. Lady3 has acted in a certain manner which had influenced the others to conform to her statement. But there was one such boy who took an active part in the discussion but, was hesitant to accept the ideas put forth by Lady3. In due time, he as well conformed to her. Conformity was studied by Solomon Asch, who conducted an experiment which concluded that it was primarily social pressure from perhaps a majority group that could affect a person to conform. In this case, it was primarily informational conformity as Lady3 stated accurate, and rational facts and figures to prove her idea and statement. It is basically the power of the situation that regulates and influences all human behaviour. It is the power of the situation that brought about instances of social influence and conformity.

I observed that people belonging to the same age groups thought alike. Their opinions and views converged and they behaved in a similar manner. They had similar patterns of thinking and interpreting the situation. They reacted to certain situations in similar ways as well. This is possibly because all of

them have grown up experiencing the same dynamic changes in the society. Also, this might reflect similar bringing up patterns.

In course of the discussion I attained an in-depth insight on the different social behavioural patterns which man tends to exhibit depending on the prevailing scenario.

Acknowledging the advantages of Naturalistic Observation, this research technique also has quite a number of disadvantages that we cannot ignore. In this kind of research technique, people may behave differently if they come to know that they are being watched. They become conscious and may try to behave in a certain way in order to conform to what they believe the observer expects to see. One major drawback of this research method is that different observers may draw different conclusions on the basis of their observation of the same witnessed behaviour, owing to their ability to make accurate assumptions which is again a rare scenario in most of the cases. However, observing different human behaviour patterns closely and then drawing meanings out of them poses as a challenge to all those researchers who carry out experiments on the basis of this research technique.

The end.

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