

Selecting Which Basic Research Methods to Use

Overall Goal in Selecting Methods

The overall goal in selecting basic business research method(s) is to get the most useful information to key decision makers in the most cost-effective and realistic fashion. Consider the following questions:

1. What information is needed to make current decisions about a product or program?
2. Of this information, how much can be collected and analyzed in a low-cost and practical manner, e.g., using questionnaires, surveys and checklists?
3. How accurate will the information be (reference the above table for disadvantages of methods)?
4. Will the methods get all of the needed information?
5. What additional methods should and could be used if additional information is needed?
6. Will the information appear as credible to decision makers, e.g., to bankers, funders or top management?
7. Will the nature of the audience conform to the methods, e.g., will they fill out questionnaires carefully, engage in interviews or focus groups, let you examine their documentations, etc.?
8. Who can administer the methods now or is training required?
9. How can the information be analyzed?

Note that, ideally, the researcher uses a combination of methods, for example, a questionnaire to quickly collect a great deal of information from a lot of people, and then interviews to get more in-depth information from certain respondents to the questionnaires. Perhaps case studies could then be used for more in-depth analysis of unique and notable cases, e.g., those who benefited or not from the program, those who quit the program, etc.

Four Levels of Research Results

There are four levels of information that can be gathered from customers or clients, including getting their:

1. reactions and feelings (feelings are often poor indicators that your service made lasting impact)
2. learning (enhanced attitudes, perceptions or knowledge)
3. changes in skills (applied the learning to enhance behaviors)
4. effectiveness (improved performance because of enhanced behaviors)

Usually, the farther your research results get down the list, the more useful is your research results. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to reliably get information about effectiveness. Still, information about learning and skills is quite useful.

Related Library Links

[Advisory Information for Businesses \(on-line lists of lists of resources\)](#)

[Consultant \(Getting and Using, in case a researcher is hired\)](#)

[Creativity and Innovation](#)

[Decision Making](#)

[Ethics \(guidelines to ensure ethical behavior\)](#)

[Marketing \(research, pricing, competitor analysis, etc.\)](#)

[Performance Management \(measures for improvement of organizations, employees, etc.\)](#)

[Planning \(various types of planning\)](#)

[Problem Solving](#)

[Research Methods \(planning research, various methods, analyzing results, giving reports, etc.\)](#)

[Searching On-Line \(tips for conducting on-line searches on the Web\)](#)

What is qualitative research?

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience's range of behavior and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues. It uses in-depth studies of small groups of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive.

Qualitative research methods originated in the social and behavioral sciences: sociology, anthropology and psychology. Today, qualitative methods in the field of marketing research include in-depth interviews with individuals, group discussions (from two to ten participants is typical); diary and journal exercises; and in-context observations. Sessions may be conducted in person, by telephone, via videoconferencing and via the Internet.

Why qualitative research works

Several unique aspects of qualitative research contribute to rich, insightful results: Synergy among respondents, as they build on each other's comments and ideas. The dynamic nature of the interview or group discussion process, which engages respondents more actively than is possible in more structured survey.

The opportunity to probe ("Help me understand why you feel that way") enabling the researcher to reach beyond initial responses and rationales.

The opportunity to observe, record and interpret non-verbal communication (i.e., body language, voice intonation) as part of a respondent's feedback, which is valuable during interviews or discussions, and during analysis.

The opportunity to engage respondents in "play" such as projective techniques and exercises, overcoming the self-consciousness that can inhibit spontaneous reactions and comments.

Careers in qualitative research

- How can I enter the qualitative research profession?
- The diverse backgrounds of qualitative consultants testify to the fact that many different paths can lead to qualitative research:
- An academic degree and/or practical experience in marketing, psychology, one of the social sciences, or other relevant discipline
- Research experience gained in a corporate context, on either the "client side" or the research "supplier side"
- Research experience gained while at an advertising agency or other marketing communications firm
- Apprenticeship with an independent moderator
- Formal training to acquire practical skills
- Some qualitative consultants work independently while others belong to firms or organizations dedicated to research.

Professional competencies

The *Professional Competencies for Qualitative Research Professionals* were introduced by the QRCA Professionalism Committee in 2003 to:

identify skills, traits and practices that constitute the professional conduct of QRCs
 provide QRCs with a guideline for self-evaluation and continued growth
 create a framework for QRC education in an ever-expanding and diversifying global society
 help clients identify the quality they seek in a QRC, and to evaluate the performance they receive

ABOUT MARKETING AND OPINION RESEARCH

Opinion and marketing research is the function which links the consumer, customer, and public to the business which offers products or services through information -- information used to identify and define the consumer market: opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate actions; monitor performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process.

Opinion and marketing research specifies the information required to address these issues; designs the method of collecting information; manages and implements the data collection process; analyzes the results; and communicates the findings, recommendations and their implications.

People like you are the lifeblood of the research industry
 Researchers are truly concerned about maintaining goodwill with the public. Our priority includes maintaining respondent confidentiality, accurately reporting your opinions, and respecting your privacy, your time, and your right to decline.

Researchers' Commitment to Maintaining Respondent Confidentiality

Information obtained through opinion and marketing research is provided to clients in aggregate without being individually identifiable. Researchers should never divulge your identity or individual answers unless you specifically give the researcher permission to do so.

Researchers' Commitment to Accurately Reporting Your Opinions

Most research companies are members of one or more professional associations established for the research industry. These associations have developed Codes of Ethics, Standards and Best Practices to insure that the data collected are accurate and representative. Very specific scientific procedures and processes are used to collect the highest quality data with the least amount of intrusion on the consumer. Researcher's clients also depend on accurate data to make the best possible decisions on the products, services and policies that affect you.

Researcher's Commitment to Privacy

The goal of the research industry is to strike a balance between the need for information to improve people's lives and protecting the privacy of the people who participate in research. Hence, interviewers should always identify themselves and state the reason for their call at the beginning of each survey. Research interviewers should be courteous and respect your time by calling back at a more convenient time if necessary. They should answer your questions as completely as possible and politely honor your decision not to participate in a particular research study if you so choose.

Who Sponsors Research Studies?

Research clients are typically large national companies, government agencies, and institutions who know that listening carefully to consumers is important to their success. In many instances, interviewers cannot divulge the client sponsoring these studies for several reasons. For example, researchers often help clients with new products that must remain confidential until these new brands are commercially introduced to the public. Also, knowing who sponsored the survey might bias your answers to our questions. Interviewers only reveal the sponsors of studies when they are instructed to do so.