UNIT 2: RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND DESIGN

1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND DESIGN

What is a Research Proposal?

A research proposal is a detailed plan that outlines what research will be conducted, how it will be done, why it's important, and what resources are needed. Think of it as a blueprint for a building - it shows exactly what will be constructed, how, and with what materials.

What is Research Design?

Research design is the overall strategy and framework for conducting research. It's like choosing the right tool for a job - you wouldn't use a hammer to fix a computer, and you wouldn't use a focus group to measure market size.

2. BASIC AND APPLIED RESEARCH

BASIC RESEARCH (PURE RESEARCH)

Research conducted to increase fundamental knowledge and understanding without immediate commercial application.

- Focuses on theory building
- Long-term orientation
- Academic in nature
- Results may not have immediate practical use
- Contributes to scientific knowledge

1. Consumer Psychology Research:

Study: "How do colors affect emotional responses to advertisements?"

Purpose: Understanding the fundamental relationship between color and emotion

Practical Application: May later inform advertising design, but immediate goal is knowledge

2. Cultural Anthropology Research:

Study: "How do joint family structures influence purchase decisions in India?"

Purpose: Understanding cultural dynamics and family behavior

Practical Application: Could inform marketing strategies but primary goal is cultural understanding

3. Cognitive Science Research:

Study: "How does the human brain process brand information?"

Purpose: Understanding brain function and information processing

Practical Application: May influence neuromarketing but focuses on scientific understanding

APPLIED RESEARCH (PRACTICAL RESEARCH)

Research conducted to solve specific, immediate problems or to make decisions in real-world situations.

- Problem-solving oriented
- Short-term focus
- Commercial/business applications
- Results directly usable
- Action-oriented outcomes

1. Product Development Research:

Study: "Which flavor of potato chips will be most popular among teenagers in Mumbai?"

Conducted by: Lay's (PepsiCo India)

Purpose: Deciding which product variant to launch

Immediate Use: Product development and marketing decisions

2. Pricing Research:

Study: "What is the optimal price for Jio's new data plan to maximize adoption?"

Conducted by: Reliance Jio market research team

Purpose: Setting competitive pricing strategy

Immediate Use: Pricing decisions and revenue projections

3. Advertising Effectiveness Research:

Study: "Which advertisement creative generates higher brand recall for Amul butter?"

Conducted by: Amul's advertising agency

Purpose: Selecting the most effective advertisement

Immediate Use: Media planning and creative decisions

Aspect	Basic Research	Applied Research
Purpose	Gain knowledge and understanding	Solve specific problems
Timeline	Long-term (years)	Short-term (weeks/months)
Focus	Theory and concepts	Practical applications
Funding	Universities, government grants	Companies, organizations
Example	"How do people form brand attachments?"	"Should we launch this new product?"

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD RESEARCH

A. Systematic and Logical:

Research follows a structured, step-by-step approach with clear reasoning.

Poor Research: Randomly asking people about car preferences without clear methodology

Good Research: Systematic sampling of target demographics with standardized questionnaire for car preference study

B. Empirical and Objective:

Based on observable evidence rather than opinions or assumptions.

Poor Research: "We think customers prefer our product because it's better"

Good Research: "Customer satisfaction survey shows 78% prefer our product due to quality (45%) and price (33%)"

C. Valid and Reliable:

Research measures what it claims to measure (validity) and produces consistent results (reliability).

Invalid Research: Using income questions to measure brand loyalty

Valid Research: Using purchase behavior and brand switching patterns to measure loyalty

Unreliable Research: Getting different results each time the same study is conducted

Reliable Research: Consistent findings across multiple studies using same methodology

D. Generalizable:

Results can be applied beyond the specific study sample to broader populations.

Poor Generalizability: Studying only Mumbai college students and claiming results apply to all Indian youth

Good Generalizability: Studying college students across 6 major Indian cities with diverse backgrounds

E. Relevant and Significant:

Research addresses important questions and provides meaningful insights.

