

Chapter 8

Using secondary data

Secondary data and primary data

- Secondary data is data that have already been collected for some other purposes, while primary data is data which can be collected specifically for the purpose of answering a research question(s) and to meet research objectives

Using secondary data for research (1)

Types of secondary data

- Documentary :are often used in research projects that also use primary data collection methods. However, you can also use them on their own or with other sources of secondary data
- Surveys :refers to data collected using a survey strategy, usually by questionnaires, that have been already analysed for their original purpose

Multiple – source secondary data

- Multiple-source secondary data can be based entirely on documentary or on survey secondary or can be amalgam of the two. The key factors is that different data sets have been combined to form another data set prior to your accessing the data.

Using secondary data for research (2)

Types of secondary data

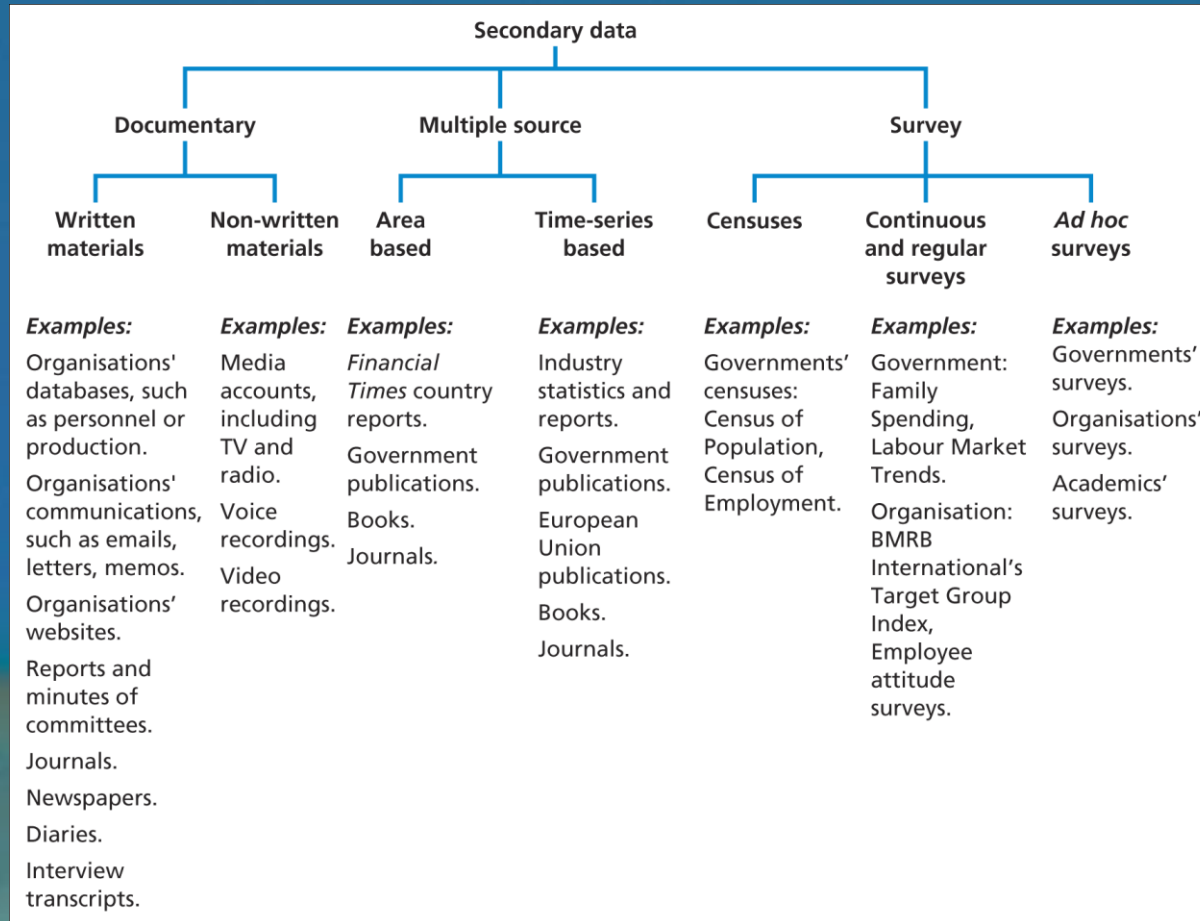


Figure 8.1 Types of secondary data

Source: Saunders *et al.* (2006)

Using secondary data for research (3)

Multiple – source secondary data

- Times series for longitudinal studies: one method of compilation is to extract and combine selected comparable variables from a number of surveys or from the same survey that has been repeated a number of times to provide a time series of data to undertake a longitudinal study.
- Cohort studies: Data also can be compiled for the same population over time using a series of 'snap shots' to form cohort studies.

Multiple – source secondary data

- Area-based data sets: Multi- source secondary data also can be combined , if they have the same geographical basis, to form area based data sets.

