

Research made easy – mind your Ps and Qs

Helen Bakewell, Directional Insights, performs her magic and clarifies the difference between three major types of research: quantitative, qualitative and pluralistic.

Quantitative research

Quantitative research involves the use of a structured questionnaire in which the response options are pre-coded and a large number of respondents are involved. Quantitative research provides a statistical representation allowing the results to be projected to a wider population. The results are statistically relevant and can reliably determine if one concept, retailer, package, etc., is better than the alternatives.

Quantitative research is not appropriate as an initial learning phase, or as a method to develop creative ideas. Quantitative research is essentially evaluative, not generative.

Methods:

- detailed and structured questionnaire (e.g. customer exit survey)
- usually deployed through face-to-face or telephone interviews.

Generally used:

- to answer the questions, “how many”, “where from”, how much”
- to test alternative hypotheses such as which concept is more favourable
- understand the market segment sizes and profile
- understand the market conversion rate potential from non-user to user.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research was developed to explore the behaviour of the consumer that is less accessible through traditional questionnaires and closed answer responses. This research methodology was designed to explore the question of “why.”

Qualitative research involves collecting, analysing and interpreting data by observing what people say and do. It is non-numerical data that provides depth and detail through direct quotation and careful description of situations, events, interactions, and observed behaviours in order to generate patterns, themes, and ideas.

- The analysis is a complete, detailed description and answers the “why” questions.
- The research is subjective, but is able to generate ideas and concepts (lists of possibilities) with in-depth focus and knowledge of the researcher's problem.
- The research employs a wide variety of techniques to collect data, rather than a standard structured questionnaire.

Methods:

- in-depth, open-ended interviews, for example in the form of focus groups; that is, groups of six to eight respondents at a time carry on a group discussion, led by a trained moderator
- direct observation
- written documents, including such sources as open-ended written items on questionnaires or diary records.

Generally used:

- for brainstorming and testing new ideas or concepts such as a new retail plan or precinct
- to assist with quantitative research; understanding “why” some customers are non-users, and not just how many are non-users
- in situations where it is impractical to obtain reliable quantitative samples, such as sensitive topic areas.

Pluralistic research

Quantitative and qualitative research are complementary tools. Many researchers have adopted the methodology of pluralistic research that “combines the advantages of both qualitative research and quantitative research.” (Burns and Bush, 2002).

Depending on the problem definition, this may involve qualitative research initially to understand the nature of the issue and potential solutions, followed by a quantitative phase to understand the scope of the issue and level of support for the various solution options. ■

Reference: Marketing Research, A.C. Burns and R.F. Bush, 2002

NOTE: This is general information only and does not take into account any individual's or company's specific requirements. Readers are advised to seek specific advice. All copyright resides with Directional Insights Pty Ltd.