
UNIT 8 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Objectives

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

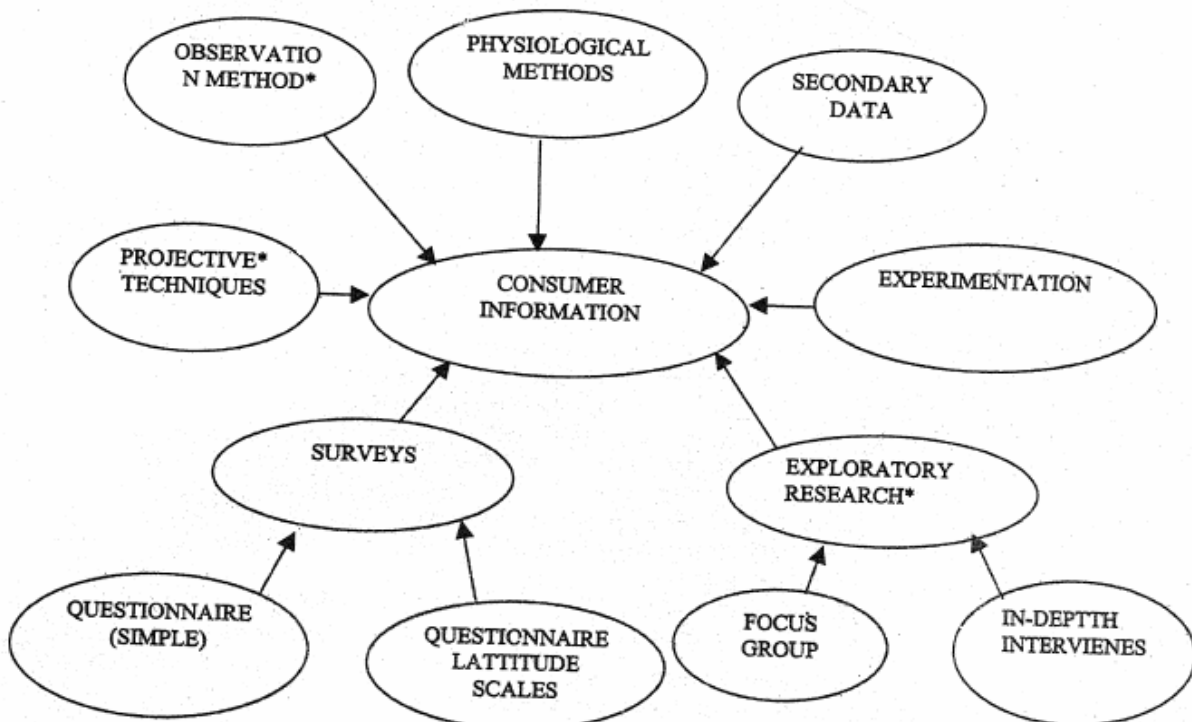
- Differentiate between qualitative research and quantitative research
- Identify possible applications of qualitative research in the area of marketing
- Understand various methods of conducting qualitative research.

Structure

- 8.1 Introduction to Qualitative Research
- 8.2 What is Qualitative Research?
- 8.3 Differences between 'Qualitative' and 'Quantitative' Research
- 8.4 Uses of Qualitative Research
- 8.5 Methods of Conducting Qualitative Research
- 8.6 Latest Techniques of Qualitative Research
- 8.7 Summary
- 8.8 Self -Assessment Questions
- 8.9 Further Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

There are various methods by which information about consumer can be obtained, and they are as follows:



