

Chapter 3

Qualitative research

Learning objectives

- Compare and contrast qualitative research and quantitative research.
- Understand the use of qualitative research and exploratory research designs.
- Describe the basic orientations of qualitative research.
- Recognise common qualitative research tools and know the advantages and limitations of their use.
- Prepare focus group outlines.
- Recognise technological advances for applying qualitative research approaches.
- Appreciate the role of qualitative research in management decision making.

Chapter summary

Part three of the text consists of Chapters 3 to 9. Together these seven chapters cover the second stage of the marketing research process, planning the research design. This chapter deals with just a small portion of the stage, namely exploratory research and qualitative analysis. The four general categories of exploratory research are identified, including the three categories of pilot studies. The chapter concludes with a warning that exploratory techniques are usually based on the researcher's judgement and cannot act as a substitute for quantitative research.

What is qualitative research?

Qualitative research helps ensure that a rigorous and conclusive study will not begin without an adequate understanding of the nature of the marketing problem. Most qualitative research designs provide information that offers greater understanding of a concept. In contrast, quantitative data provide precise measurement.

Qualitative research may be a single research investigation or it may be a series of informal studies; both methods provide background information. Researchers must be creative when choosing information sources. They should explore all appropriate inexpensive sources before embarking on expensive research of their own. However, they should still be systematic and careful at all times.

Uses of qualitative research

There are three purposes for conducting qualitative research; all three are interrelated:

1. **Diagnosing a situation:** exploratory research helps diagnose the dimensions of problems so that successive research projects will be on target.
2. **Screening alternatives:** when several opportunities arise and budgets restrict the use of all possible options, exploratory research may be used to determine the best alternatives. Certain evaluative information can be obtained through exploratory research.

Concept testing refers to those research procedures that test some sort of stimulus as a proxy for a new, revised or remarketed product or service. Generally consumers are presented with an idea and asked if they like it and if they would use it. Concept testing is a means of evaluating ideas by providing a feel for the merits of the idea before committing to any research, development and marketing. Concept testing portrays the functions, uses and possible situations for the proposed product.

3. **Discovering new ideas:** uncovering consumer needs is a great potential source of ideas. Exploratory research is often used to generate new product and advertising ideas.

Qualitative versus quantitative research

Qualitative research can accomplish research objectives that quantitative research cannot, and vice versa. Many good research projects combine both. Quantitative marketing research addresses research objectives through empirical assessments that involve numerical measurement and analysis approaches. Quantitative research is more apt to stand on its own as it requires less interpretation.

Exhibit 3.1 on page 72 illustrates some differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

- Quantitative researchers measure concepts with scales that provide numeric values.
- Qualitative researchers are more interested in observing, listening and interpreting.
- Qualitative researchers are intimately involved in the research process and in constructing the results.
- Qualitative research is said to be more subjective, meaning the results are researcher-dependent.
- Qualitative research usually involves a handful of consumers, which is acceptable in discovery-oriented research.
- Smaller samples do not necessarily mean lower costs, because of the greater researcher involvement.

- Qualitative research is most often used in exploratory designs.

Qualitative research orientations

Orientations to qualitative research are very much influenced by the different fields of study involved in research. Major categories of qualitative research include:

- Phenomenology: originating in philosophy and psychology.
- Ethnography: originating in anthropology.
- Grounded theory: originating in sociology.
- Case studies: originating in psychology and in business research.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology represents a philosophical approach to studying human experiences based on the idea that human experience itself is inherently subjective and determined by the context in which people live. The researcher focuses on how a person's behaviour is shaped by the relationship they have with their physical environment, objects, people and situations. The researcher relies largely on conversational interview tools. Interviews are usually recorded and interpreted by the researcher, who tries to avoid asking direct questions and asks the respondent to tell a story about their experience. Respondents must be comfortable telling their story, and ways to accomplish this include becoming a member of the group or to ensure anonymity.

Hermeneutics is an approach to understanding phenomenology that relies on analysis of texts in which a person tells a story about themselves. Meaning is drawn by connecting text passages to one another or to themes expressed outside the story.

A hermeneutic unit is a text passage from a respondent's story that is linked with a key theme from within this story or provided by the researcher. Specific software can help interpret texts (e.g., Atlas.ti) and is also appropriate to assist with grounded theory approaches.

