

Primary Data Collection Methods

There are some more variables like personal or impersonal / structured telephonic through mechanical devices and traditional one-to one conversations methods are also considered as method of classifying primary data collection methods. In the following sections, we will briefly discuss them.

Non-structured – Undisguised Method This method is found in qualitative research, where the data collected are of highly qualitative in nature and scope of applying statistical techniques are almost impossible or not warranted.

Focus Groups A focus group is a small group of people. A trained moderator conducts an interview in a non-structured manner in a natural manner. The moderator's role is to introduce a topic and to encourage the group to discuss it among themselves. This is suitable for 'Exploratory Research Designs'

Step-1 Examine the objectives of the research project. It provides the rationale for conducting the focus group.

Step-2 Specify the objectives—outlines the goals of the study in order to guide the interview.

Step-3 State the questions to be answered from the focus group—a detailed set of questions to be answered

Based on this objective, several questions pertinent to the study can be asked:

- Would you like to travel always by this airline? Why?
- Do you like to the services of customer care professionals / air hostess/ ground staffs? Why?
- How important is convenience to consumers?
- How important is variety of selection?
- Are consumers willing to pay more if there is personal service?
- How far are consumers willing to travel?

Step-4 Develop a Moderator's Outline. Based on the pertinent issues raised by the objectives of qualitative research, a moderator's outline can be devised. An effective focus group moderator prepares a discussion guide to help ensure that the focus group will cover all topics of interest. The discussion guide consists of written prefatory remarks to inform the group about the nature of the focus group and an outline of topics/ questions that will be addressed in the group session. It ensures that the moderator understands the nature of the study and the key findings desired by the client.

Step-5 Conduct the interview The moderator's job is to develop a rapport with the group and to promote interaction among its members. Moderator is responsible for setting a tone in the focus group that makes the respondents feel comfortable enough to discuss their thoughts. The sessions should be as relaxed and natural as possible. The discussion may start out general, but the moderator should be able to focus it on specific topics.

Step-6 Review tapes and analyze data—allows the researcher to uncover inconsistent responses, missed remarks, nonverbal communication and new ideas.

Step-7 Summarize findings and plan follow-up research—to probe further into the issues and sample statistically significant populations. Finally, ideas for follow-up action can be generated. For example, based on the focus group results we can now proceed to quantitative research.

Moderator types - On occasion, the focus group study designed in such a way that may have two moderators. These moderators can play different roles while conducting the focus group discussions. The difference between a dual-moderator group and a dueling-moderator group is that in the case of a dual-moderator group, one moderator is responsible for the smooth flow of the session and the other is responsible for ensuring discussion of specific issues. In the case of a dueling-moderator group, the two moderators take opposite positions on the issues to be discussed.

Advantages of Focus group There are four primary advantages of the focus group:

- (1) It allows people to discuss their true feelings and convictions,
- (2) It is relatively fast,
- (3) It is easy to execute and very flexible,
- (4) It is inexpensive.

Disadvantages of Focus Group

- The group is not representative of the general population
- There is extreme dependence on the performance of the moderator
- It is hard to correctly interpret the responses.
- Coding and analysis is cumbersome.
- The results are subject to researcher or client bias.

Focus Groups

Use Video Conferencing In the recent years, a number of focus groups use videoconferencing as a device to overcome the participation of respondents from various places. With traditional focus groups managers and creative personnel often watch the moderator lead the group from behind one-way mirrors. If the focus group is being conducted “out of town,” the executive personnel usually have to spend more time in airplanes, hotels, and taxis than they do watching the group session. With video-conference focus groups, they can stay home.

Online Focus Group

Research companies often set up a private chat room on their company Web sites for focus group interviews. Participants in these chat rooms feel their anonymity is very secure. Often they will make statements or ask questions they would never address under other circumstances. This can be a major advantage for a company investigating sensitive or embarrassing issues.

Depth Interview Method Depth interview method is also often applied in the case of ‘Exploratory Research designs’. Concepts may be discussed with top executives and knowledgeable managers who have had personal experience in the field being researched. This constitutes an informal experience survey. Such a study may be conducted by the business manager rather than the research department for the following purposes.

