DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

Descriptive research is defined as a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. This methodology focuses more on the "what" of the research subject rather than the "why" of the research subject.

In other words, descriptive research primarily focuses on describing the nature of a demographic segment, without focusing on "why" a certain phenomenon occurs. In other words, it "describes" the subject of the research, without covering "why" it happens.

For example, an apparel brand that wants to understand the fashion purchasing trends among New York buyers will conduct a demographic survey of this region, gather population data and then conduct descriptive research on this demographic segment. The research will then uncover details on "what is the purchasing pattern of New York buyers", but not cover any investigative details on "why" the pattern exists. Because of the apparel brand trying to break into this market, understanding the nature of their market is the objective of the study.

Descriptive Research includes surveys and fact-finding enquiries of different kinds. It tries to discover answers to the questions who, what, when and sometimes how. Here the researcher attempts to describe or define a subject, often by creating a profile of a group of problems, people, or events. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present.

Some distinctive **characteristics of descriptive research** are:

1) **Quantitative research:** Descriptive research is a quantitative research method that attempts to collect quantifiable information to be used for statistical analysis of the population sample. It is a popular market research tool that allows to collect and describe the nature of the demographic segment.

2) **Uncontrolled variables:** In descriptive research, none of the variables are influenced in any way. This uses observational methods to conduct the research. Hence, the nature of the variables or their behavior is not in the hands of the researcher.

3) **Cross-sectional studies:** Descriptive research is generally a cross-sectional study where different sections belonging to the same group are studied.

4) **Basis for further research:** The data collected and analyzed from descriptive research can then be further researched using different research techniques. The data also can help point towards the types of research methods are to be used for the subsequent research.

TYPES OF EXPLORATORY RESEARCH DESIGN

1) Descriptive-survey

This type is suitable wherever the subjects vary among themselves and one is interested to know the extent to which different conditions and situations are obtained among these subjects. The word SURVEY signifies the gathering of data regarding present conditions. A survey is useful in: (1) providing the value of facts, and (2) focusing attention on the most important things to be reported. In this type of survey, it is necessary to determine the psychological and social aspects of research by way of application or implementation of evidence to recognize between facts and influence.

For example: A researcher wants to determine the Job-Related Problems and Job-Performance of Staff Nurses in Private and Government Hospitals. He uses a questionnaire as his research instrument and each item in the questionnaire for job-related problems may be rated according to 4 levels to be chosen by the subjects or respondents namely: 4- very serious problem, 3 – serious problem, 2 –fairly serious problem, and 1- not a problem at all. From the data gathered, the researcher tabulates, analyses, and interprets data. Then he proves the fact gathered area of value to the researcher in particular and to the subjects in general. He should then focus his attention to the most serious job-related problems met by the staff nurses.

2) Descriptive-normative survey

Good and Scates (1972) stressed that "The term NORMATIVE is sometimes used because surveys are frequently made to ascertain the normal or typical condition for practice, or to compare local test results with a state or national norm." In the descriptive-normative surveys, the results/findings of the study should be compared with the norm.

For example: A researcher wishes to conduct a study on the English achievement of fourth year secondary students at the state colleges and universities. An achievement test is the instrument used to gather the data. The results of the test are then compared with the regional norm, if the achievement of the students is one standard deviation above (+1SD) the mean, this means their achievement is very satisfactory; if within the mean, satisfactory; and one standard deviation below (-1SD) the mean, unsatisfactory and they need improvement.

3) Descriptive-status:

This approach to problem solving seeks to answer questions to real facts relating to existing conditions. This is a technique of quantitative description which determines the prevailing

conditions in a group of cases chosen for study. Several studies stress the current conditions with the assumption that things will change. They cover many traits or characteristics of the group.

For example: A researcher wishes to conduct a study on the socio-economic status and performances of instructors and professors of state universities and colleges. He uses a questionnaire as instrument to gather data and requests the subjects of the study to answer it. Based on the responses, the researcher can determine the socio-economic status and performance of SUC's universities and professors whether the higher the socio- economic status is, the higher the performance will be; or the lower the socio-economic status is, the lower the performance will be.

4) Descriptive-Analysis

This method determines or describes the nature of an object by separating it into its parts. Its purpose is to discover the nature of things. The researcher should determine the composition, structure, sub-structure that occurs as units with the larger structure.