Ethnography

Ethnography represents ways of studying cultures through methods that involve becoming highly involved within that culture. Participant-observation typifies this approach and means the researcher becomes immersed within a culture that he or she is studying and draws data from his or her observations. *Culture* can be broad (i.e. Australian culture) or narrow (i.e. urban gang). A new emerging area of ethnography is netnography, which is the study of online posts in discussion groups and online communities. Observation plays a key role in ethnography and

is useful when a particular culture comprises individuals who cannot or will not verbalise their thoughts and feelings.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory represents an inductive investigation in which the researcher poses questions about information provided by respondents or taken from historical records.

The researcher asks the questions to him- or herself and repeatedly questions the responses to derive deeper explanations. Grounded theory is particularly applicable in highly dynamic situations involving rapid and significant change. Two key questions asked are:

- 'What is happening here?'
- 'How is it different?'

The distinguishing characteristic of this theory is that it does not begin with a theory but instead extracts one from whatever emerges from an area of inquiry. Grounded theory is applied in the following ways:

- analysing several years of text to reveal underlying problems
- applying software to help with the investigation.

Additionally, grounded theorists often rely on visual representations.

Case studies

Case studies simply refer to the documented history of a particular person, group, organisation or event. The case studies can then be analysed for important themes, which are identified by the frequency with which the same term (or a synonym) arises in the narrative description. Themes may be useful in discovering relevant variables. Case studies are commonly applied in business. A primary advantage is that an entire organisation or entity can be investigated in depth with meticulous attention to detail. Case studies allow the researcher to study the order of events or to concentrate on identifying relationships among functions, individuals or entities. Case studies often require the cooperation of the party whose history is being studied.

Teaching tip: Present students with the following hypothetical situation:

You are thinking of opening a city store that sells fresh fruit juices. To gain knowledge about this type of business, what organisation should you conduct a case study on? Most students should say Boost Juice or Java Juice.

Common techniques used in qualitative research

The purpose, rather than the technique of the research determines whether a study is qualitative, descriptive or causal. There are three common techniques of qualitative research:

1. focus-group interviews
2. projective techniques
3. depth interviews.

Focus-group interviews

A focus-group interview is a free-flowing interview with a small group of people. They have a flexible format and can discuss anything from a brand to a product itself. The group typically consists of six to ten participants and a moderator. The moderator's role is to introduce a topic and to encourage the group to discuss it among themselves. There are four primary advantages of the focus group (relative to alternatives). It:

- allows people to discuss their true feelings and convictions
- is relatively fast
- is easy to execute and very flexible
- is inexpensive.

However, focus-group interviews have two major disadvantages:

- A small group of people, no matter how carefully selected, will not be representative of the wider population. So there may be sampling problems.
- Without an experienced moderator, a self-appointed leader may dominate the session, resulting in an abnormal 'halo effect' on the interview.

Specific advantages of focus-group interviews can be categorised as follows:

- **Synergy:** the combined effort of the group will produce a wider range of information, insights and ideas than by accumulating separate responses.
- **Snowballing:** a bandwagon effect occurs. One individual often triggers a chain of responses from the other participants.
- **Serendipity:** an idea may drop out of the blue and the group environment affords the opportunity to develop such an idea to its full significance.
- **Stimulation:** respondents want to express their ideas and expose their opinions as the general level of excitement over the topic increases.
- **Security:** the participants are more likely to be candid because they realise that the things said are not being identified with any one individual.

- **Spontaneity:** people speak only when they have definite feelings about a subject, not because a question requires an answer.
- **Specialisation:** the group interview allows the use of a more highly trained moderator because there are certain economies of scale when a large number of people are 'interviewed' simultaneously.
- **Structure:** the moderator, being one of the group, can control the topics the group discusses.
- **Speed:** a number of interviews are being conducted at one time.
- **Scientific scrutiny:** the group interview can be recorded for observation. This affords closer scrutiny and allows the researchers to check for consistency in the interpretations.

Group composition

The ideal size for a focus group is six to ten relatively homogeneous people. This avoids one or two members intimidating the others, and yet is a small enough group to allow adequate participation. Homogeneous groups avoid confusion that might occur if there were too many differing viewpoints. Researchers who wish to collect information from different groups should conduct several different focus groups.

Environmental conditions

The group session may take place at the research agency, the advertising agency, a hotel or one of the subjects' homes. The sessions should be as relaxed and natural as possible.

The moderator

The moderator's job is to develop a rapport with the group and to promote interaction among its members. The discussion may start out in general terms, but the moderator should be able to focus it on specific topics.

