

SOCIAL SURVEYS: favoured by **POSITIVISTS**, this research technique involves asking a large number of people the same questions. These questions are largely closed, but may include a few open questions and are asked in the same order.

Type	Specific advantages (largely PRACTICAL)	Specific disadvantages (largely PRACTICAL)
<p>Structured/formal interviews e.g. the annual British Crime Survey (BCS) - sample size 40,000 victims.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response rates are usually higher than other survey methods and are normally in the range of 60 to 85%. The BCS has a response rate of around 75%. This pushes up the reliability of the findings. There is no confusion over the meaning of the questions or how to answer them as issues such as these can be clarified and explained by the interviewer if necessary. This helps to ensure that the survey is completed fully, increasing validity & reliability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This technique can be expensive. In the BCS a big expense is the laptops used in the CAPI system. Also the interviewer costs are high. Structured Interviews can take longer than other survey methods. This is especially true of the CAPI & CASI systems used by the BCS. This method can suffer from 'interviewer bias'. The way questions are phrased and the interviewers body/facial mannerisms can all distort results, lowering validity & reliability.
<p>Postal questionnaires (a type of self-completion questionnaire) e.g. the annual FA Premier League Fans Survey - sample size 22,000 football fans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This technique is fast, efficient and inexpensive compared to other research methods. The football fans survey (FFS) is fast and efficient because the clubs choose the respondents using the postal address file. Costs are also reduced in comparison to other research methods because there are no interviewers to pay. This type of survey is able to cover large geographical areas. In the FFS this is vital as there is the need to gain a cross section of all football fans. Reliability increases as a consequence. The researcher has no contact with the pps and therefore bias is minimal which increases the reliability of the findings. <p>A2 extra point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postal questionnaires give pps time to give thought to their answers, increasing the validity of the findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postal questionnaires can receive low response rates (25 to 50%). The FFS response rate is around 27%. This can destroy the representativeness of a sample. Reliability is also lowered. With postal questionnaires there is no one there to explain the questions or instructions for completion. This can result in the questionnaires being incomplete or spoiled, reducing the validity and reliability of the findings.
<p>General THEORETICAL advantages (common to all types of quantitative survey)</p>		<p>General THEORETICAL disadvantages (common to all types of quantitative survey)</p>
<p>Positivists favour all types of survey method for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large sample sizes are possible. This allows generalisations to be made from the sample population and applied to all those who share the same characteristics. For example, the sample size of the BCS is 40,000 and the FFS is 22,000. Results are reliable because the questions are standardised and the sample size is large. The objectivity of the researcher also increases reliability. Quantifiable - possible to produce statistics and establish relationships and correlations. For example comparisons can be made between social groups, across societies and in different time periods. Using largely closed questions makes this possible. <p>A2 extra points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results are verifiable meaning they can be easily checked. The findings of the BCS and the FFS are repeated and checked yearly. The results can be useful for making predictions a further benefit from large sample sizes. 		<p>Anti-positivists (interpretivists and phenomenologists) do not favour all types of survey method for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People may lie as no rapport is built up with the researcher, this lowers validity. Closed questions can produce shallow answers as the questions limit what the respondent can say. This can result in a lack of depth, insight, meanings and feelings, validity is also lowered. Due to the large use of closed questions surveys result in premature closure, the results are pre-defined and the answer the respondent is looking for may not be present. Validity can therefore be lowered. <p>A2 extra point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of flexibility in that the questions are pre-defined and so the researcher has no room to follow up interesting avenues that may open up during the research.