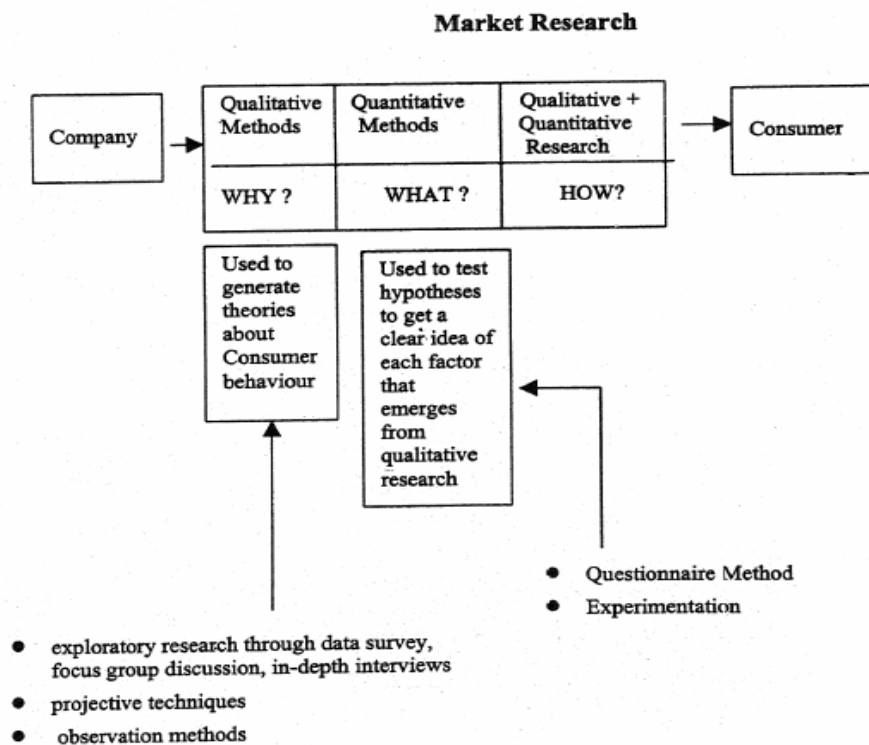


Some of the method listed out fall in the category of quantitative research and some under the method of qualitative research..(* marked)

8.2 WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- 1) Qualitative Research is exploratory or diagnostic in nature.
- 2) It involves a small number of people who are *not* sampled on any probabilistic basis.
- 3) Qualitative Research is impressionistic rather than definitive.
- 4) Qualitative Research is used to generate hypothesis for further research.
- 5) Qualitative Research is used to get better insights into consumer behaviour, and to understand underlying behaviour of the consumer in the buying process.
- 6) Through Qualitative Research, one can get subtle *clues* about products/brands/ services, that very few quantitative studies can replicate.
- 7) In Qualitative Research, *no* attempt is made to draw hard and fast conclusions about facts that emerge.
- 8) In *a* market research project, one normally uses qualitative research and quantitative research methods together.
- 9) Though Qualitative Research is useful to study consumer behaviour, any attempt to generalize the findings *for* the entire population is very risky, as the findings are based on a very small sample size.
- 10) Qualitative Research is highly subjective in nature, and one would need trained psychologists and interviewers to conduct the research work and also for analysis and interpretation of data.

The diagram below explains the importance of Qualitative and Quantitative Research methods.





8.3 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Exploratory or diagnostic in nature - used to understand behaviour and generate hypothesis	Once hypothesis has been generated, used to test out hypothesis
No calculation of sample size possible - size of sample depends upon time available to conduct research, cost, variation in the population.	Generally a probabilistic approach is used to calculate sample size, using the sample size formula.
Sample selected is such that it represents different sections of the population	Random selection of respondents to be part of research work - may or may not represent different population segments, depending upon the sampling method utilized.
It is dangerous to generalize conclusions for the entire population.	Conclusions are generalized to the universe, of which the sample purports to be representative.

8.4 USES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. It is used in 'concept generation and evaluation' e.g., whenever company wants to develop new product, or modify existing product, it would conduct Qualitative Research among target consumers to understand new emerging consumer needs, or problems which consumer has with the existing product. Therefore, every time when one goes into the market place, one would find newer models of the same product with addition/deletion of features, new and better external appearance, better finish of the product etc.
2. It is used to define the problem areas more fully - in marketing research one normally starts with qualitative research which is validated further by quantitative research.
3. It is used to formulate hypothesis for further investigation/quantification.
4. It is used to obtain large amount of data about beliefs, attitudes, etc. as data input for developing questionnaires, attitude scales, which would be used as input for multivariate analysis studies.
5. It is also used to conduct post-research study i.e., to amplify or explain same points that emerge from a major study, without having to repeat on a large scale.
6. In some areas of marketing research --- especially understanding of consumer behaviour, a more flexible approach is required, rather than a rigid approach as provided by a structured questionnaire - hence qualitative research could be used.
7. In studies of distribution channels, sales, pricing strategies quantitative approach is most suitable, whereas in concept development, product development (needs of 4 consumer), advertising research - " qualitative approach is more suitable.

