



II Qualitative Research

The 'correct' distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is surrounded by decades of controversy. It is seen as slightly more pragmatic in practice, where qualitative research tends to be used to refer to group discussions and indepth interviews.

The defining characteristic here is that rather than using a standardised survey, the moderator follows a set of guidelines to support the group or interviewee and reap as much information as possible. The moderator can then go into more detail with individual participants and inquire further, whilst observing the interaction in the group or dialogue (what is funny, what is embarrassing, what is socially accepted, etc.).

The aim here is not to gain a representative conclusion which can be generalised (moreover, less people tend to be interviewed). Rather, this method aims to identify as many different façades of the topic as possible, whilst discovering the social dimensions and the real underlying reasons (accordingly, for instance, it is possible to ascertain why choosing a specific brand has something to do with the need to feel safe, or with the need to express oneself socially).

We offer qualitative surveys for extended studies, as preparation for more complex quantitative research or for particularly qualitative questioning, usually in the form of group discussions and indepth interviews.



1. Group discussions

This involves the discussion of a topic with between 8 and 10 target persons. The moderator creates a normal conversation situation, in which opinions are formed and exchanged. This social interaction serves to stimulate the participants further, and they gradually become more active, bringing arguments into the discussion of which they were less conscious before. In addition to this, the various pro and contra arguments can be developed more effectively, whilst establishing social influences (for instance, which arguments are socially acceptable). Support aids, such as flipcharts, Post Its and drawing and craft supplies, serve to make the sessions more entertaining and fruitful.

These group discussions with 8 to 10 participants are moderated by highly experience discussion leaders or members of the project team.

Participants are recruited afresh for every project, thus preventing the formation of 'discussion experts'. We choose the best town/city and location for the survey, providing hospitality and incentives, in addition to all necessary technology (video recording as standard, live observation from an observation room and simultaneous interpreting if required).

The results are evaluated depending on each client's specific requirements: from a videotape to a structured, indepth written analysis with exact quotes.

In addition to the classic group discussion, we also offer mini groups (two participants and one discussion leader), which enhance the advantages of the classic discussion model further with the following aspects: more active small groups, and the opportunity to go into more depth with each participant.



2. Individual interviews, in-depth interviews, expert discussions

Free dialogues aim to establish a relationship of trust in order to obtain more, diverse and spontaneous information concerning the participant's real views and ideas.

This more individual approach is particularly useful concerning semi-conscious and awkward topics. Through special psychological techniques, the interviewer attempts to penetrate underlying perceptions, values, barriers or needs: which values the brand stands for, in how far it meets their personal needs concerning safety, self-portrayal, dominance, devotion, etc.

These demanding interviews are carried out by experienced qualitative interviewers or members of the project management team. All interviews with the project-specifically recruited participants are logged with protocols or recorded (audio or video), and are subsequently evaluated with great care. We choose the best location and place (hall or participant's home), and provide incentives and all necessary technical equipment (with live observation and simultaneous interpretation if necessary).



3. Observation/Experiments

Through personal or technology-supported observation, a range of actions (such as shopping behaviour in front of a shop's shelf or in a supermarket aisle, user behaviour or operation of a vending machine, how a milk carton is opened, information behaviour when reading a train timetable) can be registered. This method enables researchers to work independently of the public's willingness and ability to participate. Nevertheless, given that it is only possible to observe a person's visible behaviour in a given moment, this method is often teamed with the execution of surveys (in order to establish motives, opinions, etc.).

In contrast to observation, where researchers merely register behaviour without intervening, experiments involve the deliberate modification of a given variable in order to determine in how far this changes the result. In other words, through this method, a controlled environment is created, in which members of the public are confronted and their reactions captured. This way, a range of tests can be carried out, such as product-tasting (usually as blind taste tests), the use of a new product (short or long-term, at home or in a studio).

The participants' gestures, facial expressions and behaviour in a special situation or as a reaction to an experiment variable are noted or recorded by specially trained experts, and are later evaluated. Some of our most recent projects in this area have involved package opening, product choice from a swift selection platform, preparation of a ready-to-serve meal, and viewing behaviour concerning a television programme and commercial breaks.