

**Marketing Research**  
**Chapter 6**  
**Qualitative Research**  
**Lecturer: Michaella DeLeon Castillo, DBA - Philippines**

Marketing Research – Lecture 6

LESSON 6

**What is Qualitative Research?**

**Learning Objective 6.1 – What is Qualitative Research?**

**Describing Qualitative Research**

Research in qualitative marketing tackles marketing goals using methods that enable the researcher to offer in-depth analyses of market phenomena without relying on numerical measurement. Finding authentic inner meanings and fresh discoveries are its main goals. In practice, qualitative research is used extensively. Qualitative research is a specialty of several research companies.

Compared to the majority of quantitative methods, qualitative research is less systematic. It does not rely on self-report surveys with predefined response options. It is more dependent on the researcher since they must derive meaning from unstructured replies like text from an audio recording of an interview or a collage that exemplifies the significance of a particular activity, like skating. The data are interpreted by the researcher to determine their meaning and turn them into information.

**Uses of Qualitative Research**

It is impossible for mechanics to remedy every problem with a hammer. Instead, the mechanic has a toolbox from which he selects the appropriate tool for the situation. Research in marketing is similar. The study design should attempt to match the best tool to the research purpose among the many tools available to the researcher. Additionally, each researcher often has specialized knowledge with a small number of tools, much as a mechanic generally isn't an expert with every tool. Not every researcher has specialized knowledge of the instruments used in qualitative research. In general, qualitative research methodologies are more likely to be appropriate the less specified the study objective. Qualitative research is also ideal when the focus is on gaining a deeper understanding of motivations or creating innovative concepts.

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Qualitative “versus” Quantitative Research

There are numerous discussions in social science concerning whether qualitative or quantitative research is better. We'll start by pointing out that this is mostly a pointless argument, either way. In actuality, qualitative research is more capable of achieving research goals than quantitative research. Quantitative research can achieve goals that qualitative research cannot, but not more truthfully. The key to employing either effectively is to match the appropriate method to the appropriate study environment.

Numerous effective research projects integrate qualitative and quantitative data. A thorough grasp of the notion to be measured, for instance, as well as a description of how these ideas are articulated in common parlance, are prerequisites for the development of accurate survey measures. These two tasks are best accomplished through qualitative research. However, quantitative study will probably be needed to formally validate the measure and ensure that it can accurately capture the target idea. Qualitative research may also be required to distinguish between symptoms and problems, with quantitative research being used as a follow-up to examine the correlations between pertinent factors.

Contrasting Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

The measurement of concepts using scales that either directly or indirectly offer numerical values is a major focus of quantitative research. It is therefore possible to test hypotheses and do statistical calculations using the numerical results. This method requires some sort of number comparison, as will be explained in more detail later. Comparatively speaking, qualitative researchers are keener on listening, observing, and interpreting. As a result, the researcher has a direct hand in conducting the study and developing the findings. Rarely do samples from qualitative research have hundreds of respondents. Instead, the source of qualitative data is typically a small group of consumers. In research that focuses on discovery, this is entirely acceptable. All concepts would still require testing before being implemented. Is qualitative research less expensive than quantitative because of the smaller sample size? Maybe not. The greater researcher participation in data collecting and processing, even though fewer respondents must be interviewed, can increase the expenses of qualitative research. Given the tight connection between exploratory designs and qualitative research, it is not unexpected that qualitative research is most frequently used in them. Traditional hypothesis testing is challenging in qualitative research due to small

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sample sizes, interpretative techniques requiring subjective judgments, and the unstructured interview format. Therefore, using these approaches to draw firm conclusions about, for example, the outcomes of causal designs including experiments, is not recommended. However, when the aim is to uncover potential explanations, these drawbacks for drawing inferences become positives because the researcher spends more time with each respondent and is able to cover a lot more area because to the flexibility of the processes.

#### Qualitative Approaches to Exploratory Research

Exploratory research is a helpful stage for researchers who are unfamiliar with or have limited expertise of a research topic. By lowering the likelihood of starting with an insufficient, inaccurate, or misleading set of research objectives, exploratory research, which frequently uses qualitative methods, can be a crucial initial step to a more rigorous, conclusive, confirmatory study.

In terms of philosophy, research can be categorized as either confirmatory or exploratory. Hypotheses are tested in confirmatory research. These test results offer a precise path of action, which aids in decision-making. On the other hand, exploratory research adopts a different strategy. For instance, developing the concepts that eventually result in research hypotheses may need exploratory research. The majority of exploratory research designs yield qualitative information. These data are written, visual, or oral in nature rather than numerical. In qualitative research, narratives, artistic depictions, meaningful characterizations, interpretations, and other expressive descriptions are prioritized over numerical data. Quantitative data, which depict phenomena by allocating numbers in an orderly and understandable way, are typically not produced through exploratory designs. The majority of exploratory research doesn't yield quantitative information. In the context of an exploratory research design, this chapter primarily focuses on qualitative research. Exploratory research can consist of one formal investigation or several unofficial ones. Some qualitative research projects can be completed extremely fast. Some take an extremely long time. For instance, a single focus group study including the sales team of a sizable bottling company could probably be conducted and analyzed in a few days. Compared to most descriptive or causal designs, this would produce quicker findings. Other qualitative research designs, like a participant observer study to comprehend skateboarding, can take months to complete. While not always, a qualitative approach can help you save time.