Ultimately, whether one uses a Qualitative Research or Quantitative Research approach, depends upon the objective of the research work, and the value of decisions that would be taken from the data generated by the research work.



8.5 METHODS OF CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. Individual 'Depth' or 'Intensive' Interviews

The in-depth interviews could be classified as:

- Non-directive interview
- Semi-structured or focussed interview.

In a non-directive interview, the respondent is given maximum freedom to respond in a manner that he wishes to, within a reasonable limit of relevancy to the topic under discussion. However, the interviewer retains the initiative in the interview process, else the focus of the interview would be lost. Thus, with this technique, the respondent is given a chance to freely express his ideas and thoughts, which acts as an important feedback to the company regarding the company's products/service.

In a semi-structured or focussed interview, the initiative is retained by the interviewer, and the interview has to cover specific list of points, which has been decided in advance. There is also a tighter control over the interview, in order to maximise data collection and also collect data relevant to the topic under consideration. The interviewer also has determined as to which questions are to be asked. The best example to highlight this interview process is the *chat shows* that take place on television. Even though the participant(s) is/are given maximum freedom with respect to his/her answers, the initiative is retained by the interviewer, and he/she has decided in advance the questions that would be asked in the course of the interview.

In-Depth interviews are appropriate in the following situations:

- 1) When detailed probing of an individual's behaviour, attitude, and needs is required.
- 2) When the subject matter is of a highly confidential nature (e.g., how do you plan your investments: required for annual tax planning).
- 3) When the subject matter is an emotionally charged one or of an embarrassing nature (e.g., how do you spend when you go on a date).
- 4) When a step-by-step understanding is required of complicated decision making (e.g., how does a family plan its holiday - selection of vacation site, mode of travel and stay places, or how does a family decide when purchasing a house - which is normally a lifetime decision).
- 5) When interviews are conducted with highly qualified professionals (e.g., surgeons - on the usage/problems with various medical equipments), a normal questionnaire would not suffice for getting information, and a detailed probing is required which would come out only through an in-depth interview.
- 6) When a respondent may not be able to express his/her true feelings in a group discussion: Very often in a group discussion, a few aggressive people tend to dominate the discussion, hardly giving an opportunity to others in the group to express their views. To avoid such a situation, a researcher may decide to conduct an in-depth interview instead of a group discussion. Also, when the topic of the group discussion is of a personal nature and socially embarrassing, people in the group would tend to conform to the views of the overall group, rather than express their own individual ideas.

Limitation of the in-depth interview:

- 1) The skill of the interviewer is very critical in drawing out the respondent's true feelings.



- 2) In an interview, there is not only verbal communication, but also non-verbal communication, and the interviewer should also keep track of the respondent's voice tone, facial expression, movement of hands (gestures).
- 3) The sample size cannot be large, as conducting in-depth interviews takes a longer time.
- 4) Analysis and interpretation of data is a highly subjective process, thus generalizations to the entire population cannot be done.
- 5) In-depth interviews act as a source of generation of hypothesis, development of questionnaire for further research work.

Activity 1

Conduct a depth interview with one person to find out his/her feelings on the purchase and consumption of (a) Packaged fruit juices and (b) Ice-creams.

