

METHODS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY – UG SEMESTER II NOTES

Social psychology uses both **scientific** and **systematic** methods to understand how people think, feel, and behave in social situations. The major methods include **observational, correlational, experimental, survey, case study, field study, and qualitative methods.**

1. OBSERVATIONAL METHOD

Meaning

Systematic watching and recording of behaviour as it occurs naturally.

Types

a) Naturalistic Observation

- Conducted in real-life settings.
- The researcher does not interfere.
- Example: observing crowd behaviour in a marketplace.

b) Controlled/Laboratory Observation

- Conducted in a lab setting.
- Researchers manipulate the environment.

Advantages

- Provides real and rich data.
- Good for studying natural behaviour.

Limitations

- Observer bias.
- No control over variables.
- Cannot establish cause–effect.

2. CORRELATIONAL METHOD

Meaning

Studies the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them.

Correlation Coefficient (r)

- Ranges from **-1 to +1**.
- **Positive**: variables move in same direction.
- **Negative**: variables move in opposite direction.
- **Zero**: no relationship.

Advantages

- Helps in prediction.
- Useful when experimentation is not possible.

Limitations

- **Correlation does NOT imply causation.**

3. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

Meaning

Researcher manipulates one variable (**Independent Variable**) and measures its effect on another (**Dependent Variable**) under controlled conditions.

Key Concepts

- **Independent Variable (IV)**: the cause.
- **Dependent Variable (DV)**: the effect.
- **Experimental Group**: receives the treatment.
- **Control Group**: does not receive treatment.
- **Random Assignment**: reduces bias.

Advantages

- Establishes **cause–effect relationships**.

- High level of control.

Limitations

- Artificial environments may reduce realism.
- Ethical limitations.

4. SURVEY METHOD

Meaning

Collecting information from a large number of people using **questionnaires** or **interviews**.

Types

- **Structured** (fixed questions)
- **Unstructured** (open-ended)
- **Face-to-face, telephone, online surveys**

Advantages

- Can collect data from large samples.
- Cost-effective.

Limitations

- Response bias.
- Questions may be misunderstood.

5. FIELD STUDY / FIELD EXPERIMENT

Meaning

Conducted in natural settings but with experimental manipulation.

Example

Studying helping behaviour in public places.

Advantages

- High ecological validity (natural behaviour).

Limitations

- Hard to control extraneous variables.

6. CASE STUDY METHOD

Meaning

In-depth study of a single individual, group, or event.

Advantages

- Detailed information.
- Useful for rare or unique cases.

Limitations

- Cannot generalize results.
- Subjectivity possible.

7. QUALITATIVE METHODS

Used to understand **meaning, experiences, and social interactions**.

a) Focus Groups

Small group discussions led by a moderator.

b) In-depth Interviews

Detailed one-on-one conversations.

c) Content Analysis

Systematic study of documents, media, speeches, etc.

Advantages

- Provides deep insights.
- Useful for exploring new topics.

Limitations

- Interpretation may be subjective.
- Harder to analyze compared to quantitative data.

8. ETHICAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

- **Informed Consent**
- **Deception** (used only when necessary)
- **Debriefing**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Protection from harm**

9. TRIANGULATION

Using multiple methods to study the same phenomenon to improve **validity**.