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| Islamia university Bahawalpur |
| Focus Group |
| Assignment- Advance Research Methods and Data Analysis |
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**The Focus Group Research Method**

A focus group is a common qualitative research technique used by companies for marketing purposes. It typically consists of a small number of participants, usually about six to 12, from within a company's target market. The consumers are brought together and led through discussions of important company and brand topics by a moderator.

## Qualitative Research Elements

A focus group is qualitative research because it asks participants for open-ended responses conveying thoughts or feelings. The other prominent research type is quantitative research. This is more data-driven research that uses surveys or questionnaires to derive numerical-based statistics or percentages.

With qualitative research, researchers seek more open and complete perspectives on the brand or product. However, more general interpretations and uses of the research are necessary, since you cannot as easily break down the research into facts.

## Focus Group Features

Within a focus group, a moderator poses a series of questions intended to gain insight about the way the images, slogans, concepts or symbols. As a representative sample of consumers targeted by the company, a focus group can offer insights consistent with those shared group views the brand, product, related

In most instances, you will have to offer some type of incentive to your focus group members to ensure their active and honest participation. If you hire a research firm to by the broader target market. Focus-group moderators should pose questions in a way that does not lead group members to provide desired responses, but rather honest and insightful responses.conduct your focus group, that firm will typically handle the disbursement of the incentive, whether it’s a monetary payment or some type of free product or service.

## Benefits of Focus Groups

A focus group is generally more useful when outcomes of research are very unpredictable and you’re looking for more open feedback rather than comparisons of potential results as in a quantified research method. A focus group also allows consumers to express clear ideas and share feelings that do not typically come out in a quantified survey or paper test. Because of the open conversation among group members, topics and discussions are freer flowing and members can use comments from others to stimulate recall.

Another benefit is that the moderator can observe the dynamics among members of the focus group as they discuss their opinions with each other. In many of these groups, the moderator will leave the room to allow focus group members to communicate with each other without feeling self-conscious. This type of honest commentary can often yield nuggets that you can later use to further refine your marketing strategy and your messaging.

## Drawbacks of Focus Groups

"Groupthink" is a primary concern with focus groups. When you bring a group of people together to talk about a brand, the tendency exists for influential group members to affect the expressions of others within the group. Additionally, consumers are often more reluctant to express negative ideas in a face-to-face setting than in a more indirect research format when they know the company is conducting research.

Another major drawback of a focus group is that if you don’t hire a good moderator, it can be difficult to elicit the full range of thoughts, opinions, wants and needs of the group. And if your moderator is weak, some focus group members may not feel comfortable enough in the environment to offer their opinion.

# Important Skills That a Focus Group Moderator Should Possess

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Focus groups consist of around six to 12 people from your company's target customer market. The purpose in holding a focus group meeting is to gather direct, personal insights from customers with strong interest in your products or services. Because a focus group is a dynamic research environment, the skills of the moderator are key to getting valuable, unbiased data.

## Effective Listening Skills

A focus group leader must assert himself verbally to guide the group. However, he spends much of the meeting time listening to the opinions, feelings and ideas shared. Thorough, organized notes are necessary to compile the insights into useful advertising information. Additionally, focus group leaders start with a list of questions, but the nature of the ideas presented prompts opportunities for probing follow-up questions. The moderator must listen well to find the right moments for follow-up questions.

## Flexibility

Also due to the importance of following up member thoughts and feelings, a good moderator needs a flexible attitude and mind. He must accept that focus group members may deviate from the anticipated answers or thought patterns in response to questions. In some cases, the moderator doesn't get through his list of planned questions because of the direction of customer thoughts. Participants may also have demands or requests for water, snacks or other items to make their participation more comfortable.

## Topical Expertise

While moderating a focus group is a skill set unto itself, a moderator needs topical expertise to guide the discussion and maximize the research experience. He needs the ability to understand language used by customers and to interpret the statements as they relate to the product or service. Also, the moderator needs some level of insight into the industry to ask the right follow-up questions.

## Discernment

As with other research techniques, focus groups only produce trustworthy, useful results if the moderator manages the process objectively and effectively. He must balance the upfront objectives of the brand or company with the direction of feedback and the need for probing questions. Additionally, the moderator needs to draw out the thoughts and feelings of all participants and protect against groupthink. Focus groups sometimes have vocal participants that sway the insights of others. The moderator encourages individual expressions while maintaining an objective, facilitative stance.