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Idea Generation

Exploratory research is important for developing and screening new product concepts as well as creating new products. Exploratory research is especially helpful in concept development and screening because it generates a lot of ideas and then reduces the options to a manageable quantity. Exploratory research may reveal throughout this procedure that certain new product ideas are unfeasible. Numerous approaches exist for qualitative research to produce ideas for new goods, advertising content, promotional concepts, and product enhancements. Consumers can be asked to provide in-depth descriptions of their product experiences by researchers utilizing qualitative methods. This information can show which consumer wants a product can actually meet. A customer might be invited to share their experiences with dog food, for instance. When asked what they want in dog food, a consumer is likely to respond, "Something that is good for the dog." However, if the customer is persuaded to keep on, we can discover that the dog food "smells bad in the refrigerator" and "is messy to clean up." As a result, the interview demonstrates that there are dog feeding demands that are not solely focused on the dog. Technology can help in this endeavor as well. For instance, car marketers encourage customers to build their ideal vehicles using computerized design tools that are comparable to those used by car designers. The results of this exploratory study may lead to concepts that the company's own designers would not have thought of.

Concept Testing

Concept testing is the primary function of research in idea vetting. To screen new, altered, or relocated concepts, concept testing is a commonly used sort of exploratory research that encompasses numerous related research processes. Despite the use of the word testing, idea testing techniques are mostly qualitative. Respondents are typically given a written statement, a visual depiction, or another form of idea description, and asked for their thoughts.

The questions virtually universally revolve on the idea's likeability, usefulness, and novelty. The chance to expand on the concept is then given to the respondents, either verbally, in writing, or visually. Before investing any extra resources in manufacturing, R&D, or other firm resources, concept testing enables an

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initial review. The qualitative examination of respondent remarks identifies themes that can be exploited to enhance the product, which is perhaps equally essential.

#### **Learning Objective 6.2 – Qualitative Research Orientations**

There are numerous methods and approaches for conducting qualitative research. The various academic disciplines that are participating in the research have a significant impact on qualitative research orientations. Each of these approaches corresponds to a particular type of qualitative research. The principal types of qualitative research are

1. Phenomenology—originating in philosophy and psychology
2. Ethnography—originating in anthropology
3. Grounded theory—originating in sociology
4. Case studies—originating in psychology and in business research

It can be challenging to make clear distinctions between these approaches, and a given qualitative research study may combine parts of two or more methodologies. Each group does, however, exhibit a somewhat distinct method of knowledge discovery and human inquiry. Following a brief discussion of each, some of the more popular qualitative methods for producing qualitative data will be covered.

#### **Phenomenology**

What is a Phenomenological Approach to Research?

A philosophical method of investigating human experiences known as phenomenology is founded on the notion that human experience is intrinsically subjective and influenced by the environment in which a person lives. The phenomenological researcher focuses on how a person's conduct is influenced by the connections he or she has with objects, people, and circumstances in the physical world. The goal of phenomenological investigation is to describe, consider, and interpret phenomena.

Conversational interviewing techniques are frequently used by researchers that have a phenomenological orientation. Face-to-face conversational interviews are recorded using either audio or videotape and are then decoded by the researcher. When at all possible, the phenomenological

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interviewer takes care to steer clear of direct inquiries. Instead, the research participant is asked to share a personal experience through a tale. Additionally, the researcher must take all reasonable measures to ensure that a respondent feels at ease sharing their story. One approach to do this is to join the group (for instance, taking on the role of a skateboarder in the scenario earlier in this chapter). Another option is to have them use a name other than their genuine one. This may be especially important when researching potentially delicate subjects like smoking, stealing, or employee theft. Therefore, it might take a long time to explore the meaning of Vans from a phenomenological perspective. To build a comfort level, the researcher may first spend weeks or months integrating with the individual or group of interest. Conversations are carefully recorded throughout this period. The researcher would probably not start off by asking a skateboarder to describe his or her sneakers if an interview were requested. Instead, eliciting favorite skateboarding stories or discussing what makes a skateboarder special can lead to fruitful conversation. In general, the method is relatively unstructured in order to avoid asking questions that could be interpreted as leading and to give every chance for fresh thoughts.

#### What is Hermeneutics?

Phenomenology places a lot of emphasis on the word hermeneutics. The study of writings in which a person tells a tale about themselves is known as hermeneutics, which is a method for comprehending phenomenology. Then, meaning is inferred by relating text passages to one another or to ideas presented in other texts. The most common way to make these linkages is by coding the main ideas that the story expresses. Although it is outside the purview of this text to fully comprehend hermeneutics, some of the terminology is employed when using qualitative methods. A text passage from a respondent's story that is connected to a major subject therein or is provided by the researcher is an example of a hermeneutic unit. These sections have a significant role in the interpretation of data. There is computerized software that can help decode and analyze texts and visuals.

#### Ethnography

##### WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

Ethnography is a method of understanding cultures that involves immersing oneself deeply in that society. A common method of ethnographic research is participant-observation. Participant-observation refers to

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the researcher immersing himself or herself in the culture under study and gathering information through his or her observations. A culture can be vast, like American culture, or specific, like the culture of urban gangs or skateboarding devotees. The anthropological study of organizational culture would also be significant. In certain cases, researchers have long-term positions as employees of an organization. By doing this, they adopt the culture, and over time, other employees start to behave around the researcher rather naturally. The researcher might see actions that the employee would never disclose in a different situation. For instance, it might be challenging for a researcher looking into the ethical conduct of salespeople to get a vehicle salesperson to disclose any possibly deceptive sales practices in a standard interview. However, using anthropological methods may cause the salesman to lower their guard, leading to more accurate learnings about the car-selling culture.