Planning the focus group outline

Effective focus-group moderators prepare discussion guides to help ensure that the groups cover all topics of interest. The discussion guide begins with a written statement of the prefatory remarks to inform the group about the nature of the focus group and then outlines topics or questions to be addressed in the group session.

Focus groups as diagnostic tools

Focus groups can be helpful in later stages of a research project, but the findings from surveys or other quantitative techniques can raise more questions than they answer. Managers who are puzzled about the meaning of survey research results may use focus groups to better

understand what consumer surveys indicate. In such a situation, the focus group supplies diagnostic help after quantitative research has been conducted.

Shortcomings

The shortcomings of focus groups are similar to those of most qualitative research techniques. However, there are two specific shortcomings of bringing people together for focus groups:

- **Ensuring the moderators are sensitive and effective:** without a good moderator, self-appointed participants may dominate a session, giving somewhat misleading results. If participants react negatively towards the dominant member, a 'halo effect' on attitudes towards the concept or topic of discussion may occur. This situation should be carefully avoided.
- **Sampling problems:** researchers often select focus-group participants because they have similar backgrounds and experiences or because screening indicates that the participants are more articulate or gregarious than the typical consumer. Such participants may not be representative of the entire target market.

Depth interviews

Depth interviews are similar to the client interviews of a clinical psychiatrist. The researcher asks many questions and asks the subject to elaborate on their answers; the subject matter is usually disguised. Depth interviews are not as popular as they once were, because they are time-consuming and expensive, and because they require the services of a skilled interviewer.

Projective techniques

Individuals may be more likely to give a true answer if the question is disguised. If respondents are presented with unstructured and ambiguous stimuli and are allowed considerable freedom to respond, they are more likely to express their true feelings. A projective technique is an indirect means of questioning that enables respondents to 'project' their beliefs onto a third party, thus allowing the respondents to express emotions and opinions that would normally be hidden from others and even hidden from themselves. Common techniques are described below.

Word association

The subject is presented with a list of words one at a time and asked to respond with the first word that comes to mind. Both verbal and nonverbal responses are recorded. Word association should reveal each individual's true feelings about the subject. Interpreting the results is difficult;

the researcher should avoid subjective interpretations and should consider both what the subject said and what was not said (e.g., hesitations).

Sentence completion method

This technique is also based on the assumption of free association. Respondents are required to complete a number of partial sentences with the first word or phrase that comes to mind. Answers tend to be more complete than in word association; however, the intention of the study is more apparent.

Third-person technique and role playing

Providing a 'mask' is the basic idea behind the third-person technique. Respondents are asked why a third person does what he or she does, or what a third person thinks of a product. The respondent can transfer his or her attitudes onto the third person. Role playing is a dynamic re-enactment of the third-person technique in a given situation. This technique requires the subject to act out someone else's behaviour in a particular setting.

Thematic apperception test (TAT)

This test consists of a series of pictures in which consumers and products are the centre of attention. The investigator asks the subject what is happening in the picture and what the people might do next. Themes (thematic) are elicited on the basis of the perceptual-interpretive (apperception) use of the pictures. The researcher then analyses the content of the stories that the subjects relate. The picture should present a familiar, interesting and well-defined problem, but the solution should be ambiguous. A cartoon test, or picture frustration version of TAT, uses a cartoon drawing and asks the respondent to suggest the dialogue that the cartoon characters might use. Construction techniques request that the consumer draw a picture, construct a collage or write a short story to express their perceptions or feelings.

Modern technology and qualitative research

Videoconferencing and streaming media

As the ability to communicate via telecommunications and videoconferencing links has improved in quality, the number of companies using these systems has increased.

Streaming media consist of multimedia content such as audio or video that is made available in real time over the Internet or a corporate intranet. Offsite managers can view the focus group using a media player like Microsoft Media Player. Traditionally, the quality of streaming video has been far lower than videoconferencing, but streaming technology is improving.

Interactive media and online focus groups

An online focus group refers to a qualitative research effort in which a group of individuals provide unstructured comments by entering their remarks into an electronic, Internet display board of some type. Participants use a keyboard and mouse to make their remarks during a chat room session or as a blog. Because comments are entered into the computer, transcripts of verbatim responses are available immediately after the group session. Benefits include:

- quick and cost-efficient
- group synergy and snowballing ideas may be diminished
- 'continuous' focus groups can be established through an Internet blog. This technique can be called a focus blog when the intention is to mine the site for business research purposes.