Locating secondary data

Finding the data - a two stage process

1. Establishing that the required secondary data is available
2. Locating the precise data required

Availability of secondary data (1)

Sources

- References in publications (books, journal articles)
- Within organisations (unpublished sources)
- Tertiary literature –
(indexes and catalogues in archives or online)

Availability of secondary data (2)

Finding secondary data

- References in published guides
- Data held by organisations
- Data on the Internet

Evaluating secondary data (1)

Advantages

- Fewer resource requirements
- Unobtrusive
- Longitudinal studies may be feasible
- Provision of comparative and contextual data
- Unforeseen discoveries may occur
- Generally permanent and available

Evaluating secondary data (2)

Disadvantages

- Purpose of data collection may not match the research needs
- Access may be difficult or costly
- Aggregations and definitions may be unsuitable
- No real control over data quality
- Initial purpose may affect data presentation

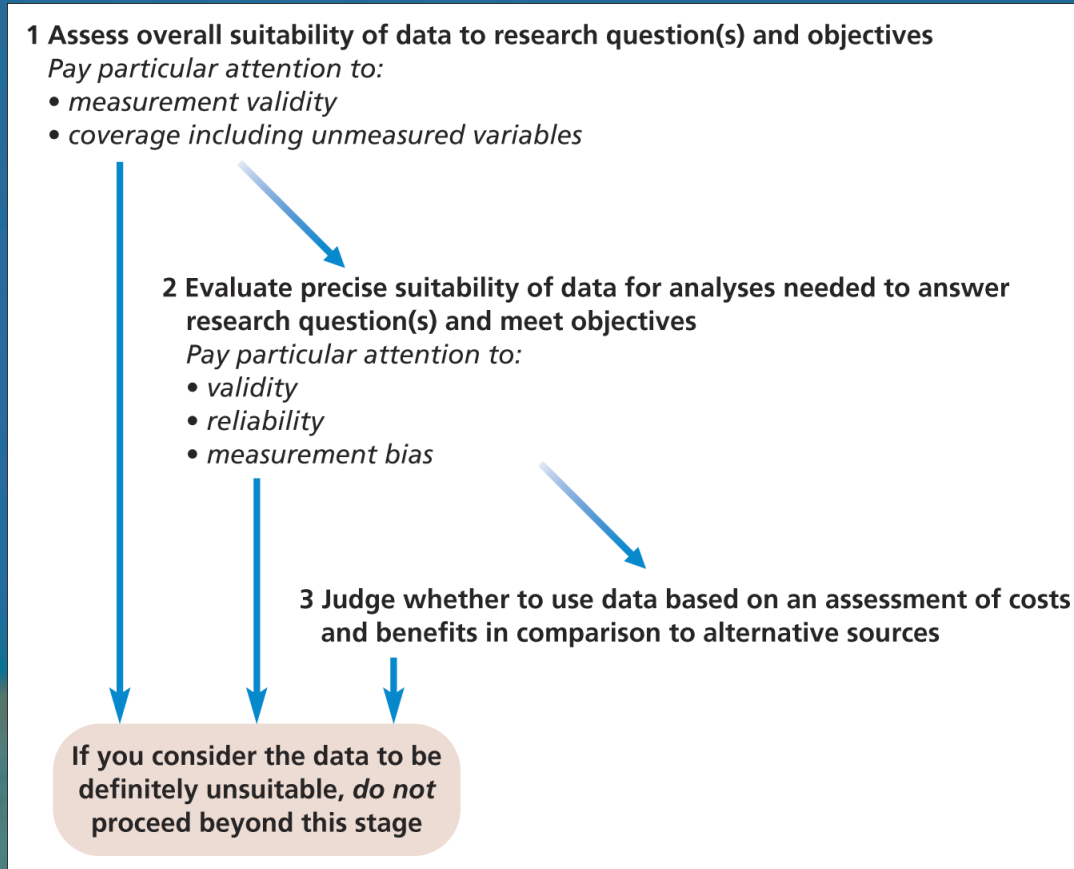
Evaluating secondary data (3)

Ensure that data sources

- Enable the research question(s) to be answered
- Enable research objectives to be met
- Have greater benefits than their associated costs
- Allow access for research

Evaluating secondary data (3)

Evaluating potential secondary data sources



Source: Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Figure 8.2 Evaluating potential secondary data sources

Suitability of secondary data (1)

Overall suitability: points to consider

- Precise suitability, including reliability and validity
 - assessment of collection methods
 - clear explanation of collection techniques
- Measurement validity
- Measurement bias and deliberate distortion

Suitability of secondary data (2)

Overall suitability: points to consider

- Coverage and unmeasured variables
 - ensure exclusion of unwanted data
 - ensure sufficient data remain for analysis
- Costs and benefits

Evaluating your secondary data sources

Checklist Box 8.9

Complete the Checklist in Box 8.9
to help you evaluate your secondary data
sources

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Summary: Chapter 8

- Secondary data consists of three main types - documentary, survey and multiple sources
- The data can be used in a variety of ways
- Secondary data may be less current and collected for a purpose that does not match your research question(s)
- Secondary data needs to be located and its availability established
- Data sources should be assessed for suitability, measurement validity and coverage

Summary: Chapter 8

- Evaluation of secondary data should include reliability and any measurement bias
- Costs and benefits of using secondary data should be evaluated and compared with alternative sources
- Although secondary data may contain some bias, it can help to answer your research question
- Remember to check the research project assessment regulations regarding the use of secondary data