#### Observation in Ethnography

In ethnography, observation is crucial. Nowadays, researchers will occasionally ask homeowners for permission before installing cameras in their homes. By doing this, the ethnographer is able to observe consumers in their "natural habitat" and learn more about them in order to test new products, come up with new product concepts, and create marketing strategies in general. When a group of people in a specific culture are unable or unwilling to express their thoughts and feelings verbally, ethnographic research can be especially helpful. Ethnography, for instance, provides advantages for learning ideas from youngsters because it does not heavily rely on their responses to questions. Instead, the researcher may merely blend in with the neighborhood, let the kids act naturally, and document what they did.

#### Grounded Theory

What is Grounded Theory?

Most likely, grounded theory is used in business research less frequently than phenomenology or ethnography. A grounded theory is an inductive investigation in which the researcher asks queries regarding data collected from interviewees or from the past. In order to arrive at more thorough explanations, the researcher continuously questions his or her own answers to the questions. Particularly in highly dynamic situations involving quick and large change, grounded theory is useful. The researcher

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using grounded theory focuses on two main questions: "What is happening here?" and "How is it different?" Grounded theory is unique in that it does not start with a theory but rather derives one from whatever results from an area of investigation.

#### How is Grounded Theory Used?

Consider a business that asks a researcher to investigate whether or not its sales team is still as productive as it was five years ago. The researcher looks for a possible explanation using grounded theory. Based on text analysis of several sales sessions that were recorded over the past five years, an inductive theory is built. The researcher can create a theory by challenging the events that were brought up in the sales interviews and examining variations in the circumstances that may have caused the debate. The argument contends that informal communication between salesmen has decreased over the past five years due to an increased dependence on e-mail and other technology tools. The salespeople have thus failed to come together as a tight-knit "community."

A grounded theory can also be developed using computer software. In our Vans example, the researcher might analyze skateboarders' accounts of positive and negative skating experiences by challenging the occurrences and modifications mentioned. These could lead to thoughts regarding the part that particular brands play in determining whether an experience is positive or negative. On the other hand, grounded theorists frequently use visuals. The skateboarder might then create collages to depict both positive and negative events. In order to develop theory, queries can be applied to the images just like they were to the text.

#### Case Studies

##### What are Case Studies?

Case studies are merely the recorded past of a certain individual, group, company, or event. Typically, a case study will discuss the acceptance or denial of a certain product by consumers. As an alternative, case studies may detail the activities of a particular corporation launching a new product or handling a management crisis. This form of case study is typified by textbook cases. Clinical interviews

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with specific customers may serve as a case study. These might center on their encounters with certain products or brands. After then, significant themes in the case studies might be examined. The frequency with which the same term (or a synonym) appears in the narrative description helps identify themes. Finding factors that are pertinent to prospective explanations may be possible using the themes.

#### How are Case Studies Used?

Business practices frequently make use of case studies. Case studies of companies that market "luxury" goods, for example, have shed light on the characteristics of notable brands. Higher cost wine labels (such as Penfold's Grange) were meticulously studied, including the marketing and production processes, by a marketing researcher. This investigation made the case that authenticity can be a vital component of a prestige brand.

Customers value a product or brand more when they are aware that it is genuine. Case studies frequently fall under another qualitative research category. The Research Snapshot box up top exemplifies how observation helped in the discovery of insights that resulted in significant marketing adjustments. The ability to thoroughly and minutely examine an entire corporation or other entity is a key benefit of the case study. The researcher can thoroughly examine the sequence of events as they take place or concentrate on finding connections between various functions, people, or entities thanks to this intensely focused attention.

The party whose history is being researched must frequently cooperate for a case study to be successful. The effectiveness of any case study is greatly dependent on the awareness, inventiveness, intelligence, and motivation of the person performing the case analysis due to the freedom to look for any evidence an investigator feels essential.

#### Learning Objective 6.3 – Common Techniques Used in Qualitative Research

Numerous methods are used by qualitative researchers. Although each category may show a preference for particular techniques, many techniques cross over into more than one of the prior categories.

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What is a Focus Group Interview?

The focus group interview is so popular that many advertising and research firms only conduct focus groups. It is incorrectly equated with qualitative research in that sense. A focus group interview is an informal, unstructured discussion with a small group of people, typically six to ten. A skilled moderator guides focus groups and employs a flexible structure that promotes conversation between participants. Employee programs, brand meanings, product issues, advertising themes, or new product concepts are typical focus group subjects. At a predetermined time, everyone gathers in a central location. Consumers discussing hair coloring, petroleum engineers discussing issues in the "oil patch," kids discussing toys, or employees discussing their employment are just a few examples of possible participants. An opening statement is made by the moderator to generally direct the conversation in the desired direction. The group should choose the themes for debate, not the moderators. In keeping with phenomenological methods, moderators ought to refrain from asking direct questions unless absolutely required.

Advantages of Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups give participants the chance to express in their own words the depth of their convictions as well as their actual sentiments, worries, and frustrations. While alternative methods might get the same results, focus groups have the following benefits:

1. Fairly quick
2. Simple to carry out
3. Permit respondents to build on one another's ideas.
4. Present various viewpoints
5. Flexibility to allow for more thorough explanations
6. Thorough examination

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Speed and Ease

Three or four group sessions can be run, assessed, and reported on in a week or so in an emergency. Finding someone to carry out the study is simple due to the great number of research companies that perform focus group interviews. There are numerous research companies with their own focus group facilities in almost every state in the US. Large research departments within companies are likely to have at least one focus group moderator who is qualified, eliminating the need to outsource the focus group.

