Chapter 17: Field Research

Quasi-experimental design

Giving up control of some aspects of the environment for improved external validity

Ethics: waiver of consent

**Laboratory vs. Field Research**

The next major distinction between research methods is between laboratory and field studies. A laboratory study is a study that is conducted in the laboratory environment. In contrast, a field study is a study that is conducted in the real-world, in a natural environment.

Laboratory experiments typically have high internal validity. Internal validity refers to the degree to which we can confidently infer a causal relationship between variables. When we conduct an experimental study in a laboratory environment we have very high internal validity because we manipulate one variable while controlling all other outside extraneous variables. When we manipulate an independent variable and observe an effect on a dependent variable and we control for everything else so that the only difference between our experimental groups or conditions is the one manipulated variable then we can be quite confident that it is the independent variable that is causing the change in the dependent variable. In contrast, because field studies are conducted in the real-world, the experimenter typically has less control over the environment and potential extraneous variables, and this decreases internal validity, making it less appropriate to arrive at causal conclusions.

But there is typically a trade-off between internal and external validity. External validity simply refers to the degree to which we can generalize the findings to other circumstances or settings, like the real-world environment. When internal validity is high, external validity tends to be low; and when internal validity is low, external validity tends to be high. So laboratory studies are typically low in external validity, while field studies are typically high in external validity. Since field studies are conducted in the real-world environment it is far more appropriate to generalize the findings to that real-world environment than when the research is conducted in the more artificial sterile laboratory.

Finally, there are field studies which are non-experimental in nature because nothing is manipulated. But there are also field experiments where an independent variable is manipulated in a natural setting and extraneous variables are controlled. Depending on their overall quality and the level of control of extraneous variables, such field experiments can have high external and high internal validity.

## Marketing Research

## User Experience Research

Observational/Diary Non-experimental Research?