- Detailed probing of the individual.
- Discussions on topics considered confidential, sensitive, or embarrassing.
- Situations where strong social norms exist and the individual may be easily swayed by group response.
- Detailed understanding of complicated behaviour.
- Interviews with professional people.
- Interviews with competitors who are unlikely to reveal the information in a group setting.
- Situations where the product consumption experience is sensory in nature affecting mood states and emotions.

Procedure – The following steps may be followed for conducting depth interview

Step-1 A depth interview is conducted on a one-on-one basis. Choose the expert to be interviewed.

Step-2 The respondent is probed in depth by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings on a topic. The interviewer attempts to get the subject to talk freely and the direction of the interview is influenced heavily by the subject's answers.

Step-3 Summarise the findings and draw conclusions.

Advantages of depth interview - The major advantages of depth interviews are that great depths of insights can be uncovered, the responses can be directly associated with the respondent, and there is no social pressure to conform to a group response.

Disadvantages of depth interview - Depth interviews have lost their popularity recently because of the following difficulties.

- Skilled interviewers capable of conducting depth interviews are expensive and difficult to find.
- The lack of structure makes the results very susceptible to the influence of the interviewer. The quality and completeness of the results depends very heavily on the skills of the interviewer.
- The data obtained is difficult to analyze and interpret.

Tips for effectiveness - The quality of responses is very crucial and it completely depends upon the skill set of the interviewer. The interviewer has to conduct him / her in very professional manner with the respondents to get highest cooperation from the respondents. Meeting the respondents with prior permissions / appointments, place of meeting, procedure for recording the responses are some of the key issues to be planned.

Observation Method organisations trace huge amount of data through observation mode. Scientific observation is the systematic process of recording behavioural patterns of people, objects, and occurrences without questioning or communicating with them.

Types of observation The researcher utilizes different observation methods.

➤ Structured Vs. Unstructured observation - Structured observation is appropriate when the marketing research problem has been clearly defined and the information needed has been specified. It requires that the researcher specify in detail what is to be observed and how the measurements are to be recorded. Unstructured observation is appropriate when the problem has yet to be formulated precisely, and flexibility is needed in observation to identify key components of the problem and to develop hypotheses.

➤ Disguised Vs. undisguised observation - In disguised observation, the respondents are not aware that they are being observed, whereas in undisguised observation the respondents are aware that they are under observation. Disguised observation is used when it is felt that the respondents would act differently under direct observation.

➤ **Natural Vs. Contrived Observation** - Natural observation involves observing behaviour as it normally takes place in the environment. Contrived observation takes place in an artificial environment that has been created by the researcher. Natural observations allow the researcher to observe actual behaviour, but do not allow for inferences on the causes of behaviour. Contrived observation enables the researcher to control more of the variables that affect behaviour.

Observation can be classified based on the observer as personal or mechanical

➤ **Personal observation** - The researcher himself goes to the field and personally observes actual behaviour as it occurs, and the observer merely records what takes place. The researcher does not attempt to control or manipulate the phenomenon being observed. This method requires researcher's efforts and time; if field forces are employed, then the researcher has to train them on method of observing.

➤ **Mechanical observation** - These are devices used to continually record ongoing behaviour for later analysis. Closed circuit camera, Toll Plaza Tracking system, Customer Shopping Behaviour Tracing Equipments and many more to say, are some of the equipments used in the recent times, to trace the consumer behaviour.

Advantages of Observation Methods The advantages of observation methods are:

- Observational methods permit measurement of actual behaviour.
- The potential bias caused by the interviewer and the interviewing process is eliminated or reduced.
- Certain types of data can be collected best only by observation.
- If the observed phenomenon occurs at relatively frequent intervals and is of short duration, observational methods may cost less and be faster than the survey methods.

Disadvantages of Observation The following disadvantages of observation merit attention.

- Very little can be inferred about the motives, beliefs, attitudes, and preferences underlying the observed behaviour.
- Selective perception of the observer can bias the data.
- In some cases the use of observational methods may border on being unethical because the subjects' behaviour is being monitored without their explicit knowledge or consent.

Structured – Undisguised Method The response generated from the study is highly structured and the respondents know for what purpose [undisguised] the data have been collected by the

researchers. This method is used for descriptive studies / quantitative research. The data can be analysed using sophisticated statistical methods.

Survey Method **Surveys** require asking people, respondents, for information using either written or verbal questioning. Questionnaires or interviews collect data through the mail, on the telephone, or face-to-face.