Irrelevant Research: Studying newspaper reading habits when focusing on digital marketing strategy

Relevant Research: Studying social media usage patterns for digital marketing decisions

F. Ethical:

Research protects participant privacy and follows ethical guidelines.

Unethical: Recording customer conversations without consent

Ethical: Obtaining clear consent before collecting personal information

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research objectives are specific, measurable goals that define what the research aims to achieve. They act as a roadmap, guiding every aspect of the research process.

Types of Research Objectives

A. Exploratory Objectives: To explore and understand a problem or opportunity when little is known about it.

For example if there is a company wants to enter a new market:

Objective: "To explore the potential opportunities and challenges for Starbucks entering tier-2 Indian cities"

Research Questions: What are the coffee consumption habits? Who are the competitors? What are local preferences?

B. Descriptive Objectives: To describe characteristics, behaviors, or phenomena in detail.

For example market size is a characteristic of a market so the objective will be:

Objective: "To determine the size and growth rate of the Indian organic food market"

Measurable Outcomes: Market value in rupees, annual growth rate, regional distribution

Another example can be regarding Customer Profiling:

Objective: "To profile the demographic and psychographic characteristics of Zomato Gold subscribers"

Measurable Outcomes: Age, income, lifestyle, usage frequency, satisfaction levels

C. Causal Objectives: To establish cause-and-effect relationships between variables.

For example in order to determine the pricing impact objective can be set as:

Objective: "To determine the effect of price reduction on sales volume for Britannia biscuits"

Causal Relationship: Price change (cause) → Sales volume (effect)

5. TYPES OF RESEARCH

CLASSIFICATION BY PURPOSE

A. Exploratory Research:

It is used when the problem is not clearly defined or when you need preliminary insights.

Characteristics:

- Flexible and informal
- Small sample sizes
- Qualitative methods preferred
- Generates hypotheses
- Provides direction for further research

Methods:

- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews
- Literature review
- Expert interviews
- Observation studies

For example consider this situation: Patanjali considering entry into fitness equipment

Research: Focus groups with fitness enthusiasts to understand needs, preferences, and brand perceptions

Outcome: Insights to guide product development and positioning

B. Descriptive Research:

It is used when you need to describe characteristics of markets, consumers, or phenomena.

Characteristics:

- Structured and formal
- Large sample sizes
- Quantitative methods
- Tests specific hypotheses
- Provides statistical data

Methods:

- Surveys
- Observational studies
- Secondary data analysis
- Cross-sectional studies
- Longitudinal studies

For example consider this situation: Measuring the size of the Indian smartphone market

Research: Large-scale survey across urban and rural areas measuring ownership, usage, and purchase intentions

Outcome: Market size estimation and growth projections

C. Causal Research:

It is used when you need to understand cause-and-effect relationships.

Characteristics:

- Highly structured
- Controlled conditions
- Experimental design
- Tests cause-effect hypotheses
- Statistical analysis of relationships

Methods:

- Laboratory experiments
- Field experiments
- Test markets
- A/B testing
- Controlled trials

For example consider this situation: Testing optimal price for new Maggi variant

Research: Field experiment in different cities with different price points

Outcome: Understanding price-demand relationship

CLASSIFICATION BY APPROACH

A. Quantitative Research:

Numbers, statistics, and measurable data

Examples:

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Market size studies
- Brand tracking studies
- Price sensitivity analysis

B. Qualitative Research:

Understanding attitudes, motivations, and behaviors

Examples:

- Focus group discussions
- In-depth interviews
- Ethnographic studies
- Case studies

C. Mixed Methods Research:

Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches

Example:

- Phase 1: Qualitative focus groups to understand factors influencing car purchase decisions
- Phase 2: Quantitative survey to measure importance of each factor across larger population

6. BENEFITS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Ensures Research Objectives are met

Proper design aligns methodology with objectives, ensuring research answers the right questions.

