**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, likes 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.

#### References

British Research Methodology (BRM) (n.d.) Research Design.

Sage (2021) Sage Research Methods: Methods Map.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) Research Methods for Business Students 6th ed. Pearson Education Limited.

QuestionPro (2021). What is research?