Piggybacking and Multiple Perspectives

Thoughts that would not normally be developed could result from the group method. The interaction between respondents enables them to build on one another's concepts. In other words, one respondent prompts discussion among the others, and as a result, more and more original insights become possible. A single participant's remark frequently starts a series of answers from the other participants. Since each participant has a unique perspective, the focus group's social element also encourages the expression of multiple points of view.

Flexibility

Focus group interviews have an advantage over more rigorous and structured survey formats because of their flexibility. It is possible to debate a wide range of subjects and learn a wealth of knowledge, particularly with regard to the variances in consumer behavior in various contexts. Group interviews frequently yield responses that would not be expected in a survey, such as "If it is one of the three brands I occasionally use and if it is on sale, I buy it; otherwise, I buy my regular brand" or "If the day is hot and I have to serve the entire neighborhood, I make Kool-Aid; otherwise, I give them Dr Pepper or Coke. "Situational considerations must be taken into account in any interpretations of respondent comments if a researcher is studying a target group to learn who consumes a specific beverage or why a consumer chooses a certain brand.

Scrutiny

A focus group interview offers various opportunities for closer examination. First, since the session is typically held in a room with a two-way mirror, many others can watch it. An invited audience that may include researchers and decision makers is on one side and the responses and the moderator are on the other. The meeting may be broadcast live via a video hookup if the decision-makers are situated in another

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city or country. The opportunity to actually observe the research being conducted offers some check on the eventual interpretations, whether by live video or a two-way mirror. Second, most focus groups record their sessions on audio or videotape. Later, a thorough review of the recorded session can provide further information and aid in settling disputes regarding what took place.

#### Focus Group Illustration

Focus groups are frequently utilized for concept vetting and concept elaboration. The idea may be altered, improved, and tried again until management deems it to be acceptable. Philip Morris is creating a smokeless cigarette for the U.K. market even though RJR's initial attempts at smokeless cigarettes in the United States were unsuccessful. To learn how the product will be perceived and how it may be improved, focus groups are being deployed. Samples of the product are given to the focus group participants voluntarily, and they then have a discussion about it. The findings of the interviews indicate that the most important qualities of the product to communicate are that it emits very little odor, no side smoke, and no ashes. It is anticipated that these beliefs will result in an optimistic outlook. Respondents to focus groups had little concern about how the cigarette actually worked. Smokers think they will use the device if people who don't smoke don't become annoyed by people who are around people who are using the "electronic cigarette." In order to improve the product and create a theory for how it should be marketed, focus groups are helpful.

#### Group Composition

There should be six to ten people in the focus group. One or two people may intimidate the others in a small group. A sizable gathering might not allow for adequate participation from each individual. Homogeneous groups seem to work best because they let researchers concentrate on clients with similar lifestyles, experiences, and communication skills. There aren't many arguments or points of view in the session that come from different backgrounds. Each respondent should also belong to a distinct and recognizable culture from an anthropological perspective. Vans would benefit from conducting a focus group interview with only skateboard enthusiasts. Perhaps participants could be found at a neighboring skate park.

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Environmental Conditions

A focus group session could normally occur at the research firm in a space designated for this use. Focus group research providers work out of commercial facilities with videotape cameras in observation rooms hidden behind two-way mirrors and microphone systems connected to speakers and tape recorders to allow for more inspection, as stated above. To foster a more laid-back environment ideal for a free exchange of ideas, refreshments are offered. Under these circumstances, reports of individual experiences and feelings can be more candid and private.

The Focus Group Moderator

A good moderator must have the following qualities:

1. To encourage interaction among all members, the moderator must establish rapport with the group. The moderator should be someone who genuinely cares about other people, who pays attention to what others have to say, and who can quickly build relationships, win people over, and create an environment where they feel comfortable and ready to speak.
2. The moderator should have good listening skills. Because the goal of the group interview is to elicit spontaneous responses, attentive listening is extremely crucial. The moderator could lead the group in the wrong direction if they don't have adequate listening abilities.
3. The moderator must refrain from adding personal commentary. A good moderator will typically say less than more. They can encourage fruitful conversation by asking broad follow-up questions like, "Tell us more about that incident," or "How are your experiences similar to or different from the one you just heard?" The moderator must take extra care to avoid posing questions that imply agreement, such as "You do like cornflakes, don't you?"
4. The moderator needs to be able to manage the conversation without being intrusive. The moderator's job also entails keeping the conversation on the main topics of debate. The skilled moderator alters the conversation's flow when a subject isn't producing any new insights. The moderator does not allow the group complete authority over the conversation, but typically has prepared questions on management-

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related subjects. However, the moderator has complete choice over when and how these questions are brought up during the conversation. Thus, the moderator's role is where the phrase "focus group" originates. He or she begins by requesting a general conversation but typically zeroes in on particular subjects during the session.

#### Planning the Focus Group Outline

A discussion guide is used by focus group researchers to help manage the interview and direct the conversation toward specific product topics. A discussion guide defines the themes or questions to be discussed in the focus group session after providing textual introductions outlining the focus group's goals and ground rules. The focus group outline is therefore provided by the discussion guide. There may be simply a few words in some discussion guides' complete text. Others may go into greater detail. The difficulty of the issue, the researcher's background and experience, and the amount of content are all factors.