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2. focus-Group Discussion

There are broadly two ways in which a group discussion can be conducted:

- i) **Brain-Storming** : In such a method, there is no moderator for the group, and the group freely expresses its ideas on the given topic. The ideas could be absolutely abstract, but then this would help in generating new product ideas and also better ways of conducting a particular business etc. In this, use is made of tape-recorder to record the group discussion, video-taping of proceedings is also done in order to record the facial expressions of the, participants, as also the intensity of their feelings.
- ii) **Focussed Group**: Discussion: In such a method, the group is given a topic and asked to discuss the topic. A moderator would also be involved in order to ensure that the group 'discussion remains relevant and does not go off the track. The moderator could stop the, discussion between time intervals to find out what conclusions are being drawn by the group after each time interval.

Size and Composition of a Group Discussion Panel

There is no correct size prescribed for a Group Discussion. The size of the group depends upon (a) the subject matter under discussion. (b) the type of participants. Normally, 8 to 12 individuals in a group discussion panel is an ideal size. However, for highly professional and articulate people, the ideal size is 5/6 participants in the group, as the participants would have more to contribute to the topic under discussion.

The group members should be such that it reflects the characteristics of a particular market segment under study. The sampling plan is drawn up first, which then helps in deciding the composition of the group discussion panel members.

The role of the moderator in a group discussion is to establish a rapport with the group members. He/she *also* informs the members of the rules to be followed in the group discussion. The moderator acts as a stimulus' to provoke heated discussion in, the group, *so ' that* all underlying ideas, feelings and emotions emerge. The moderator also intervenes after time intervals, to asses the extent of agreement/disagreement with the ideas that are emerging.



Application areas for Group Discussion

The following are the situations where a group discussion could be used:

- 1) For development of new product ideas, abstract concepts.
- 2) For product positioning ideas - how does to consumer perceive a particular product/service/idea.
- 3) To determine hidden feelings/attitudes of the consumer.
- 4) To establish consumer vocabulary, as a preliminary step when developing questionnaires. It is not always possible to think of all questions associated with a product/brands, when conducting survey research. The group discussion helps in developing suitable questions.
- 5) For advertising and communication research - what to say to the consumer, how to say it, what should be the focus of the message etc.

Advantages of a Group Discussion:

- 1) In a Group Discussion setting, the interaction among members acts as a stimulant to generate new ideas, which may never be possible in an in-depth individual interview situation.
- 2) The Group Discussion setting leads to spontaneity in conversation which cannot come in individual interview situation.
- 3) The Group setting is emotionally provocative the conversation may set off the thinking process, and one would recall older memories and conversations that may be relevant to the discussion on hand.

Disadvantages of a Group Discussion:

- 1) Qualified and trained personnel are required to conduct Group Discussion.
- 2) Analysis and nteroperation is highly subjective.
- 3) A few members in a group could dominate the entire discussion.

Activity 2

Conduct a focus group interview with six people in your organization on the purchase and consumption of (a) fast food (b) Packaged fruit juices. Prepare a report based on your result.

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3. Projective Techniques

When a researcher is conducting an in-depth interview, or conducting a survey through the questionnaire method, he might face problems in the form of language barriers with the respondent, or illiterate respondent (especially in social research and rural research), or social barriers (respondent is embarrassed to talk about a topic) or psychological barriers (recall of event or feelings at that moment of interview is not there or trying to avoid certain questions or "can't say" answer). In order to overcome such barriers faced during an interview process, the researcher may replace the questionnaire with the projective techniques.



The basic underlying concept behind projective techniques is that in certain situations, it is impossible to obtain correct information about what a person thinks or feels by asking him to describe his/her feelings - but this information can be obtained by making the respondent to project his feelings on to some other person or object.

The following are the different types of projective techniques:

i) Word Association Test

In this method, the respondent is presented with a list of stimulus words, and for each word, is asked to respond with what he thinks about the word. The respondent is not given time to think of the responses. The idea is that the 'first thought' responses are likely to reveal the true feelings of the respondent about the stimulus.

Example: Suppose a company wishes to understand what a person thinks about leisure time:

Stimulus word	Response
• Train	
• Books	
• Television	
• Swimming	
• Automobile	
• House	

The first responses to these words would give a fair idea as to how the respondent would like to spend his leisure time.

