

Fieldwork and Research Plan for Urban Inequalities

Aim

In the course of this investigation, I will explore the possible effects of the digital divide in Hounslow, paying great attention to who will be affected and whether inter-related variables contribute to a widening gap between those with internet access and those without. Such an aim will help predict which social group (e.g. the elderly, ethnic minorities, those without qualifications) are most likely to be marginalised due to their lack of Internet and technology. Alongside this, I aim to investigate whether the digital divide will still exist in the future.

Methodology of Fieldwork

This ethnographic investigation will take place in Hounslow. However, because of the large sample frame, I will conduct a cluster sample by randomly selecting (using an online generator) a postal district which will become my sampling location. Taking this further, I will complete a random sample to select fifteen house numbers who will take part in my survey. Such a technique, not carrying out a census, will be less time consuming and provide a manageable amount of data to work with, preventing human error during analysis. Moreover, by choosing fifteen houses, my sample size is more likely to be representative of the entire Hounslow population than choosing a smaller size. Anything beyond fifteen would become impractical to work with.

Furthermore, I will create a questionnaire (being relatively short to improve my response rate) using closed questions. These questions, having response boxes, will be easier to analyse and make the survey quicker and easier to conduct. My questions will revolve around Internet access and age as from research (below), these variables have a close correlation. Nonetheless, those participating in the survey are most likely to reject personal questions (e.g. how much do you earn per year) so factors such as wealth/local economy will have to be gained from online sources. It is important I take into account these variables as they might play a substantial role in exacerbating the digital divide. If I am to predict future impacts, I must investigate who is being affected the most. My questionnaire will consist of the following questions:

- Do you have internet access? [YES/NO]
- In what age category do you fit in? [13-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50+]
- Did you study ICT at school? [YES/NO]
- If you have children, do they study ICT at school? [YES/NO/NA]
- **Improvement (read evaluation): Which school does/will your child attend? _____**

My questions don't allow for a bipolar analysis which can be ambiguous and affected by bias. For example by asking 'how much internet do you use' and having the following response boxes 'a lot/a little/sometimes', participants will interpret this differently. By

including response boxes, which do not overlap, a more precise response is guaranteed alongside a mix of qualitative (yes/no) and quantitative (age) data. Besides this, by asking whether ICT was/is being studied at school, I can analyse the role of education on the digital divide (whether it has had an affect/whether it will reduce future impacts).

Data Collection (Continuation of Methodology)

I will, personally, visit each house in the sample frame and ask the questions face to face, which will improve response rate and provide immediate data (as some may not return the questionnaire if I was to post it). Albeit it being dark, increasing risk, I will make an effort of visiting houses from 17.30pm, where most people should be home from work. If I receive no response (i.e. they do not answer the door) I will return once more the following day at an earlier time. If they fail to respond a second time, I will discard the house number from my sample and randomly select a new number.

Once I have collected all my data I can begin analysis by extrapolating data and applying it to the entire Hounslow population. For example, my hypothesis is that the older the population, the more likely they are to lack internet access (possibly due to a lack of education). If my sample proves this, I can extend my conclusions to Hounslow, assuming my sample is unbiased and fully representative. By doing so, I will calculate, using online sources, the average age of Hounslow to explore the percent of population who are affected and likely to become marginalised.

Research and Sources

First and foremost, I will research factors exacerbating the digital divide and who generally is affected by it. This will entitle me to form a hypothesis and understand the nature of my investigation. Additionally, it will be of use for me to research the national curriculum to identify whether ICT is being taught. Knowing this will aid my analysis in understand future impacts of the digital divide. I will also research the economic activity of the sampling neighbourhood to consider the impact of wealth on internet access alongside age. To find the average age of Hounslow, I will use a database from a governmental based website cited below.

| Source | Description | Reliability |
|---|--|--|
| http://www.21stcenturychallenges.org/60-seconds/what-is-the-digital-divide/ | Facts and figures about the digital divide in the UK. This shows impacts and figures. | From a reputable source (RGS) so reliable for my usage in investigation |
| https://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemiation/NeighbourhoodSummary.do?width=789&a=7&i=1001&m=0&s=1424357114502&enc=1&profileSearchText=TW3+1PX&searchProfiles= | Database with a myriad of indicators for Hounslow. This will provide me details about the average age of Hounslow. | A governmental based website so likely to have precise measurements of Hounslow. Census based. |
| http://londondatastore-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/instant-atlas/borough-profiles/atlas.html | A map and database showing different measures in Hounslow. Use alongside above data. | I will cross reference data with above source to check whether its similar, checks reliability |
| Google Earth | To generate local street maps and put Hounslow's size in perspective. | From the Google company, reputable source and used in previous work. |

Presentation

I could present my findings on a 'Google Earth' printed street map, indicating houses I've tested. On top of this base map, I would then produce a (tracing paper) layer, using a choropleth mapping technique, to show age. However to save time and produce efficient results, I will use GIS mapping to record data and then produce layered maps. By doing so, I can incorporate my research and create layers for economic activity.

To calculate correlation between age and internet access (my priority) I will construct a multiple bar chart- frequency (number of houses) against age. Each bar will be showing "with (internet) access", "no access", "learnt ICT" respectively. This is the only possible way of analysing the trend of data as a scatter diagram cannot be produced as most data values are qualitative. Nevertheless, I can account for extraneous variables and accurately extract data from a bar chart easier than from a scatter diagram.

Similarly, I will produce a compound bar chart to show education of ICT in schools today. This will let me predict future impacts of the digital divide. For example, if I find that most people attending school are receiving ICT education, the impacts of the future digital divide are being minimized. Research, however, will be needed to check the national curriculum.

Evaluation

My sources and collection methods are reasonably reliable, enhanced by cross referencing sites containing statistical data. However by using the internet alone, I am limiting myself to only using online sources when I could find valuable information from other materials. Thus, I will make an effort of using revision guides/books on the digital divide also. These will then be referenced as part of my conclusions and final evaluation.

Moreover, my questions, being limited in response, will only produce qualitative data which is hard to present and may not be representative of the entire population. Nonetheless I am controlling this by using statistical diagrams which allow for both quantitative and qualitative results. Furthermore, when enquiring about children's school education, the participant's children may not yet be old enough to attend a school. Therefore a more suitable question should be supplemented, taking into account school options and names. Although the participant may be hesitant to respond to this personal detail, it will anyhow give insight into local schools. By knowing this, I can research the curriculum of the school and see whether children will learn about ICT.

A further evaluation will be produced after my investigation where I will have the capacity to consider my techniques.