

Module 2 Part 2 D Descriptive Research Design

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2.4.1 Descriptive Research

Descriptive research studies are those studies which are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group, whereas diagnostic research studies determine the frequency with which something occurs or its association with something else. The studies concerning whether certain variables are associated are examples of diagnostic research studies. As against this, studies concerned with specific predictions, with narration of facts and characteristics concerning individual, group or situation are all examples of descriptive research studies. Most of the social research comes under this category. From the point of view of the research design, the descriptive as well as diagnostic studies share common requirements and as such we may group together these two types of research studies. In descriptive as well as in diagnostic studies, the researcher must be able to define clearly, what he wants to measure and must find adequate methods for measuring it along with a clear cut definition of 'population' he wants to study.

The design in such studies must be rigid and not flexible and must focus attention on the following: (a) Formulating the objective of the study (what the study is about and why is it being made?)

(b) Designing the methods of data collection (what techniques of gathering data will be adopted?)

(c) Selecting the sample (how much material will be needed?)

(d) Collecting the data (where can the required data be found and with what time period should the data be related?)



(e) Processing and analyzing the data. (f) Reporting the findings.

The main purpose of descriptive research is to describe the state of view as it exists at present. Simply stated, it is a fact finding investigation. In descriptive research, definite conclusions can be arrived at, but it does not establish a cause and effect relationship. This type of research tries to describe the characteristics of the respondent in relation to a particular product.

Descriptive research deals with demographic characteristics of the consumer. For example, trends in the consumption of soft drink with respect to socio-economic characteristics such as age, family, income, education level etc. Another example can be the degree of viewing TV channels, its variation with age, income level, profession of respondent as well as time of viewing. Hence, the degree of use of TV to different types of respondents will be of importance to the researcher. There are three types of players who will decide the usage of TV: (i) Television manufacturers, (ii) Broadcasting agency of the programme, (iii) Viewers.

Therefore, research pertaining to any one of the following can be conducted:

- (a) The manufacturer can come out with facilities which will make the television more user-friendly. Some of the facilities are – (i) Remote control, (ii) Child lock, (iii) Different models for different income groups, (iv) Internet compatibility etc., (v) Wall mounting etc.
- (b) Similarly, broadcasting agencies can come out with programmes, which can suit different age groups and income.

(c) Ultimately, the viewers who use the TV must be aware of the programmes appearing in different channels and can plan their viewing schedule accordingly.

2. Descriptive research deals with specific predictions, for example, sales of a company's product during the next three years, i.e., forecasting.

3. Descriptive research is also used to estimate the proportion of population who behave in a certain way.

Example: "Why do middle income groups go to Food World to buy their products?"

A study can be commissioned by a manufacturing company to find out various facilities that can be provided in television sets based on the above discussion.

Similarly, studies can be conducted by broadcasting stations to find out the degree of utility of TV programmes.

Example: The following hypothesis may be formulated about the programmes:

1. The programmes in various channels are useful by way of entertainment to the viewers.

2. Viewers feel that TV is a boon for their children in improving their knowledge- especially, fiction and cartoon programmes.

2.4.2 Descriptive Research Design

The name itself reveals that, it is essentially a research to describe something. For example, it can describe the characteristics of a group such as – customers, organizations, markets, etc.



Descriptive research provides "association between two variables" like income and place of shopping, age and preferences.

Descriptive inform us about the proportions of high and low income customers in a particular territory. What descriptive research cannot indicate is that it cannot establish a cause and effect relationship between the characteristics of interest. This is the distinct disadvantage of descriptive research.

Descriptive study requires a clear specification of "Who, what, when, where, why and how" of the research. For example, consider a situation of convenience stores (food world) planning to open a new outlet. The company wants to determine, "How people come to patronize a new outlet?" Some of the questions that need to be answered before data collection for this descriptive study are as follows:

1. Who? Who is regarded as a shopper responsible for the success of the shop, whose demographic profile is required by the retailer?
2. What? What characteristics of the shopper should be measured?
3. Is it the age of the shopper, Gender, income or residential address?
4. When? When shall we measure?
5. Should the measurement be made while the shopper is shopping or at a later time?
6. Where? Where shall we measure the shoppers?
7. Should it be outside the stores, soon after they visit or should we contact them at their residence?