The analysis of the word association test is done as follows:

- Determine the frequency with which the various responses emerge.
- Category of attitudes can be created (e.g., favourable/neutral/unfavourable), and words.

Example:

If one wants to study the perception of students regarding MBA course, the categories that could emerge are:

practical	impractical
interesting	boring
easy	difficult
Job oriented	theory oriented.

The words that emerge from word association tests can be useful in developing semantic differential scale, likert scale, adjectives that describe products/services.

ii) Sentence Completion Test:

This is an extension of the word association test. In this method, the respondent is asked to finish an incomplete sentence with the first thought that comes to his mind. The idea is that the respondent projects his own feelings into the sentence.

Example:

- I like to drive mobikes because.....
- Most people smoke because.....
- I smoke because.....
- Cars are



As with the word association, the frequency of responses are taken into consideration while analyzing the results of the sentence association test.

iii) Fantasy Situation:

Here, the respondents are asked to imagine that they are converted into a product itself e.g., car, box of chocolate. This leads to the respondent imagining himself to be product itself and give the human characteristics to the product. This method is used for developing brand perception, brand personality.

iv) Cartoon Completion:

In this method the respondent is shown a cartoon that is similar to a comic strip, with "balloons" indicating speech. Usually, two people are shown talking to each other about a particular product/service/situation, but only one balloon contains the speech.

The situation that is shown in the cartoon is obviously of special interest to the researcher, and is part of the research project under hand. The respondent has to fill the other 'balloon' with his answer to what the other person is saying.

With this one tries to measure attitude towards a product or service. Analysis and interpretation of these results are highly subjective.

v) Picture Interpretation (Thematic Apperception Test) :

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), along with the Rorschach Inkblot test, is probably the most widely known and used projective technique in Clinical Psychology. The same basic technique used above is applied for marketing research applications.

Here, the respondent is shown a picture - either a line drawing, illustration or photograph which is rather ambiguous, and is asked to describe what is going on - or tell a story about what is illustrated.

For example, a retail outlet like a gift shop is interested in knowing what a shopper thinks while buying a gift how does he look at the various display items, what he expects during the shopping experience - for such a research project, a researcher might show the photograph of a person entering the gift shop to the respondent, and ask him to develop a story on what he thinks could be happening inside the shop. Normally, a respondent would project his own feelings while developing the story from the photograph. This gives an idea to the researcher as to what the respondent expects on entering the gift shop. The major drawback with this method is that there is a great deal of subjectivity in interpretation of the responses to these projective tests. These projective techniques are used in exploratory research, whose output act as input for developing hypothesis and full-fledged quantitative research.

Activity 3

Select any product and brand of interest to you. Administer each of the following techniques to five fellow colleagues to develop an idea of their feelings towards the brand: (a) Word Association Test, (b) Sentence Completion Test, (c) Cartoon (d) Thematic Apperception Test

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4. Observation Method

Observation method is another very powerful tool for getting information about the consumer. This method is used for recording behaviour of people, objects, events. Informal observations are extensively used for observing customer buying patterns, impact of



competitive advertisement on buying, product availability etc.

Observation technique is always used in conjunction with other research techniques. The inherent danger in this method is that one could draw wrong conclusions as it is highly subjective, and a lot depends upon the observer's perception of a situation.

Advantages of Observation Technique:

- 1) This method does not rely on the willingness of the respondent to cooperate and provide information.
- 2) Behaviour patterns of which a respondent is not aware of, can be recorded by observation only e.g., facial expression of a consumer while examining a new product display in a store.

Disadvantages:

- 1) By observation method one cannot observe a consumers beliefs, feelings, awareness etc (other research techniques like focus groups, in-depth interviews required).
- 2) The observed behavior pattern must be of short duration, should occur frequently, in order to qualify for observation, and act as input to other research techniques.

Classification of Observation Techniques:

- a) Natural vs. Contrived Observation

Natural observation is recording of consumer behaviour as it takes place e.g., shopping process. Contrived observation is one in which an artificial environment is created and then consumer behaviour is observed e.g., Simulated Test Marketing.