Social networking

Social networking is one of the most significant trends in recent times, becoming the primary tool for communicating with friends for many consumers. A large portion of this information discusses marketing and consumer-related information. Companies monitor these sites for information related to their particular brands and code it as positive or negative.

Software development

Computerised qualitative analysis software is now commonly used. Three commonly used programs are Nudist, ATLAS.ti and NVivo. These help identify themes and connections within text as well as videotapes and photographs. There are also several other software programs that can assist with basic qualitative interpretation. Some are available as freeware. These are listed on the Impoverished Social Scientist Guide to Free Software, at Harvard University (see <http://www.umass.edu/qdap>), which is regularly updated. Trial and student versions of the more popular packages are also available.

Modern predictive analytic software enables text data to be mined from various sources including social networking sites, recorded conversations from call centres, email contacts and many more. Leading statistical analysis companies (SAS and SPSS) offer advanced text mining capabilities. These programs can be expensive, but they offer the ability to extract meaning from the tremendous amounts of verbal information generated by the customers, partners and competitors.

Online versus face-to-face focus-group technique

Respondents feel online anonymity is very secure in online focus groups. Online focus groups can be larger because participants do not have to be in the same room at a research facility

(i.e., 25 participants or more is not uncommon). The Internet does not have geographical restrictions. Disadvantages of online focus groups are:

- the researcher does not exercise as much control over who is participating
- the moderators cannot see body language and facial expressions
- the moderator's ability to probe and ask additional questions on the spot is reduced
- respondents cannot touch or taste anything.

A warning about qualitative research

Qualitative research techniques have their limitations, and the interpretation of their results is judgemental. Thus, they cannot take the place of quantitative, conclusive research. Because of certain problems – such as interpreter bias or sample size – exploratory findings should be treated as preliminary. The major benefit of exploratory research is that it generates insights and clarifies the marketing problems for testing in future research.

If the findings of qualitative research are very negative then no further research should probably be conducted. However, the researcher should proceed with caution as there is a possibility that a potentially good idea could be rejected because of unfavourable results at the exploratory stage. In other situations, when everything looks positive in the exploratory stage, there is a temptation to market the product without further research. In this situation, marketing managers should determine the benefit of further information versus the cost of additional research. When a major commitment of resources is involved, it is often well worth conducting a quantitative study.

Solutions

Questions for review and critical thinking

1. Comment on the following remark by a marketing consultant: 'Qualitative research is subjective and uses a small number of respondents; it does not constitute market research.'

The consultant's remark indicates that qualitative research is not descriptive or conclusive marketing research. In other words, this person is thinking that marketing research must have a representative sample and be quantitative. The perspective in this book is that qualitative research has its purposes and it is indeed marketing research. Of course, qualitative research has its limitations and subsequent research should follow.

2. What type of qualitative research would you suggest in the following situations?
 - a. A product manager suggests developing a new interactive game for the Apple Watch.

The product manager could consider case studies of existing interactive games in the marketplace. A pilot study, small scale examination via secondary research of successful games may also help in designing and developing a new game. Game concepts could also be tested later in focus groups.

- b. A research project has the purpose of evaluating potential brand names for a new cocktail ready-to-drink mixer.

When generating a new brand name, the research question will focus on the consumers' associations with several proposed brand names. The name should be selected because it has a connotation that is compatible with the intended product concept. A connotation that presents a favourable and distinctive image is desired. A word association test might be very useful. A statement such as the following might be used: 'I am going to read you several names. I would like you to respond with the first thing that comes to your mind. For example, if I say '*cocktail*' you might respond by saying 'expensive' and so on.

- c. A movie producer is interested in the future of the cinema attendance versus downloaded movies.

This might begin with the use of secondary information, as described earlier in this chapter about the success or otherwise of cinema versus streaming movies. Note that we discuss the use of secondary data in more detail, including cinema attendance in

Chapter 4 of the text). In-depth interviews with industry experts and cinema distributors would also be beneficial in identifying future trends.

- d. An advertiser wishes to identify the symbolism associated with using a power tool.

A thematic apperception test might be a useful technique in this situation. For example, the first picture might be a person in the process of using a power tool to drill a hole. Or the picture might show two people in the same room, one beginning to sand a floor. A sentence completion test might also be used. If a focus group is used, users and non-users of power tools should not be in the same group. Each of these situations could be explored in various ways. The preceding answers are only a suggestion of possible research strategies.

