



UNIVERSITY OF  
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# Overview of Qualitative Research

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## Understanding User Needs

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# Sales data? Survey? Usage statistics?

**Quantitative research helps to understand...**

- Overall trends
- Existing product or service
- Issues you can anticipate

**Quantitative research is less useful for...**

- Detailed understanding
- New possibilities
- Unanticipated issues

**Detailed understanding: How do users input a destination?**

**New feature: Quizzes to help people memorize routes?**

**Unanticipated issue: Might families want “most fun” route?**



# Qualitative Research

## Characterized by...

- *Non-numerical data*
- *Direct interaction with people and contexts*
- *Richness and detail*

## Strengths of qualitative research

- *In-depth*
- *Broad range*
- *Hypothesis generation*
- *Causal explanations*

# Qualitative Research Methodologies

## Data gathering:

- *Interviews*
- *Field observations*
- *Participant observations*
- *Focus groups*
- *Etc.*

## Data analysis:

- *Coding*
- *Content analysis*
- *Thematic analysis*
- *Recursive abstraction*

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**Focus in  
this course**

} via “affinity walls”

# Qualitative Research Caveats

**Qualitative research is not the best for questions such as...**

- *What proportion of our users do X?*
- *Would usage increase if we did Y and instead of Z?*
- *Does program V cause effect W?*

**Weaknesses of qualitative research:**

- ~~*Providing numerical data or analysis*~~
- ~~*Confirming hunches, guesses, intuitions*~~
- ~~*Making close comparisons*~~





**Qualitative research is useful in a wide range of contexts beyond user needs assessments.**