#### Focus Groups as Diagnostic Tools

Perhaps the most common method used by marketing researchers to carry out exploratory research designs is focus groups. Later on, in a research project, focus groups can also be beneficial, especially when the results of surveys or other quantitative methods generate more questions than they do answers. Focus groups can help managers who are unclear about the implications of survey research findings comprehend what consumer surveys reveal. In such a case, the focus group offers diagnostic assistance following the completion of quantitative research. Focus groups are a fantastic diagnostic resource for identifying issues with concepts. For instance, focus groups are frequently used for idea screening. The group is given a starting idea, after which they are free to elaborate on it. This frequently results in lengthy lists of potential issues with the product and suggestions for how to fix them. Additionally, mature items may be "focused grouped" in this way.

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Videoconferencing and Streaming Media

The videoconferencing sector has experienced rapid expansion in recent years. The number of businesses employing these systems to conduct focus groups has expanded as the quality of our capacity to interact via telecommunications and videoconferencing links has improved. Marketing managers no longer need to travel to a focus group venue to participate in focus groups; instead, they can watch on television from home with videoconference focus groups.

Multimedia content, such as audio or video, that is made instantly available over the Internet or a business Intranet is referred to as streaming media. Through the use of this cutting-edge digital media distribution technology, researchers can "broadcast" focus groups for online viewing. Using a media player like Microsoft Media Player, remote managers can view the focus group. This prevents the need to travel to a focus group location, similar to videoconferencing. The quality of streaming video has typically been far worse than that of videoconferencing. However, as streaming technology advances, the quality disparity is quickly diminishing.

Interactive Media and Online Focus Groups

Qualitative exploratory research is increasingly being used online for both formal and informal purposes. Formally, an online focus group is a qualitative research project in which participants submit their opinions into some sort of electronic, Internet display board to provide unstructured feedback. In a chat room or blog format, participants utilize a keyboard and mouse to type their comments. Transcripts of verbatim responses are immediately available following the group discussion since respondents input their comments into the computer. Online groups can be convenient and economical. However, group synergy and idea snowballing may be lessened because there is less interaction between participants.

Online Versus Face-To-Face Focus Group Techniques

A research business can set up a private, online chat room for the aim of conducting a formal online focus group. Both formal and informal internet focus groups' participants are confident in the security of their anonymity. Respondents frequently say things in this setting that they would never say

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in another. For instance, a lingerie manufacturer gained knowledge about how to create seductive items for larger ladies. These women were open in their online discussions of what it would take "to feel better about being naked." It's tough to comprehend how challenging such a conversation would be in person.

Greater anonymity might be a huge benefit for a business looking into delicate or humiliating topics. Online focus groups can have more participants than traditional focus groups because members are not required to be in the same room at a research facility. For the concurrent chat-room format, 25 or more participants are not unusual. The Internet has no geographical boundaries; thus, participants can be spread out over vast distances and even in various time zones. Of course, a significant drawback is that the researcher frequently has less control over precisely who participates. In other words, it would be quite simple for someone to not fit the required profile or even answer the screening questions deceptively just to join. Because moderators cannot see participants' body language or facial emotions (such as surprise, excitement, or curiosity), online focus groups have a significant disadvantage. They are therefore unable to properly understand how others are responding. Online focus groups also limit moderators' capacity to delve further and pose fresh inquiries. Online research is typically not appropriate for studies that require participants to actually touch or taste something (such as a new easy-opening container design).

#### Disadvantages of Focus Groups

Focus groups have a lot of benefits. The focus group has some restrictions and drawbacks, much like pretty much every other research methodology. Focus group issues include those listed below. Focus groups first and foremost need impartial, considerate, and efficient moderators. A moderator finds it very challenging to maintain total objectivity when discussing the majority of topics. Large research businesses may only give the interview moderator the information necessary to carry out the interview successfully. The moderator's viewpoint shouldn't be the sole thing discussed in the focus group. Additionally, without a skilled moderator, one or two participants may dominate a session, resulting in outcomes that reflect the views of only one or two individuals rather than the group as a whole. To ensure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and that even a timid respondent's opinion is given serious respect, the moderator must work very hard. Focus groups are conducted by a wide variety of people, some of whom

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have little or no training in doing so. However, effective moderators are those who possess a combination of good people skills (which cannot be taught), expertise in qualitative research, and experience.

Second, focus groups have some particular sampling issues. Focus group participants are frequently chosen by researchers because they share comparable backgrounds and experiences or because screening reveals that they are more eloquent or outgoing than the average customer. These participants might not be a good representation of the target market as a whole. As a result, the findings from focus groups are not meant to be generalizable.

Third, although traditional face-to-face focus groups may not be appropriate for addressing sensitive themes, online formats that allow respondents to remain anonymous are less of a problem. A focus group is a social situation where participants are typically strangers to one another. Therefore, topics that individuals ordinarily avoid discussing in public could also prove challenging to cover in a focus group.

Fourth, focus groups do have a hefty price tag, especially if they are not led by employees of the organization requesting the focus group. There are far more expensive methods for research initiatives, such as a comprehensive mail survey with a nationwide random sample. The expenditures of conducting, analyzing, and disseminating this study could total thousands of dollars.

Interviews in Depth A depth interview is a focus group's alternate. A depth interview is a one-on-one conversation between a research respondent and a qualified researcher. Although they serve a different function, depth interviews are very similar to psychological, clinical interviews. The researcher asks numerous questions and then follows up on each response by requesting further explanation.