3. What are the differences between 'real-time' and 'off-time' focus groups? Suppose a manager wants to examine students' attitudes to buying digital textbooks. Which type of online focus group would be better suited for them?

Real-time focus groups occur online and offline, with respondents giving feedback to discussion questions at the same point in time. Off-time focus groups occur online when respondents do not have to present but can contribute to a discussion forum by posting comments. The advantage of off-time focus groups is that respondents can reply at their own convenience and it is easier to organise and implement as a research design. The disadvantage is that there is not the same level of interaction in a real-time focus group. With the research example provided, off-time focus groups may be a good way to get student feedback about buying digital textbooks, as the level of interaction with peers may not be a crucial part of the research problem.

4. What benefits can be gained from case studies? What dangers, if any, do they present? In what situations are they most useful?

Case studies normally portray extremely good or extremely bad examples. If one's situation is similar to the case study, an in-depth investigation of one situation may allow the research to glean considerable information and gain many insights. The major danger is that the situation in the case may not be typical. Making the assumption that one situation is the same as another can be risky. Case studies are most useful when the business or industry under investigation is a close match to the researcher's needs. They can remove some of the uncertainty surrounding a problem and pave the way for additional research.

5. What is the function of a focus group? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

The function of a focus group is to identify the opinions, feelings and convictions of participants towards a specified topic. These opinions are developed through an unstructured, free-flowing interview process. The primary advantages of a focus-group interview are that such research is fast, easy and inexpensive. A focus-group interview is also much more flexible than a typical survey because numerous topics can be discussed.

The moderator is crucial to the success of the focus-group interview. This person must not allow participants to be affected by the actions of a dominant member.

A disadvantage of focus-group research is that the interpretation of the information received is largely subjective, thus increasing the possibility of bias. The small number of participants may not accurately reflect the larger population. Such exploratory research is generally successful if it clarifies problems that will be tested in future research.

Focus-group research may be used for many diverse purposes. For example, Lee Jeans conducted focus groups with women between the ages of 24–54 and found that women classified three different types of jeans: work jeans – those worn for work in the house or in the backyard; casual jeans – for shopping, school and other regular activity; and dress-up jeans – for social occasions. The focus-group interviews with consumers also revealed jeans provided working women with a sense of relaxation and energy. Women believe that coming home and putting on jeans after a day at work, in a uniform or office attire, was a pleasurable experience.

The Carnation Company provides another interesting example of the type of information focus-group interviews can provide. Past research had revealed that many people did not drink powdered milk because of a perceived taste deficiency compared with fluid milk. Carnation decided to reposition the brand to make it more appealing. First, Carnation sought answers to the following questions:

- Why do the majority of consumers who drink milk shun powdered milk?
- What would get them to drink it?
- In contrast, why do present powdered milk drinkers find the product acceptable?

These research questions suggested the need to develop hypotheses through the focus-group technique. Separate sessions with users and nonusers were conducted. Discussions with nonusers confirmed that taste was a major barrier to use. Sessions with users revealed that a large percentage solved the taste problem by mixing powdered milk half and half with fluid whole milk, producing a cheaper, better-tasting, low-fat milk. Carnation hypothesised that nonusers would be more likely to convert if the company repositioned its product as a milk extender. Quantitative research confirmed this hypothesis, and Carnation executed the strategy with an advertising and promotion campaign that told the milk extender story.

- 6.** If a researcher wanted to conduct a focus group with children, what special considerations might be necessary?

First the researchers need to get legal clearances to work with children. They then need to take into account some of the nuances of working with children. For example, children aim to please adults and so can be easily led by the moderator. Their level of understanding of abstract concepts also varies. A child may have difficulty understanding marketing terms like satisfaction, brand image and attitude. Children may be influenced by peer pressure. A moderator might take special care to indicate that the client wants to know when people differ and that it is important to show disagreement if there is any. Some children might be loud or boisterous if they are in a group with friends. Groups should be selected so there will not be too much socialising within the group.

- 7.** A focus-group moderator plans to administer a questionnaire before starting the group discussion about several new product concepts. Is this a good idea? Explain.

This is a very typical procedure. It is often used when it is important for employees to understand or to think about an unfamiliar concept or something they have not been exposed to in the past. By asking respondents to read concept statements and answer a short questionnaire to evaluate the concepts, the researcher has some assurance that the discussion will begin with everyone having a general understanding of the topic. In addition, this procedure provides the subjects with something to do while they are waiting for all group members to assemble.