For example: researcher wishes to conduct a study on the job analysis of personnel in government and private hospitals. He devises a questionnaire to analyze the job of the subjects of similar positions, functions and responsibilities and with the same salary.

5) Descriptive Classification

This method is employed in natural sciences subjects. The specimens collected are classified from phylum to species.

To illustrate: An investigator wishes to conduct a taxonomic study of sea urchins. He collects them from different research stations and then identifies and classifies them according to classes and species.

6) Descriptive-Evaluative

This design is to appraise carefully the worthiness of the current study.

To illustrate: The researcher wishes to conduct a study on evaluation of an implementation of WOW (War on Wastes) in a division. He devises a questionnaire which evaluates the implementation of WOW and requests the division and district supervisors, principals, head teachers, and teachers as subjects of the study to respond on it.

7) Descriptive-Comparative

This is a design where the researcher considers two variables (not manipulated) and establishes a formal procedure to compare and conclude that one is better than the other if significant difference exists.

For example: A researcher wishes to conduct a study on the effectiveness of teaching English using rhetoric and content-based approaches to Bachelor of Computer Technology students at the State College. He uses tests as research instrument. All things are held constant, except on the approaches of teaching used. The two variables are rhetoric and content-based approaches. The statistical tool used is the z-test. If significant difference exists it means an approach is better than the other. With no significant difference, the two approaches are almost the same.

8) Correlation survey

This is designed to determine the relationship of two variables (X and Y) whether the relationship is perfect, very high, high, marked or moderate, slight or negligible. Perfect positive correlation with a value of 1.0 seldom happens, same with perfect negative correlation. In perfect positive correlation, all the individual performances in X and Y have the same positions. If he tops in test X he also tops in test Y; if he is lowest in test X he is likely lowest in test Y. in perfect negative correlation, all the individual performances in X and Y have the opposite positions. If he tops in test X, he is lowest in test Y; if he is lowest in test X, he tops in test Y.

9) Longitudinal survey

This involves much time allotted to investigation of the same subjects of two or more points in time.

To illustrate: A researcher wishes to set up a Mathematics achievement pattern to secondary students, ages 13 to 16. He takes a group of thirteen-year-old boys and girls and records their Mathematics achievement over regular intervals (i.e. every grading period). The researcher follows up this work until they reach 16 years old. Based on the data gathered, the investigator sets up the Mathematics achievement pattern from the same group of students investigated over a long period of time.

USES OF DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive research can be used in multiple ways and for multiple reasons. Before getting into any kind of survey though, the survey goals and survey design is very important. Despite following these steps though, there is no way to know if the research outcome will be met. To understand the end objective of research goals, below are some ways organizations currently use descriptive research today:

- **Define respondent characteristics:** The aim of using close-ended questions is to draw concrete conclusions about the respondents. This could be the need to derive patterns, traits and behaviors of the respondents. It could also be to understand from a respondent, their attitude or opinion about the phenomenon in question. For example, understanding from teenagers the hours per week they spend on browsing the internet. All this information helps the organization conducting the research make informed business decisions.

- **Measure data trends:** Data trends can be measured over time with statistical capabilities provided by descriptive research. Consider if an apparel company conducts research between different demographics like age groups from 24-35 and 36-45 on a new range launch of autumn wear. If one of those groups doesn't take too well to the new launch, this provides an insight into what clothes are like and what are not and the ones that are not, are dropped.

- **Conduct comparisons:** Organizations also use descriptive research to understand how different groups respond to a certain product or service. For example, an apparel brand creates a survey asking general questions that measure the brands image. The same survey also asks demographic questions like age, income, gender, geographical location etc. This consumer research helps the organization understand what aspects of the brand appeal to the population and what aspects do not. It also helps in making product or marketing fixes or in some cases even create a new product line just to cater to a high growth potential, group.

- **Validate existing conditions:** Descriptive research is widely used to help ascertain the prevailing conditions and underlying patterns of the research object. Due to the non invasive method of research and the use of quantitative observation and some aspects of qualitative observation, each variable is observed and an in-depth analysis can be concluded. It is also used to validate any existing conditions that maybe prevalent in a population.

- **Conduct research at different times:** To ascertain if there are any similarities or differences, the research can be conducted at different periods of times. This also allows any number of variables to be evaluated. For the purpose of verification, studies on prevailing conditions can also be repeated to draw trends.