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Chapter 2

Research Methods in Social Psychology

Research is relevant in any field of study. In this chapter, research methods in social psychology are discussed. The chapter not only covers the nature of research in social psychology but also discusses its key concepts. Quantitative and qualitative research in the context of social psychology is also discussed. An important issue related to ethics is also discussed.

Research in Social Psychology

1. It is an investigation
2. The investigation is carried out in a systematic and objective manner
3. Research is directed towards seeking answers to certain problems
4. Generalisations can be carried out

Key Concepts in Research

1. Construct
2. Variable
   - Independent variable
   - Dependent variable
   - Extraneous variables
3. Experimental and control group

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4. Confederate

5. Internal and external validity

Components of Research Process

- Problem
- Hypothesis/es
- Sample and sampling technique
- Research Design
    1. True designs
    2. Faulty designs
    3. Quasi-experimental designs
    4. Factorial designs
    5. Small n designs
- Data collection
- Analysis of data
- Deriving conclusions and making generalisations

Types of Research in Social Psychology

- Experimental method
- Field research
- Descriptive research
- Correlational method

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- Survey research
- Action research

Qualitative Research in Social Psychology

- Qualitative interviewing
- Focus group
- Case study
- Ethnography
- Grounded theory

Ethical Issues in Research

- Beneficence and non-maleficence
- Informed consent
- Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity
- Deception

Challenges and Problems While Conducting Research in Social Psychology

- Issues and threats related to internal validity
- Issue with regard to generalisation of the findings
- Effect of social desirability
- Demand characteristics
- Experimenter's expectancy effect

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- Making a choice between maintaining discipline identity and interdisciplinary approach

Trends and Prospects in Social Psychology Research

- Testing of evolutionary hypothesis
- Cross-cultural research
- Social neuroscience
- Multiple perspective
- Expansion of database
- Indigenisation

Activities/Assignments

1. Start the session by relating or presenting some significant researches carried out in the field of social psychology. These researches can be used as case studies for further discussion on various topics covered in this chapter.
2. Ask the students to refer to various online resources and identify two latest researches in social psychology by Indian psychologists and highlight their findings.
3. Ask the students to identify prominent researches in social psychology that have used deception.
4. Divide the students into different groups, assign one ethical issue to each group and ask them to discuss the issue and then present it.
5. Ask the students to first refer to the formats of informed consent given on different websites and tell them to discuss on the common features in these formats.
6. Ask the students to identify a possible topic in social psychology and ask them to present in class.
7. Invite a resource person to speak on qualitative research in social psychology.

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Resources

- http://open.lib.umn.edu/socialpsychology/chapter/1-3-conducting-research-in-social-psychology/
- http://nobaproject.com/modules/research-methods-in-social-psychology
- http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/psychology/zech/graphics/zech_1_resmethpsych/pdf/zec88196_051_078.pdf
- Sansone, C., Morf, C., & Panter, A. (2004). *The Sage handbook of methods in social psychology* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

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An Introduction to Social Psychology

Suhas Shetgovekar



Chapter 2
Research Methods in Social Psychology

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Definition of Research

- Research can be described as adding to the existing fund of knowledge. It is a critical and complex enquiry and an intensive and cumulative process.
- It can be described as a systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalisations, principles and theories, resulting in the prediction and possibly ultimate control of events.
- It is a search for knowledge to find a solution to a problem.
- Some of the definitions of research are as follows:
    - Research, in simple terms, can be defined as an investigation that is systematic in nature and directed to seek answers to a problem (Burns, 2000).
    - Best and Khan (1999) have defined research as 'systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observation that may lead to the development of generalisation, principles or theories, resulting in prediction and possibly ultimate control of events'.
    - Kerlinger (1995, p. 10) defines scientific research as 'a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomenon guided by theory and hypotheses about the presumed relations among such phenomena'.

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Goals of Research in Social Psychology

1. One of the goals of research in social psychology is a systematic description of behaviour in a social set-up in order to make generalisations. While conducting research, systematic and specific methodology needs to be followed in order to derive generalisations. The findings need to be based on systematic research rather what one feels.
2. Research in social psychology also deals with cause and effect relationship. For example, whether education level have an effect on health related behaviour.
3. Developing theories is yet another goal of social psychology. Theories can be derived with regard to certain behaviours of people. The goal of any science is developing theories. Theories mainly help understand the reasons behind certain processes and events. Thus, in social psychology, a theory regarding aggression will help understand the reasons behind this behaviour. Theories explain certain basic concepts and also the relationships between these basic concepts.
4. Further, the information and knowledge about social psychology and its principles can be applied to various social problems. For example, the knowledge about groups can be applied to groups in an industrial setup.

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Key Concepts in Research

- Construct
- Variable
- Experimental and control group
- Confederates
- Internal and external validity

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Components of Research Process

- Problem
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- Sample and sampling techniques
- Research design
- Data collection
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Ethical Issues in Research

- Beneficence and non-maleficence
- Informed consent
- Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity
- Deception in social psychology research



Challenges and Problems in Social Psychology Research

- Issues and threats related to internal validity
- Issue with regard to generalisation of the findings
- Effect of social desirability
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Trends and Prospects in Social Psychology Research

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