- 8.** Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the following focus-group techniques.

- a.** A videoconferencing system that allows marketers to conduct focus groups in two different locations with participants interacting with each other.

This system would be expensive. It would, however, be useful when the subjects are geographically far apart and too busy to travel to a central location. For example, a manufacturer of surgical equipment might use this type of focus group to get several heart transplant surgeons together. This technique would probably be too elaborate and too expensive for a day-to-day focus group.

- b.** A system that uses telephone conference calls for group sessions.

The major advantage of the telephone conference call system appears to be convenience. The researcher does not require that the subjects travel to a central location for interviewing. The group members may hear each other and conduct a group discussion. However, a major disadvantage is that visual aids (e.g., concept

statements) cannot be handed out and individuals cannot see each other. Thus, a group member who wishes to speak but is dominated by a 'phone hogging' individual may not bother to speak up. It is more difficult to ensure that all the information will be collected from the members of the group.

- c. An online focus group that allows respondents to join the discussion and type in their responses at their own convenience.

These are often called 'off-time' focus groups. The advantage of off-time focus groups is that respondents can reply at their own convenience and it is easier to organise and implement as a research design. The disadvantage is that there is not the same level of interaction in a real-time focus group.

- 9. An online retailer receives many thousands of customer emails a year. Some are complaints, some are compliments. They cover a broad range of topics. Are these letters a possible source for exploratory research? Why or why not?

Yes they are. This is a relatively inexpensive source of consumer information that is neglected in many organisations. Answering the emails should be delegated to a market research analyst. The text also discusses how text mining (both of written and verbal information) is being increasingly used by companies. The information could be a suggestion for a product improvement and is not analysed in any systematic fashion by the marketing research department. Many new product ideas are generated on the basis of problems with the product. Complaints are a good source of knowledge about web design problems.

- 10. How might exploratory research be used to screen various ideas for advertising copy in television advertisements?

Exploratory research techniques are often used to screen ideas for advertising. Advertising ideas can be expressed as concept statements in a manner very similar to concept statements for new products. In this type of advertising concept testing, consumers are presented with a slogan or some rough advertising copy and asked what this statement means to them – if it is believable, if they like it, etc. Projection techniques can be used to get top-of-the-mind reactions to these advertising concepts. Often, focus groups are used to evaluate certain advertising themes – possibly produced in a rough form that is shown to members of the focus group.

For example, an advertising agency soliciting business from fast-food restaurant McDonald's developed a test commercial that targeted both preteen girls and their mothers. The television advertisement featured a girl who innocently encountered a boy at school. In

the final scene, the girl and her friends have just been seated at McDonald's and the boy walks over and sits next to her. Preteen girls, when asked about the commercial in a focus group, showed minor irritations at the false eyelash scene which they thought condescending, but indicated a strong positive response to encounters with the boy, especially when he joins the group. However, when a group of mothers, whose approval was required for their daughters' visit to McDonald's, were questioned in another focus group, the opposite was true. The mothers identified strongly with the eyelash scene, which reminded them of youthful togetherness, and with the early scene with the boy, but they drew the line when the boy actually sat down with the girl, who they thought too young to be dating.

- 11.** Most projective techniques attempt to find out a respondent's true feelings by asking indirect questions rather than using direct questions that could give the respondent a good idea about the researcher's true motives. Does the use of this technique constitute deception?

Individuals may be more likely to give a true answer if the question is disguised. If respondents are presented with unstructured and ambiguous stimuli and are allowed considerable freedom to respond, they are more likely to express their true feelings. Most researchers believe that if a 'deception' is temporary and if respondents are debriefed about the nature of the study there is no problem conducting research in this way.

Some argue that indirect means of questioning enable respondents to 'project' their beliefs onto a third party or into a situation, thus allowing the respondents to express emotions and opinions that would normally be hidden from others and even hidden from themselves. However, most researchers would argue that there isn't any deception. The respondent is asked a variety of questions where the purpose is not understood by the respondent. If the respondent has been told the general purpose of the study and agreed to cooperate, there is no need to explain every detail of the study.

- 12.** What are the potential problems with the following focus groups? How might they be improved?

The Weekend Dads' organisation is developing a free program to cater for the needs of fathers who only see their children on weekends. It is looking for fathers to take part in its focus groups to determine what services and assistance the groups can provide.

