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# Whether to Use Qualitative or Quantitative Research to Answer a Marketing Question

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Overall there are two kinds of research: qualitative and quantitative. For any research project you must be clear about which type will give you the information required. Think about the answers you want and how they will be used.

### **Why or How Many?**

The role of qualitative research is to tell you why; quantitative research tells you how many. Do not be tricked into thinking that you can do both jobs well with one approach. The methods are quite different. So are the answers.

If you are trying to improve a product or service, identify different market segments or develop a persuasive advertising or sales message, then qualitative research is the way to go.

If instead, your task is to determine how many people like an idea, to measure the size of a market or to prepare a volume estimate, then quantitative research is what you need.

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## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

### **Identify Key Issues**

Qualitative research should be used when you really want to understand in detail why an individual does something. It is often used to elicit a respondent's Purchase Logic. Purchase Logic explains why an individual buys a particular product or service. Thus, it is the basis for identifying real market segments, i.e., groups of people who purchase for the same reasons.

Qualitative research is particularly useful as a tool for determining what is important to customers and why it is important. Often marketing people are faced with the problem of not knowing what questions to ask in quantitative research. Qualitative research provides a process from which key research issues are identified and questions formulated and by discovering what really matters to customers and why.

Qualitative research is also used to identify the full range of responses or

opinions that exist in a market or population. Qualitative research helps you identify issues and understand why they are important. With this goal in mind, it is also important to speak to a diverse group of respondents when conducting qualitative research.

Qualitative research reveals areas of consensus, either positive or negative, in the patterns of response. It also determines which ideas generate a strong emotional response. Thus, it is especially useful in situations which involve the ongoing development and refinement of new ideas.

Qualitative research should not be used when you need to learn how many people will respond in a particular way or how many hold a particular opinion. Qualitative research is not designed to collect quantifiable results. After learning why one person would buy or respond in a certain way through qualitative research, it is relatively straightforward to count how many other individuals there are like him or her through quantitative research. Thus, qualitative research is often followed by a quantitative study.

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH



**Measure  
Attitudes  
and  
Behavior**

The primary reason for conducting quantitative research is to learn how many people in a population share particular characteristics or like a particular idea. It is specifically designed to produce accurate and reliable measurements that permit statistical analysis.

Quantitative research is appropriate for measuring both attitudes and behavior. If you want to know how many people use a product or service or have interest in a new product concept, then quantitative research is what you need. It is also used to size a market, to estimate business potential or volume, and to measure the size and importance of segments that exist in a market.

Quantitative research should also be used when you want to profile a group of people based on shared characteristics (such as demographics). Through advanced statistical techniques such as correlation, regression, cluster analysis or factor analysis, quantitative research can be used to create models that predict whether or not someone holds a particular opinion or would act in a certain way based on an observable characteristic.

Quantitative research is neither appropriate nor cost effective for learning why people act or think as they do. The questions must be direct and easily quantified, and the sample must be quite large (200 is an absolute minimum) so as to permit reliable statistical analysis.

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### *Related Articles*

To learn more about the topics discussed in this article, you may wish to read the following papers found on [www.uwa.com](http://www.uwa.com):

- Identify Market Segments That Want a Product or Service
- Purchase Logic: The Foundation of Marketing Strategy