8. Why? Why do you want to measure them?
9. What is the purpose of measurement? Based on the information, are there any strategies which will help the retailer to boost the sales? Does the retailer want to predict future sales based on the data obtained?
10. Answer to some of the above questions will help us in formulating the hypothesis.
11. How to measure? Is it a 'structured' questionnaire, 'disguised' or 'undisguised' questionnaire?

2.4.3 Characteristics of descriptive research are:

- ✚ **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 an popular market research tool that allows to collect and describe the nature of the demographic segment.
- ✚ **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.
- ✚ **Cross-sectional studies:** Descriptive research is generally a cross-sectional study where different sections belonging to the same group are studied.
- ✚ **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.

2.4.4 Applications of Descriptive Research with Examples

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. To understand the end objective of research goals 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. **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 to 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.

2.4.5 When to use Descriptive Study?

1. To determine the characteristics of market such as:

- (a) Size of the market
- (b) Buying power of the consumer
- (c) Product usage pattern
- (d) To find out the market share for the product
- (e) To track the performance of a brand.

2. To determine the association of the two variables such as Advertisement and sales.

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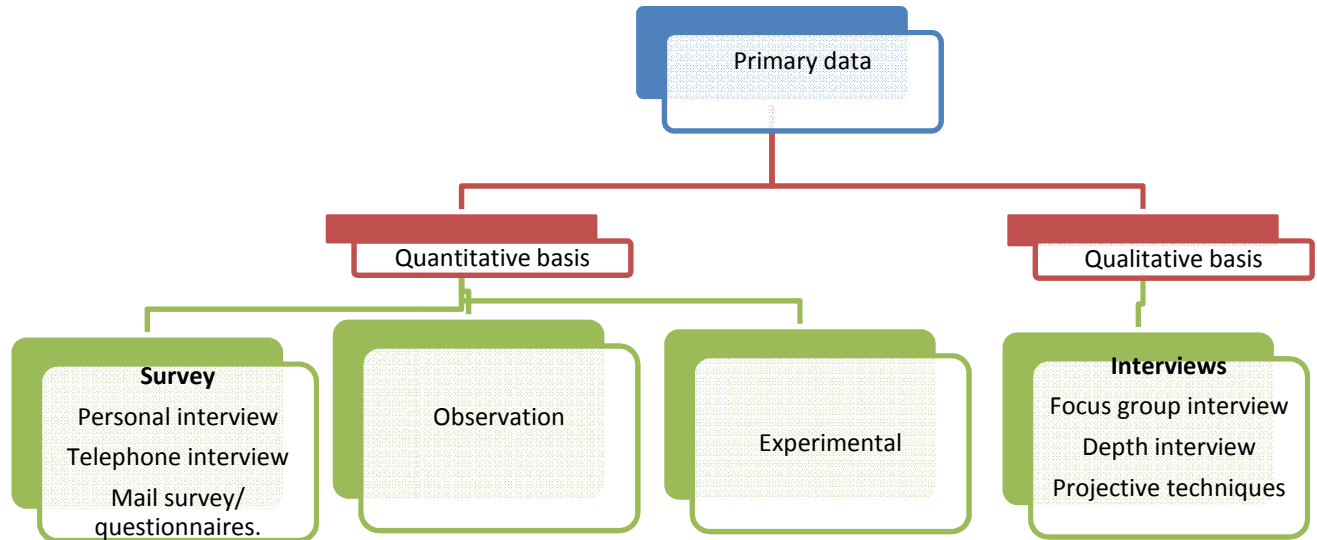
3. To make a prediction. We might be interested in sales forecasting for the next three years, so that we can plan for training of new sales representatives.
4. To estimate the proportion of people in a specific population, who behave in a particular way?

Example: What percentage of population in a particular geographical location would be shopping in a particular shop?

Hypothesis study at the descriptive research stage (to demonstrate the characteristics of the group).

Management problem	Research problem	Hypothesis
How should a new product be distributed?	Where do customers buy a similar product right now?	Upper class buyers use 'Shopper's Shop' and middle class buyers buy from local departmental stores
What will be the target segment?	What kind of people buy our product now?	Senior citizens buy our products. Young and married buy our competitors products.

2.4.6 Descriptive research methods for data collection



1. Survey

The survey is a research technique in which data are gathered by asking questions of respondents.

Survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research. The broad area of survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents. A "survey" can be anything from a short paper-and-pencil feedback form to an intensive one-on-one in-depth interview.

Types of Surveys



Surveys can be divided into two broad categories: the questionnaire and the interview.

Questionnaires are usually paper-and-pencil instruments that the respondent completes.

Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on the respondent says. Sometimes, it's hard to tell the difference between a questionnaire and an interview. For instance, some people think that questionnaires always ask short closed-ended questions while interviews always ask broad open-ended ones. But you will see questionnaires with open-ended questions (although they do tend to be shorter than in interviews) and there will often be a series of closed-ended questions asked in an interview.

Survey research has changed dramatically in the last ten years. We have automated telephone surveys that use random dialing methods. There are computerized kiosks in public places that allows people to ask for input. A whole new variation of group interview has evolved as focus group methodology. Increasingly, survey research is tightly integrated with the delivery of service. Your hotel room has a survey on the desk. Your waiter presents a short customer satisfaction survey with your check. You get a call for an interview several days after your last call to a computer company for technical assistance. You're asked to complete a short survey when you visit a web site.

2. Observation Studies

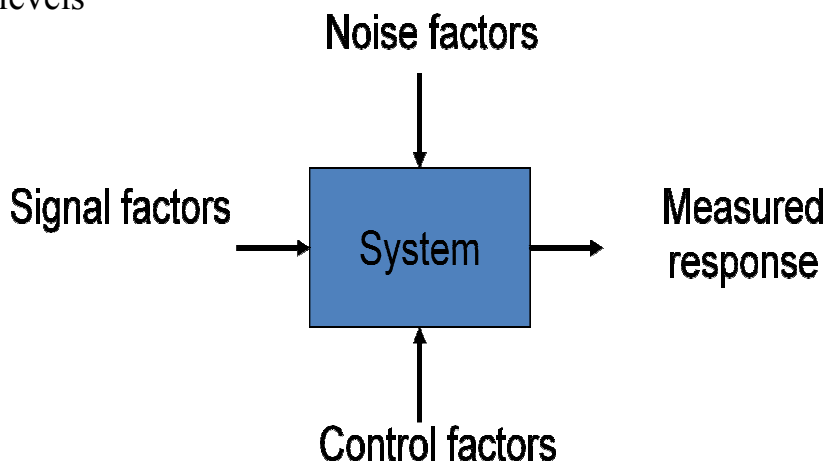
An observational study draws inferences about the possible effect of a treatment on subjects, where the assignment of subjects into a treated group versus a control group is outside the control of the investigator. This is in contrast with controlled experiments, such as randomized controlled trials, where each subject is randomly assigned to a treated group or a control group before the start of the treatment.

Observational studies are sometimes referred to as natural experiments or as quasi-experiments.

These differences in terminology reflect certain differences in emphasis, but a shared theme is that the early stages of planning or designing an observational study attempt to reproduce, as nearly as possible, some of the strengths of an experiment.

3. The **experimental method** involves manipulating one variable to determine if changes in one variable cause changes in another variable. Experimenter's first goal: Understand the process!

Experiments - used to study effects of parameters as they are set at various levels



2.4.7 Difference between Exploratory Research and Descriptive Research

Exploratory Research	Descriptive Research
It is concerned with the “Why” aspect of consumer behaviour i.e., it tries to understand the problem and not measure the result.	It is concerned with the “What”, “When” or “How often” on the consumer behaviour.
This research does not require large samples.	This needs large samples of respondents.
Sample need not to represent the population.	Sample must be representative of population.
Due to imprecise statement, data collection not easy.	Statement is precise. Therefore data collection is easy
Characteristics of interest to be measured is not clear.	Characteristics of interest to be measured is clear.
There is no need for a questionnaire for Collecting the data.	There should be a properly designed questionnaire for data collection.
Data collection methods are: Focus group Literature Searching Case study	Data collection methods are: Survey Observation Experimentation

Summary



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There are primarily three types of research design namely exploratory research, Casual and experimental research and descriptive research,.

Exploratory research helps the researcher to become familiar with the problem. It helps to establish the priorities for further research. It may or may not be possible to formulate Hypothesis during exploratory stage.

To get an insight into the problem, literature search, experience surveys, focus groups, and selected case studies assist in gaining insight into the problem.

The role of moderator or facilitator is extremely important in focus group. There are several variations in the formation of focus group.

Descriptive research is rigid. This type of research is basically dependent on hypothesis. Descriptive research is used to describe the characteristics of the groups. It can also be used forecasting or prediction. Causal research is conducted mainly to prove the fact that one factor "X" the cause was responsible for the effect "Y". While conducting experiment, the researcher must control the extraneous source of error. This may confound the experiment.

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