

opening hours of the store), then the data gathered from the sample will have **external validity**. In other words, it will be **generalisable** to the wider customer base.

It may also be feasible, if the client has up-to-date information on the profile of the customers, to use quota sampling with some effectiveness.

Another strength of this approach is that it is likely to be **less expensive** than recruiting and maintaining a full-scale panel and so it is more likely to be within the means of a small supermarket. Using face-to-face data collection means that there is a greater degree of control over fieldwork and data quality. The interviewers can encourage respondents to take part and explain anything that is unclear.

#### **Limitations of an in-store interview approach**

The main limitation of this approach is that it is **time consuming** to set up and run and, because interviewers are used, it is likely to be **more expensive** than the postal method (although it is likely to be less expensive than recruiting and maintaining a full-scale panel). It is likely that the approach compared to the postal method will achieve top of mind answers rather than more considered responses.

In addition, given the nature of the data collection approach, interview length must be kept to five to ten minutes. This may **limit the amount of data** that can be collected. The questionnaire will have to focus on the key issues related to customer satisfaction. A further limitation, threatening the external validity of the data, is that **response rates may be low**.

#### **Recommendation and rationale or justification**

In theory, any of the approaches described could be recommended and the answer would be valid if the approach described is **suitable** – would gather the type of data needed by the client – and if **reasons are given** as to why it is most suitable for the context. Since the client is a small supermarket it is unlikely that they would have the budget to set up and maintain a panel. In addition, the client's interest is on customer satisfaction and it may not be necessary to set up a full-scale longitudinal study to gather that information – it is unlikely to be cost effective.

The choice therefore rests with the two repeated cross-sectional approaches: **postal** or **in store**. Again, given that the client is a small supermarket, it is unlikely that it will have the resources to have an up-to-date database of its customers, including their address details. Without such a robust and reliable sampling frame, it is unlikely that this approach is the most suitable for the client at this time.

This leaves us with the in-store interviews. Selecting an appropriate sample for this approach does not rely on existing information sources. Furthermore, the method of data collection – face to face – is perhaps best suited to gathering the sort of information the client needs, and the length of interview is also suitable. This approach is also likely to be the most cost effective for the client, and the one most suitable for their budget. Taking the repeated cross-sectional approach rather than the longitudinal approach is likely to be more manageable and more cost effective for this client. Using face-to-face interviews rather than postal is likely to lead to better quality data (higher in both external validity, internal validity and reliability).

To ensure that this is the case, interviewers must be **clearly briefed** about the sampling process and in the use of the questionnaire; posters alerting customers that the research is taking place and the use of incentives may help to increase the response rate.

## 10 Qualitative methods of data collection (10/05)

**Tutorial note.** This is a two-part question, with each part carrying equal marks.

In part (a) to pass you must identify at least three qualitative research techniques suitable for gathering the sort of information the newspaper client wants and you must outline the strengths and limitations of each technique you identify.

How you answer this question will depend on how you interpret the word 'technique'. For example, if you take it to mean a technique such as projective techniques, then you could discuss three different types of projective techniques; if, on the other hand, you take it to mean qualitative methods of data collection in the broader sense, then you could discuss group discussions, in-depth interviews or variations on these. Both of these interpretations and therefore both approaches are acceptable. In part (b) you must choose one of the techniques you described in your part (a) answer and show how you would set up and execute this technique to make sure that it produces the sort of information the client needs. The aim of this question is to test your ability to apply what you know about a technique to a given research situation and to test your practical understanding of how to use the technique effectively.

In preparing your answer to part (b) of the question, think about the key stages in the research process – from briefing to conduct of fieldwork – and what you need to do at each stage to ensure a quality outcome.

(a) **Client information needs:** information on attitudes towards a national newspaper.

**Techniques suitable for data collection on attitudes include the following:**

- Individual in-depth interviews
- Group discussions (face to face)
- Online group discussions
- Workshops (or other extended sessions)
- Projective or enabling techniques or other specific questioning/data gathering techniques

**Strengths and limitations of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs)**

The main **strengths** of IDIs in gathering data on attitudes are that they allow the researcher to explore the attitudes of an individual **at length** and **in depth**. In addition, they allow you to do this without the views of the respondent being **influenced** by what members of a group might say, or what the person thinks that group members might think of them if they were to report a particular attitude. In other words, a strength of an IDI is that it allows you to get **beyond the socially acceptable view**.

Another strength of IDIs is that they can be used to follow a person **over time**, to understand how their views or attitudes might change. For example, if the newspaper were to introduce a new format, IDIs would be a very useful way of charting a reader's attitude and view of it.

A further strength is that there is some **flexibility** in where the interview is held. Since the research is about newspapers and a person's newsgathering activities, a suitable place to conduct the interview may be the home or workplace of the respondent.

Another strength of this approach is that the interview can be **tape-recorded**, allowing the researcher scope to review it at a later date and thus increasing the **quality** of the data analysis.

The main **limitations** of IDIs are that they are **expensive** and **time consuming** to recruit and conduct. Furthermore, they do not allow much scope for generating discussion and so may not be suitable for exploring in **detail** attitudes to newspapers and reading newspapers.