

## Unit 3: Research Methods

Welcome to Week 3 where you will be introduced to research methods.

Before going into the research methods, it is beneficial to understand **Research Design**. Research design refers to having a plan about what you plan to do in order to answer your research question (Saunders et al., 2012). Hence, you will need to be sure of the research strategies and methods you will employ for data collection and your analysis.

The 2 types of research design are:

**Exploratory Research:** where, as the name suggests, specific aspects of a research area are explored. The problem is not clearly defined, so there cannot be a conclusive result from the research. Instead, there will be a better understanding of the problem or situation. An example of Exploratory Research is where a company wants to carry out an investigation into the effectiveness of Customer Relationship Management in mobile marketing.

**Conclusive Research:** being the opposite of exploratory research, the focus is more specific – to verify insights and aid in selecting a course of action (BRM, n.d.). One key category of this type of research design is **Descriptive Research**, where the aim is to describe elements or causes in the specified research area. An example of Descriptive Research is a focus on social media where you undertake a critical analysis of this tool as a marketing strategy.

Research Methods actually refers to the “systematic tools used to find, collect, analyse and interpret information” (Sage, 2021). So, understanding which research method to adopt for your project is essential as it will determine the type of data you collect and analyse, in order to answer your research question. The three main types of Research methods are Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Research.

**Qualitative Research:** refers to a research method used to gather data about experiences, behaviours and emotions from a predetermined set of respondents. This type of research is useful in exploring how or why something has occurred and interpreting the events and outcomes. Inductive approaches are associated with qualitative research.

The tools and techniques used to gather qualitative research data are:

- Focus groups (Covered in unit 7).
- Case studies (Covered in unit 7).
- Observations (Covered in unit 7).
- Surveys/polls (Covered in unit 8).
- Interviews (Covered in unit 8).

**Quantitative Research:** refers to a research method used to gather numerical data to which statistical analysis can be applied. It focuses on discovering patterns and/or relationships and can therefore be used to make generalisations. So, the main questions being explored using this method are “how much?”, “how many?” and “to what extent?”. Deductive approaches are associated with quantitative research.

The tools and techniques used to gather quantitative research data are:

- Experiments (including Observations).
- Case studies.
- Surveys/polls.

**Mixed Methods Research:** integrates both qualitative and quantitative research to provide a holistic approach to a research project.

Conducting research based on any research method involves 2 methods for data collection:

- Primary research, where information is gathered directly from the subject using.
- Secondary research, where data is gathered from previously published primary research, like published case studies and articles, magazines, newspapers, books, etc.

The references below, as well as this week’s reading, explore the advantages and disadvantages of using the various research methods.

*In this unit we shall:*

- Introduce the concept of exploratory and descriptive research designs.
- Introduce 3 research methods – quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research - as well as primary and secondary research methods, and the data collection methods associated with each one.

*On completion of this unit you will be able to:*

- Understand the different research methods.
- Know which data collection methods are related to each method of research.
- Have some idea which of these would be suited to your area of research.

## **Reflection:**

Research methods are the approaches, procedures, or tools used to collect data or proof for assessment so that new information can be found, or a topic can be better understood.

There are different ways to do research, and each one uses a different set of tools to gather information.

### **1. Quantitative Research methods:**

As its label implies, quantitative research is predicated on the quantification of some phenomenon. Its primary goal is the collection and analysis of numerical data, and it can be used for the purposes of locating averages, identifying patterns, and developing forecasts. Some examples of quantitative research methods are (Rangaiah, 2021):

- **Experiment Research** - This technique is used to determine the impact of a given independent variable on a dependent variable by controlling or managing that variable.
- **Survey** - This technique is used to determine the impact of a given independent variable on a dependent variable by controlling or managing that variable.
- **(Systematic) observation** - Using this strategy, you can keep an eye on anything that happens in the wild.
- **Secondary research:** The focus of this study is on recycling information gathered for other projects, such as a nationwide survey (Galauner, 2021).

### **2. Qualitative research methods:**

Data about people's actual experiences, feelings, and actions, as well as the significance that people ascribe to those things, are gathered through qualitative research. It helps scholars better comprehend difficult ideas, social dynamics, or cultural occurrences. Investigating what happened and why, providing context for acts, and summarizing those actions are all aided by this sort of study (University of Newcastle Library, 2019).

Below are the types of qualitative research methods:

- **Observations:** Observations, conversations, and other experiences are meticulously documented in this approach.
- **Interviews:** Inquiring about something or someone directly through one-on-one dialogue.
- **Focus groups:** To do this, a group of people will need to ask questions and talk about the answers they found.
- **Surveys:** Unlike quantitative research surveys, these surveys' questionnaires feature lengthy open-ended questions that necessitate detailed responses.
- **Secondary research:** Collecting the information that already exists, including photos, documents, and videos. This can be done using an In-Depth Interview, research into a Case Study, or examination of existing content.

### 3. **Mixed Methods Research**

Methods that Combine Approaches Quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation are combined in this study. It offers a comprehensive method by integrating statistical data with additional, more nuanced information. Triangulation, or the checking of data from multiple sources, is another benefit of using mixed methods.

- **Open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires:** Incorporating aspects of both types of questionnaires into your data collection is what this strategy entails. Participants have the option of using both pre-written responses and free-form writing to complete the survey. By combining the two, you can learn more about your participants and draw more accurate conclusions. Nonetheless, you should give some thought to the methodology you'll use to analyse the data and draw conclusions.

### **SELECTING THE BEST RESEARCH METHOD**

This is highly dependent on the focus of your study. Dawson (2019) suggests asking yourself the following questions to help you choose the most appropriate research approach for your work:

- Are you good with numbers and mathematics?
- Would you be interested in conducting interviews with human subjects?
- Would you enjoy creating a questionnaire for participants to complete?
- Do you prefer written communication or face-to-face interaction?

### **References**

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