B. Maximizes Efficiency and Effectiveness

Good design optimizes resource utilization and ensures reliable results.

C. Minimizes Errors and Bias

Structured design reduces various types of research errors.

Types of Errors Prevented:

- Sampling Error: Ensuring representative samples
- Non-response Error: Designing strategies to maximize response rates
- Measurement Error: Using validated scales and instruments
- Coverage Error: Defining target population clearly

D. Facilitates Replication and Validation

Well-designed research can be replicated to validate findings.

E. Enables Generalization

Proper design allows findings to be applied beyond the study sample.

F. Cost and Time Optimization

Good design prevents costly mistakes and reduces research time.

7. RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A research proposal is a formal document that outlines a planned research project. It serves as a contract between researcher and client, detailing what will be done, how, when, and at what cost.

Purpose of Research Proposal

- Communication Tool: Clearly communicates research plans to stakeholders
- Planning Document: Forces systematic thinking about research approach
- Evaluation Basis: Allows comparison of different research approaches
- Budget Justification: Explains resource requirements and costs
- Timeline Guide: Establishes project milestones and deadlines
- Quality Assurance: Ensures methodological rigor before execution

Types of Research Proposals

Internal Proposals:

An internal proposal is a document created within a company by an internal research team proposing study to management within same organization to suggest changes, improvements, or new projects

Example: Flipkart's internal research team proposing customer retention study to senior management due to declining repeat purchase rates observed in quarterly reports The proposal's purpose is to secure management approval and budget for comprehensive retention analysis. The audience will include VP Marketing, Head of Customer Experience, CFO.

External Proposals:

An external proposal is written for an audience outside the organization, typically to sell a service or product to a client or to secure partnerships and funding. It refers to a research agency proposing services to client organization.

Example: Nielsen (Data Analytics Company) proposing retail measurement study to Hindustan Unilever. For this, HUL needs market share tracking for new detergent launch. The purpose of this proposal is to secure a business contract from client (HUL). The audience will include HUL brand managers, procurement team, research heads.

Solicited Proposals:

Proposals requested by clients through formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The client defines research requirements and multiple agencies compete for securing the contract. A specific format and criteria provided by the client and formal evaluation process is undertaken. The research must meet detailed specifications given by the client.

Example: Tata Motors issues RFP for customer satisfaction study

RFP Content: Study objectives, target audience, geographic scope, timeline, budget range

Agencies Respond: Multiple research agencies submit competitive proposals

Selection Process: Proposals evaluated on methodology, experience, cost, and timeline

Typical RFP Process:

- RFP Release: Client publishes detailed requirements
- Agency Registration: Interested agencies register to participate
- Clarification Round: Agencies ask questions about requirements
- Proposal Submission: Agencies submit detailed proposals
- Evaluation: Client evaluates proposals using predefined criteria
- Presentation: Shortlisted agencies present their approach
- Selection: Client selects winning proposal

Unsolicited Proposals:

Proposals initiated by research agencies or internal teams without specific client request. In this case, a researcher identifies an opportunity and approaches a client with the proposal. This approach is more proactive hence it has more flexibility. However the researcher need to convince client of importance of the research. There is a higher risk of rejection.

Example: Market research agency approaching Zomato with proposal for voice ordering study

Opportunity Identified: Growing trend of voice-activated technology

Proactive Approach: Agency develops proposal without client request

Value Proposition: Highlighting potential competitive advantage of voice ordering feature

Successful Unsolicited Proposal Elements:

- Problem Identification: Clear articulation of business challenge
- Opportunity Highlighting: Demonstrating potential value
- Credibility Building: Showcasing relevant experience
- Solution Presentation: Specific research approach
- ROI Demonstration: Expected return on research investment

8. RESEARCH PROPOSAL STRUCTURE

I. Executive Summary:

Concise overview of entire proposal (typically 1-2 pages)**.** It will include:

- Research objectives
- Key methodology

- Expected outcomes
- Timeline and budget
- Value proposition

II. Background and Problem Statement:

Establishes context and justifies need for research. It will include:

- Current business situation
- Specific problem or opportunity
- Information gaps
- Consequences of not conducting research

III. Research Objectives:

Clearly states what research aims to achieve. It will include:

- Primary objectives
- Secondary objectives
- Specific research questions
- Expected outcomes

IV. Literature Review (if applicable):

Demonstrates understanding of existing knowledge. It will include:

- Relevant previous studies
- Industry benchmarks
- Theoretical frameworks
- Research gaps

V. Research Methodology:

Detailed explanation of research approach. It will include:

- Research design (exploratory/descriptive/causal)
- Data collection methods
- Sampling strategy
- Sample size calculation
- Data analysis approach

VI. Sample Design:

Explains target population and sampling approach. It will include:

- Target population definition
- Sampling frame
- Sampling method
- Sample size justification
- Sample distribution

VII. Data Collection Plan:

Describes how data will be gathered. . It will include:

- Data collection methods
- Survey instruments
- Field work plan
- Quality control measures
- Technology and tools

VIII. Data Analysis Plan:

Explains how data will be analyzed. It will include:

- Statistical techniques
- Analysis software
- Reporting approach
- Visualization methods

IX. Timeline and Milestones:

Shows project schedule and key deliverables. It will include:

- Project phases
- Key milestones
- Timeline chart
- Dependencies

X. Budget and Resources:

Details project costs and resource requirements. It will include:

- Detailed cost breakdown
- Resource allocation
- Payment schedule
- Cost justification

XI. Expected Outcomes and Deliverables:

Describes what client will receive. It will include:

- Research deliverables
- Report format
- Presentation format
- Additional materials

XII. Research Team and Credentials:

Establishes credibility and expertise. It will include:

- Team member profiles
- Relevant experience
- Similar project examples
- Company credentials

XIII. Terms and Conditions:

Defines project parameters and responsibilities. It will include:

- Scope limitations
- Client responsibilities
- Data confidentiality
- Intellectual property rights
- Payment terms

9. EVALUATING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Evaluation Criteria

A. Technical Soundness

- Methodology appropriateness
- Sample design adequacy
- Analysis plan sophistication
- Quality control measures

B. Relevance and Alignment

- Alignment with business objectives
- Practical applicability
- Actionability of expected insights
- Strategic relevance

C. Feasibility and Practicality

- Resource requirements
- Timeline realism
- Access to target population
- Implementation challenges

D. Cost-Effectiveness

- Value for money
- Budget alignment
- Cost breakdown transparency
- ROI potential

E. Credibility and Experience

- Team expertise
- Relevant experience
- Past performance
- Industry knowledge

EVALUATION PROCESS

Step 1: Initial Screening

- Compliance with RFP requirements
- Basic qualification criteria

- Timeline and budget alignment

Step 2: Technical Evaluation

- Methodology assessment
- Sample design review
- Analysis plan evaluation
- Quality measures review

Step 3: Commercial Evaluation

- Cost analysis
- Value assessment
- Budget fit evaluation
- Payment terms review

Step 4: Presentation and Discussion

- Proposal presentation by agencies
- Clarification questions
- Methodology discussion
- Team interaction

Step 5: Final Selection

- Scoring based on evaluation criteria
- Reference checks
- Final negotiations
- Contract award

Common Proposal Weaknesses to Avoid

1. Vague Objectives: Unclear or immeasurable research goals
2. Methodology Mismatch: Wrong methods for research objectives
3. Inadequate Sampling: Poor sample design or insufficient size
4. Unrealistic Timeline: Insufficient time for quality execution
5. Incomplete Budget: Hidden costs or unclear breakdown
6. Generic Approach: One-size-fits-all methodology
7. Limited Analysis Plan: Superficial data analysis approach

8. Poor Presentation: Unclear writing or unprofessional format