The interviewer's function in a depth interview is crucial, much like that of focus group moderators. He or she must be a highly competent person who can support the respondent in speaking openly without directing the dialogue. Critical are the probing questions. The term "laddering" refers to a specific method of probing in which respondents are asked to compare brand differences at several levels. Typically, the first distinctions are at the attribute level, the second is at the benefit level, and the third is at the value or motivation level. Then, based on a) the materials they are constructed of, b) the comfort they offer, and c) the thrill they produce, Laddering can differentiate between two kinds of skating shoes. Each in-depth interview could run up to an hour or more. Therefore, conducting many interviews is a time-consuming process. Every interview not only needs to be done, but it also generates roughly the same quantity of text as a focus group interview. The researcher must examine and

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interpret this. The requirement to capture both the respondent's outward behaviors and unconscious intentions gives rise to a third significant problem. It is challenging to choose a genuine interpretation of such data because analysis and interpretation are extremely subjective processes. Focus groups can't fully understand a given person, whereas depth interviews can. Additionally, since the environment isn't particularly social, respondents are more willing to talk about delicate subjects than participants in a focus group. When studying a particular unique or odd behavior, depth interviews are especially beneficial. For instance, depth interviews have been successfully used to identify traits of adolescent behavior, including shopping, smoking, and theft as well as how they get what they want from their parents. Focus groups and depth interviews are comparable in many respects. If only one or two interviews are conducted, the expenditures are comparable. However, due to the longer interviewing and analysis times, focus group interviews are more expensive when 12 or more interviews are included in a report.

#### Conversations

In qualitative research, having conversations with respondents is a non-formal method of acquiring data in which the researcher engages a respondent in a discussion about the pertinent topic matter. Since there is hardly any structure to this method, the researcher starts the conversation with very few expectations. The objective is for the respondent to create a discourse about their personal experiences. The ensuing discourse will be used to derive meaning.

The benefit of using a conversational technique is that most interviews are not expensive to conduct. Due to their passion for a certain product category, respondents frequently do not require payment. Once the researcher has a connection with them, they are reasonably effective at addressing delicate issues. However, since little effort is done to guide the dialogue, conversational approaches tend to generate little pertinent information. Additionally, the data analysis heavily depends on the researcher.

#### Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are typically conducted in writing and ask participants to provide brief essays in response to predetermined open-ended questions. Write as much or as little as you'd want, according to the respondent. Typically, the questions would be broken up into portions, with the introductory question being followed by a few more in-depth inquiries. There is potential for less formal follow-ups when these are conducted face to face.

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The benefits of this strategy include the capacity to handle more particular problems. The majority of the time, responses are simpler to comprehend than other qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews can be quite cost-effective because the researcher can simply prepare the questions in writing ahead of time and, if in writing, the questions are administered without the presence of an interviewer.

#### Free-Association/Sentence Completion Method

Free-association approaches merely capture a respondent's initial, top-of-mind cognitive responses to a stimulus. The free-association technique is shown by the Rorschach or inkblot test. Respondents are asked to state their initial thought after viewing an ambiguous figure. Researchers are able to map a respondent's thoughts or memories using free-association techniques.

Responses to word association tests are frequently briefer than those to sentence-completion problems. The responses are particularly good at revealing what is going through a respondent's thoughts, even if they cannot be used to dig for meaning like other qualitative approaches can. Additionally, they can do it quickly and extremely affordably. The use of free-association and sentence-completion exercises is occasionally combined with other strategies. For instance, they occasionally work well as icebreakers in focus group discussions.

#### Observation

We have discussed how observation may be a crucial qualitative technique throughout this chapter. The participant-observer method is a good example of how observation may be utilized to investigate different problems. Field notes are interpreted for meaning. The researchers' descriptions of what actually occurs in the field are contained in field notes. The text from which meaning is derived is then these remarks. Visual observation is another sort of observation. As noted above, researchers may study consumers in their homes or attempt to get information through various types of photographic records. Observation can be quite cheap, like when a research associate merely sits and watches behavior, or it can be extremely expensive, like in the majority of participant-observer studies. Insight into things that respondents cannot or will not verbalize can best be gained through observational study.

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Collages

Sometimes respondents are asked to create a collage to illustrate their interaction with a certain product, service, or brand for marketing studies. The collages are then meaning-analyzed, much how text dialogues are meaning-analyzed. Even the development of possible grounded theories from the visual representations can be assisted by computer technologies.

Harley-Davidson commissioned a study in which collages illustrating opinions about Harley Davidson were contrasted based on the respondent's ownership of Harley or a rival brand. Collages made by "Hog" owners featured topics related to art and outdoor freedom. The non-Hog groups did not exhibit these themes. This prompted confirmatory research, which enabled Harley to maintain its development by better targeting its various market niches.

Similar to word association and sentence completion, collages are frequently used in conjunction with other techniques like focus groups and in-depth interviews. Collages have the flexibility advantage, but they are also quite open to the researcher's interpretation.

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

In a theme perception test (TAT), consumers and products are the focal point of ambiguous image(s) that are shown to subjects. The person is questioned about what is occurring in the image(s) at this time and what may follow. As a result, themes (thematic) are triggered based on how the images are used for perceptual-interpretive (apperception) purposes. The researcher then examines the information in the tales the subjects have related. The image or cartoon stimulus must be intriguing enough to spark conversation yet vague enough to conceal the topic of the study. Giving out hints about a character's favorable or unfavorable disposition is not appropriate. A photograph of a guy gazing at a big tree was used as the pretest for a TAT studying the reasons why men might buy chainsaws. Owners of homes and weekend woodcutters participated in the study. They all agreed, almost unanimously, that they would hire a tree surgeon to handle this matter professionally. Thus, the researchers discovered that the image was not sufficiently ambiguous early on in the pretesting process. Because of the size of the tree, it was impossible for the respondents to relate to the tree-cutting activity. The environmental setting should be

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a well-defined, well-known problem with an unclear solution if participants are to project their own opinions into the circumstance.