The topic is rather sensitive and potentially embarrassing to participants. Getting fathers to open up and speak freely about their needs may prove to be a challenge as such admissions may be associated with poor parenting. A skilled and tactful moderator is

needed to put them at ease. Only then will they feel comfortable enough to talk about weekend parenting and any assistance they may require.

Another problem that may arise is the 'halo effect', where a self-appointed father dominates the discussion. Again, an experienced moderator can overcome this by interjecting at the opportune time and requesting comments from other participants.

Finally, sampling problems may arise. No matter how carefully they are selected, the fathers may not be representative of the wider population. Several focus groups will be necessary before common themes become apparent. The Weekend Dads' organisation may then decide to conduct convergent depth interviews. Surveys are not recommended because of the sensitivity of the topic.

- 13.** Comment on the following approach to qualitative research. Does it breach any of Hugh Mackay's seven deadly sins? If the research was successful, does it need to be changed or improved?

Dr Clotaire Rapaille, a 'cultural psychologist', has made a fortune by applying a brand of Jungian psychoanalysis to market research. He does not believe in focus groups. Instead he uses a technique called 'imprint sessions'. They take three hours, and for the last hour, participants lie on the floor in a dark room, listen to relaxing music, taking their minds back to childhood. When he worked for Chrysler he instructed his subjects to go back to the 'very first time in your life, your mental imprint, when you thought "car". There is an emotion attached to that'. What came out of this research was the PT Cruiser, a 1940s retro-looking sedan. Chrysler sold more than one million units.

After reading the article '*Hugh Mackay's seven deadly sins of qualitative/exploratory research,*' at the end of Chapter 3, students should be able to identify the seven sins. They are summarised as follows:

- Calling a collection of strangers a 'group': some topics (particularly those that are sensitive) are best researched by means of personal interviews, rather than focus groups.
- Using an unfamiliar environment: the 'experimental effect' brought about by a strange setting must be avoided or at least minimised.
- Not listening to participants: researchers should not ask too many questions; participants need to be allowed to speak freely.
- Intimidating the respondents: researchers need to be invisible. Their presence should not affect the discussion.
- Quickly interpreting data: first impressions are often misleading. Time and care needs to be taken when interpreting qualitative data.

- Oversimplifying findings: all the complexities of qualitative data should be reported, not just the black-and-white answers.
- Abandoning methodological rigour: 'gurus' who are overly confident that their subjective results can be attained using any method must be stopped. Research should never be conducted by just one person.

Looking at the Chrysler 'imprint session' we can see that the second sin has been breached. Participants were placed in a very unusual environment. More information about the 'imprint session' is required to determine if any other sins were breached. Ultimately, the 'imprint session' produced some terrific results, so it's hard to criticise. Students should be reminded that even though Dr Clotaire Rapaille was collecting qualitative/exploratory data, he is not a marketer and is not necessarily subject to 'proper' marketing practices.

- 14.** A researcher interested in understanding the illicit drug-use habits of 18–29 year olds in New Zealand, is wondering whether to use in-depth interviews or focus groups. What would you advise and why?

How to ask questions on sensitive topics such as drug use is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9 of this textbook. Clearly, confidentiality and privacy are important here, and this means that respondents should not be identified in any reports and perhaps they should not be recorded. The use of both focus groups and in-depth interviews has, however, been used successfully by the Australian government in its research on illicit drug use. See <http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/content/campaign3>

Written case study 3.1

Up, up and away. Airborne focus groups with Air New Zealand

Objective

Focus groups are used extensively in market research and business and are evolving in type to online and video conferencing/streaming formats. As with all market research design, any approach has its strengths and weaknesses. This may well be the case with airborne focus groups.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using an airborne focus group in this place?

The airborne focus group here is similar to what is called an experience focus group, where respondents experience a service, try a product or react to advertising. In this case the respondents are being questioned and are discussing their reactions to airline service, while they are experiencing it. The composition of the focus group was also an important target market for Air New Zealand and included frequent flyers and travel experts, who are important opinion leaders. The weakness of the design is that the research took place on the airline, and the setting may have influence the respondents answers. Also those who chose not to fly Air New Zealand were not included in the focus group.

2. How could the design of the focus group be improved? If at all?

The focus group would have been more effective if had taken place in a neutral setting such as the premises of a market research agency. As well as frequent flyers and travel experts, separate focus groups could have included people who flew regularly with other airlines.