- b) Disguised vs. Undisguised Observation

Disguised refers to whether or not consumer is aware of being observed. e.g., two-way mirrors, hidden cameras in shops, observers dressed as sales clerks etc.

- c) Structured vs. Unstructured Observation

In a structured observation, the decision problem has been clearly defined. Information needs are clearly defined, and so this reduces observer bias and increases the reliability of observed data.

In an unstructured observation, the problem is yet to be defined and formulated, and is ideal for exploratory research.

- d) Human vs. Mechanical Observation

By replacing humans with mechanical devices, the accuracy of observation increases, observer bias is reduced and lower costs are incurred. Special mechanical devices used for observation could be video cameras (shopping behaviour), Audimeter/Peoplemeter (TRP ratings), Eye-cameras, etc.

Activity 4

Observe few shoppers of chocolates in your neighbourhood store, what insights; you could gain from these observations regarding purchase of chocolates.

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8.6 LATEST TECHNIQUES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative Research is taking more and more inputs from psychology, to develop latest techniques in Qualitative Research. Some of the latest techniques used are as follows:

- 1) **Imagery Technique:** This technique is used to determine the images of two competing brands, As an example, readers were asked to describe two competing magazines.

Magazine 1 was described as young, attractive, bubbling teenager.

Magazine 2 was described as older, less interesting, introvert lady. This information helped the owner of the magazine to reposition magazine 2.

- 2) **Synecotics:** This technique gives the researcher an insight into the intuitive or emotional impressions of the consumer for either a brand or advertising campaign, by unleashing the creative side of the consumer. The respondents are asked to go through a series of games designed to lower their inhibitions which help in unleashing the child present in every adult. The basic idea is that creativity works at child level. With this exercise, the researcher can get original ideas for use in developing advertising campaign, as also the consumer's real feelings about products.
- 3) **Neuro-Linguistic Programming:** This technique provides an insight into the 'Non-Verbal Impact' of an advertisement on the target consumer. This is done by analyzing as to which of the five senses (sight, taste, touch, sight, aural) a consumer uses to recall an advertisement. As an example, the Onida advertisement campaign was analyzed using this technique, and it was able to reveal strong sensory effect of Rasping Voice and Shattering Glass. The underlying idea behind this technique is that much of the recording of experience goes on 'below the surface' and outside conscious awareness. For the purposes of marketing, there is a codification of the sensory modalities into Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic (touch, taste and smell). The shorthand version is called as VAK segmentation. Human are emotional creatures, and a person would buy on emotion and justify the purchase on logic. Thus, to decode the emotions surrounding the product purchase and experience, researchers use the NLP technique. NLP techniques are modelled on techniques used in other fields of psychology (Ericksonian Hypnosis and Classical Conditioning), and hence only persons trained in the field of psychology can use this technique.

8.7 SUMMARY

The various methods by which information about consumers can be obtained are broadly classified into two categories - Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research. Qualitative Research may be used to generate hypothesis for further research, is exploratory in nature and involves a small number of people who are not sampled on probabilistic basis. Qualitative research can provide leads and insights which could be of extreme help in conducting quantitative research. There are various methods of conducting qualitative research. These are depth interviews, focus groups, observation and projective techniques like word association test, sentence completion test, cartoons, thematic apperception test. Qualitative research is increasingly using inputs from psychology and some of latest techniques being used include imagery, synectics and neuro-linguistic programming.

8.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTION

- 1) Highlight the main, differences between qualitative and quantitative research.
- 2) With the help of examples, discuss the areas where qualitative research can be used in marketing.

3) What are the various methods of conducting qualitative research? Discuss advantages and limitations of each of these methods.



8.9 FURTHER READINGS

Parasuraman, A “ *Marketing Reseac* “, *Addision* - Wesley Publishing Company Inc., USA.

Chisnall, P. " *The Essence of Marketing Research*", PHI, New Delhi

Tull, D. And Hawkins, D, “*Marketing Research - Measurement and Method*”.Macmillan Publishing Co., New York.