The TAT frequently consists of a collection of connected images that allow for the construction of narrative in a number of contexts. In the first image, two shoppers may be seen discussing a product; in the second, someone may be cooking the food; and in the third, the product may be seen being served at the dinner table. A TAT can show several vague images of a skateboarder before showing the skateboarder leaving for the store. This could provide insight on the companies and goods that best suit the skateboarder market.

#### Projective Research Techniques

A TAT is an example of a projective research method. An indirect inquiry method known as a projective approach allows respondents to project their thoughts and sentiments onto a distant party, an inanimate object, or a task circumstance. With little assistance from the interviewer, projective techniques typically encourage respondents to describe a scenario in their own terms. People are required to interpret events in light of their unique histories, worldviews, and personalities. They are also expected to communicate feelings and thoughts that they might otherwise keep to themselves or hide from others. All projective methods are especially helpful for researching delicate subjects.

There is an old tale about questioning a man about his decision to buy a Mercedes. He explains that the Mercedes keeps its value and does not depreciate significantly, that it gets better gas mileage than you'd anticipate, or that it has a comfortable ride when asked explicitly why he decided to buy one. The same individual would respond, "Oh, that status seeker!" when asked why a neighbor bought a Mercedes. This narrative serves as an example of how people may respond more truthfully (consciously or unconsciously) to questions that are disguised, and how a projective approach can be used to mask the identity of the person being described.

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#### Learning Objective 6.4 – Exploratory Research in Science and in Practice

##### Misuses of Exploratory and Qualitative Research

Any research instrument can be used incorrectly. Conclusive, confirmatory research must be conducted in addition to exploratory research. The ability to make firm inferences or test hypotheses is thus constrained because many qualitative instruments are best used in exploratory designs. The subjectivity that comes with "interpretation" is among its main problems. In fact, qualitative research and interpretive research are sometimes employed interchangeably. Before making significant marketing decisions based on the results of a depth interview or other comparable technique where only one researcher evaluates the meaning of what one individual said, extreme caution should be exercised. Is the outcome repeatable, i.e., could a different researcher's interpretation lead to the same conclusions? Indeed, a few early and well-publicized misuses of several qualitative approaches during the period that came to be known as the "motivational research" era led to a widespread distaste for them for years. Many of the concepts developed during this time had some value, as is sometimes the case, but there were not enough researchers to evaluate the data from enough respondents. Because they thought the data peaked inside people's subconscious mind and so had extra power, marketers reacted quickly to the findings. As a result, faulty interpretation frequently led to flawed research, and hasty decision-making has led to flawed processes.

##### Scientific Decision Processes

Scientific investigation is characterized by objectivity and reproducibility. Are focus groups reproducible and objective? Would the focus group results be interpreted differently by three separate researchers? How should a head nod or facial expression be interpreted? Have participants thoroughly understood the concept or idea of a hypothetical product? Because people typically enjoy all new things, did respondents overestimate their interest? Many of these inquiries boil down to matters of opinion, which may differ across researchers and between response groups. Thus, a focus group, a depth interview, or a TAT by itself do not adequately represent a thorough scientific investigation. However, if the ideas uncovered through these methods stand up to first scrutiny and are turned into research hypotheses, they can then be put to more thorough testing. If a tagline is more effective than another, for instance, if Diet, Vanilla,

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or Cherry Dr Pepper is preferred over Diet Pepsi, and so on, these tests may involve survey research or an experiment testing an idea very specifically. Therefore, applying qualitative research instruments in an exploratory manner is very much a part of scientific inquiry.

The methods utilized in an exploratory research design yield more findings than those in other research designs, making it the most productive type of design. Until all benefits associated with using the product are identified, a corporation cannot identify the most significant ones. A research endeavor should involve a confirmatory study using objective instruments and an acceptable sample in terms of both size and how well it represents a population before making a scientific judgement. But is using a scientific approach to decision-making always necessary? In reality, a lot of marketing choices are made entirely on the findings of focus groups or other exploratory research. Time, money, and emotion are the main drivers behind this.

#### Time

Researchers occasionally simply aren't given enough time to follow up on the findings of exploratory research. Marketing businesses feel a growing urgency to launch new products more quickly. As a result, an apparently sound concept developed in a focus group (such as Diet, Vanilla, or Cherry Dr Pepper) is simply not tested with a more thorough study. Some would argue that the danger of postponing a decision is greater than the risk of moving forward without completing the scientific process. Therefore, even though the researcher might want to object, there can be a logical justification for doing so. The conclusions reached through exploratory research designs, however, should be understood by the decision-makers to be just that—exploratory. As a result, the decision has a lower chance of being successful than it would have had additional testing been a part of the study process.

#### Money

Similar to this, researchers may decide not to follow up on the findings of exploratory study because they think the expense will be too expensive. Recognize that qualitative research may have already cost thousands of dollars. Managers who are not familiar with research will be prone to asking questions like, "Why do I need yet another study?" and "What did I spend all that money for?" They consequently decide to move on based solely on exploratory findings.

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Again, as long as the provisional character of any ideas produced from exploratory research has been transmitted through the study report, the researcher has met the professional commitment. Again, this isn't always a poor strategy. The wisest course of action could be to move forward with implementation rather than spending more money on confirmatory research if the decision itself does not pose a significant risk or if it can be readily reversed. Keep in mind that you shouldn't conduct research if it will cost you more money than it would earn you.