Written case study 3.2

Getting a grip: Focus groups and Beaurepaires Tyres

Objective

In this case focus groups are used to reposition a tyre retailer. But did the focus group lead or did it confirm the wisdom of the marketing strategy that was employed?

1. What role did focus groups play in the rebranding of Beaurepaires?

Focus groups were used by the company to help develop more meaningful brand names for women and other client groups. A pilot study was first used by the manager by simply visiting a store and observing the nature of the layout, attitude of the managers and the type of customers.

2. Did the focus groups guide or did they confirm management decision-making?

Focus groups really confirmed management observation of the stores that needed changing. The focus groups could however, also have been used to test the new store concepts and rebranding of the company.

3. Why was it important to do market research in this case?

The company was to rebrand and this is an expensive and risky decision, which means that there is a great value to doing research. Note that the type of research – a combination of focus groups and a pilot study – was able to provide sufficient insight into the management problem and help embed a solution for the firm.

4. How might this research design be improved?

The research may be improved by the use of survey research to track the satisfaction of customers, or by a quasi-experimental design, in which reactions to a test re-branded store could be compared to other stores. These two other approaches, though would have taken greater time and involved much higher costs.

Ongoing case study

Mobile phone switching and bill shock

Objective

In this case we examine the choice researchers need to make when planning and organising qualitative research. In commercial research there are also often short deadlines and yet demands for quality information in research. Research budgets are usually also tight, which explains in part the popularity of qualitative research.

1. What kind of qualitative research do you think is best here? Why?

As the researchers need to gather the information quickly and at low cost, focus groups represent the best design in this case. Focus groups also have the advantage that the client can watch the focus group in action, and so feel involved in the research. This is what actually happened in this case.

2. Develop a potential discussion guide for this response

A discussion guide that was used in practice is available in the text (see Exhibit 3.5), though students could consider developing their own. They should however, follow the format suggested in the text.

3. What are some potential problems with your qualitative research design, and how could these be avoided?

The most common problem in qualitative research is that you are basing your results on the views of a few people. In focus groups there is also the possibility that one person can dominate proceedings, or that people do not all contribute equally. To get around these problems, usually a mix of focus groups is used to cover different groups. For this company we used focus groups of those who switched and did not switch mobile phone providers as well as focus groups covering age, and family life cycle. Responses were quite different for each of the focus groups. In order to ensure that the discussion represents the views of all, a skilled moderator is required. Another approach is to have a respondent read out a response to a written question, such as what was the main reason you switched providers? Or what would you like to see in a new phone plan? This is often called the nominal technique.

A paper on the qualitative research done for mobile phone switching is available below:

Carter, Leanne, Gray, David, D'Alessandro, Steven and Johnson, Lester (2015), 'The I love to hate them relationship with cell phone service providers: The role of customer inertia', *Services Marketing Quarterly* (in press).

Activities

Survey this!

Surveys can be used to collect qualitative data. Students are asked to look at a question from the survey and to find at least three responses from students in the data and try to interpret the results, explaining which approach to interpreting the data fits their attempt. What theory can be learned from the responses? Compare your interpretation to other students' and discuss any agreements or disagreements.

Ongoing project

The following project worksheet is useful in helping students consider what type of qualitative research design is suitable given their research problem. If students are conducting a focus group it is a good idea to have two people attend, one to act as moderator and the other as note-taker. If students wish to film respondents then ethical guidelines must be followed. At all times respondent identity is to be protected.

Note that the choice of a qualitative technique depends on the research objective and research philosophy being used (see Exhibit 3.2 on page 77). Once a qualitative research method has been chosen, the following steps, as shown in the flowchart below, should be followed. A major issue is how the information will be recorded in-depth interviews or focus groups. This is usually a combination of voice recordings and sometimes film combined with notes taken in the field. Obviously the respondent needs to provide permission for this to occur. Qualitative research often also provides a great deal of information for interpretation and so the skill of both the interviewer and analyst is paramount. Increasingly qualitative software such as Nudist and NVivo are used to help discover important themes in textual, audio and video data.



Search me! marketing

Conduct a literature search on word association tests. What is the contribution of this type of research approach to our understanding of consumers?

A good starting point is Hayton, James C., and Magdalena Cholakova. 'The role of affect in the creation and intentional pursuit of entrepreneurial ideas'. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice* Jan. 2012: 41+. *Search me! marketing – journals*. Web. 19 Sept. 2016.