

## **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS**

It will be increasingly appropriate to use on-line social media sites for geography related research questionnaires. Most towns and villages have facebook sites with many members who will be keen to offer their opinions on a variety of issues. This makes the completion of questionnaire research quick and efficient. Questionnaire design packages are available on-line and many will have a facility for beginning to classify the data collected and to produce graphs and charts.

1. Using an on-line questionnaire is a convenience / pragmatic sampling method, but it does enable a large sample to be collected reasonably easily, quickly and at low cost. It makes data analysis easier to do and responders may be more candid than they would be in a face to face interview.
2. It does, however, come with reservations in that it may be biased and unrepresentative of the population from which it is drawn.
3. Unlike random sampling each person within the total population from which the sample is drawn does not have an equal and independent chance of taking part in the survey. The only way to really conduct a random sample in these circumstances would be to use the Electoral Register and random number tables and make it a mail survey which would be very costly in terms of both time and money.
4. Unlike a stratified sample it may not sample all sections of the population in terms of age, sex, socio-economic status in the proportions that exist in the total population from which it is drawn.
5. The 2021 National Census gives us data for the population of each area of the UK, and it is possible to see how closely the sample follows this structure (comparing age/sex ratios and percentages)
6. Surveys from on-line questionnaires may be answered by people who are not really involved in the situation. They may be on a Town/Village social media site even if they live far away from the area, even abroad and may not have been involved or visited the area for many years.
7. The sample may be skewed since not everyone has the internet or the time and energy to complete the questionnaire. Certain groups such as the elderly may be over or underrepresented.
8. Survey fraud is possible either intentional or unintentional. People may complete the survey more than once and may lie or give untrue or partially true statements that are hard or impossible to spot.
9. Some questions may be left unanswered or may be hard for respondents to interpret and survey fatigue may be evident if the questionnaire is long.
10. Conducting one to one and elite interviews may help to overcome some of these problems. It may also be that the large size of the sample produced by online sampling outweighs the limitations and that even if in person surveys were done the sample structure would be dictated by when, where and how often the sampling was done and necessarily would not include people who very rarely go to the area being surveyed.