#### Emotion

Emotion, time, and money are all interconnected. Decision-makers can act rashly because they are so eager to solve a problem or because they are so thrilled about a groundbreaking finding made during a focus group interview. It's possible that some of the theories developed during the motivational research era sounded so alluring that decision-makers became emotionally involved and moved forward without conducting the necessary testing. As a result, when we fall in love with anything, just as in real life, we often act irrationally. Making ensuring a number of decision makers are involved in the decision-making process lessens, but does not eliminate, the likelihood of emotion intruding in this manner.

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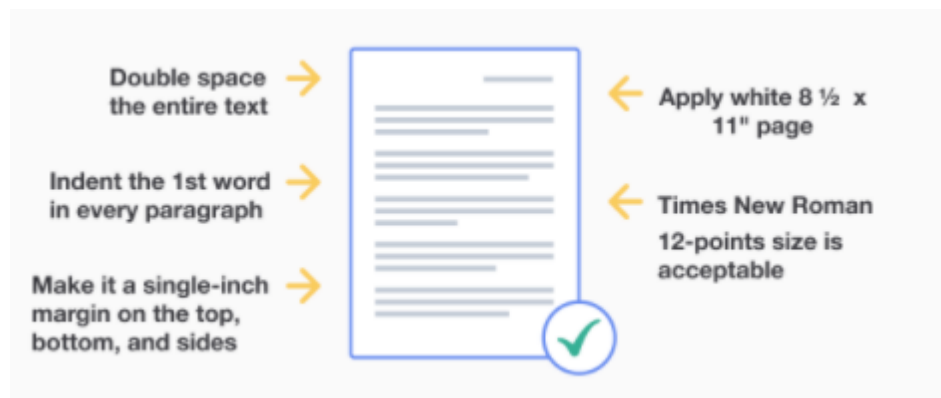
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### Progress Check:

#### Requirements:

1. Due Date : \_\_\_\_\_
2. Essay format, minimum of 20 words and maximum of 100 words.
3. Format



### Questions

1. Identify the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research and comprehend them.
2. List the fundamental types of qualitative research.
3. Recognize typical qualitative research tools and understand their benefits and drawbacks.

### Answer

1. 1. The discussion highlighted the fallacy of any claim that qualitative research is inherently superior to quantitative research. Instead, each strategy has benefits and drawbacks that make it

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suitable in particular circumstances. The relative absence of numbers in qualitative research is the most obvious distinction. In qualitative research, text or other visual materials are more often interpreted subjectively by the researchers. The results of quantitative research, however, are objective because they remain the same regardless of who computed the figures. Small samples are used in qualitative research, but large samples are typically used in quantitative research. Compared to quantitative research, qualitative methods are typically more flexible and result in richer and more detailed explanations.

2. Phenomenology is a philosophical method for examining human experiences that is predicated on the notion that human experience is intrinsically subjective and influenced by the environment in which it occurs. It is highly suited for in-depth conversational research. Ethnography is a method of researching cultures that involves intensive interaction with that culture. A typical ethnographic method is participant-observation. Grounded theory is an example of an inductive qualitative inquiry in which the researcher repeatedly probes a respondent's speech in an effort to elicit a comprehensive justification for their actions. Sometimes collages are used to create grounded theory. Case studies are essentially the recorded histories of a certain individual, group, company, or event.
3. The depth interview and focus group interviews are the two methods used most frequently in qualitative research. Given that conducting the interview portion(s) of a series of depth interviews would take 10 times as long as conducting one focus group, the focus group has a little cost advantage per responder. The depth interview, however, is more suitable for talking about delicate subjects.

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**Quiz 6**

**True or false**

1. When at all feasible, the phenomenological interviewer is careful to refrain from asking direct questions.
2. Case studies frequently fall under another quantitative research category.
3. The likelihood that quantitative research instruments will be acceptable depends on how specific the study objective is.
4. A qualitative approach can, but is not always, time-efficient.
5. Technology can also help with qualitative research in this endeavor.
6. Is qualitative research less expensive than quantitative because of the smaller sample size?
7. Consumers might be asked to provide in-depth descriptions of their product experiences by researchers utilizing qualitative methods.
8. The phenomenological researcher focuses on how a person's relationship with the physical environment, things, people, and situations shapes that person's culture.
9. When at all feasible, the phenomenological interviewer is careful to refrain from asking direct questions.
10. The majority of descriptive research methods yield qualitative results.

**Answer**

1. F
2. F
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. T
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. F

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**Fill in the blank**

1. Observation, listening, and \_\_\_\_\_ are more appealing to qualitative researchers.
2. Concept testing methodologies are frequently used in testing.
3. Exploratory research is a beneficial stage when researchers have \_\_\_\_\_ expertise or information regarding a study subject.
4. Research that tests hypotheses
5. Quantitative research is very suitable when a managerial action standard is involved.
6. The relative absence of \_\_\_\_\_ in qualitative research is the most obvious difference.
7. Qualitative research is thought to be more \_\_\_\_\_, which indicates that the findings are subject to the researcher's bias.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ enables a preliminary assessment before to the commitment of any extra manufacturing, R&D, or other firm resources.
9. Software is available to help with text and image coding and interpretation.
10. In order to distinguish problems from other factors, qualitative research may be required. Quantitative research can then be used to test the correlations between the relevant variables.

**Answer**

1. **Interpreting**
2. **Qualitative research**
3. **Limited**
4. **Confirmatory**
5. **Research objective**
6. **Numbers**

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- 7. Subjective**
- 8. Concept testing**
- 9. Computerized**
- 10. Symptoms**