# How to Write a Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Focus groups can be an ideal way for a business or institution to get information from members of their target market and generate ideas for more detailed research going forward. A moderator’s guide serves as the outline of what the groups will discuss, and is usually written as a collaborative process between the moderator and the stakeholders to ensure that the desired information is collected.

## Importance

Moderating a focus group is a challenging task, which is why most moderators make sure to have a guide completed beforehand. Whether it is completed by the moderator herself or one of the stakeholders, it is critical to make sure every session is conducted in a similar fashion to create consistency and generate statistically valid results, as well as to clarify the topics and questions to be discussed. While moderators may be flexible in teasing out information depending on individual group composition, the structure presented by the guide is a road map to keep discussions on-topic and the event moving on schedule.

## Basic Information

The first part of the focus group moderator’s guide should provide the background information needed to conduct the interview. Start with the research objectives. Placing them in a prominent position reminds both the moderator and any other readers what the focus group is designed to answer. After that, write a description of the respondents’ profiles and the interview logistics, which is important because it provides background and context and may be useful for confirming details later.

## Introduction

The introduction describes how you want the moderator to introduce herself and inform the focus group members of what they can expect over the course of the session. Have the moderator tell the audience the general purpose of the session, remind them of the incentive that they are receiving for participation, discuss any administrative details and detail the level of confidentiality. Also have the moderator establish the rules of the discussion. For example, if you plan to record the interview, it is important to explicitly receive permission from the participants to do so.

## Topics

List the three to five topics that you expect the moderator to cover, and the amount of time devoted to each topic. For a typical 90-minute session, that is the amount of material that can be covered comfortably and comprehensively. It’s best to begin with a general topic to generate discussion before getting into more specific material to make sure the participants are comfortable speaking in front of the rest of the group and to get them accustomed to participating.

## Questions

Write a list of questions to be answered for each topic. In general, ask behavior questions before attitude questions, positive before negative, unaided before aided. It is also helpful to include probes, short comments or questions that can be used to further explore desired topics or stimulate discussion. Wrap up sessions by asking if there was anything the moderator missed that they would like to talk about.

## Feedback

Once the draft of the moderator guide is finished, it should be reviewed by stakeholders to assess whether any changes need to be made in the content or format. This interactive process ensures that there will be no miscommunication about what the groups intend to measure, and gives everyone an understanding of what will take place.

# Guide Objectives for a Focus Group Discussion

If you want to get an in-depth look at what customers think of your business, focus groups can provide the anecdotal information that can inform strategic planning. For that to happen, the moderator must strike a balance between encouraging frank dialogue from participants and keeping the conversation focused on the business goals that inspired the exercise. By using the research objectives as a guide, the moderator has a path to securing a productive focus group for your business.

## Conceptualization

Before deciding to use a focus group, ask yourself why you need one to be conducted. Identify the insights you hope to gain and how you can use these insights. This conceptualization phase is the first step towards coming up with the objectives that will determine how the focus groups are structured. It's a critical process to begin early, because conceptualization also determines whom the focus group interviews. Participants who are able to answer the questions posted in the objectives should be selected from target demographics.

## Specificity

Following the establishment of the general points that begin the process, it's important to then drill down to specific objectives that can provide useful information in the limited time of a group session. Focus group objectives must be clear and specific. “Find out what people think of my business” is so general that it’s hard to get anything useful. Ask why you want to know and what you’re concerned about. You may want to know how a particular target demographic feels about your business as compared to your general customer base, for example.

## Design

Nearly every focus group starts off with a moderator guide. Often it is the moderator who completes it, although critical stakeholders sign off on it prior to completion. This ensures that the moderator conducts the focus group in a way that generates the information that the sponsor intended. Prominently featured at the start of the moderator guide are the research objectives, which remind the moderator, as well as the stakeholders reading the guide, of the purpose of the focus group. The objectives are the guideposts that inform everything that follows.

## Questions

To guide discussion towards the objectives, use open-ended questions that tie to the research goals. Avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no." For example, if you use a focus group to get an impression of a program in which your electronics business spokesperson addressed high school students about careers in math and science, don't ask if they liked it. Ask what they thought of it. The former question can be answered in a word; the latter gives the moderator a chance to elicit more information.

# How to Write Focus Group Objectives

Focus groups can be effective research tools for learning new information about your customers, competitors or products, or confirming marketing assumptions you’ve made before you begin using them to create strategies and tactics. Conducted improperly, a focus group session can result in the participants parroting information you want to hear, so you need to make sure you write clear focus group objectives.

## Justify the Focus Group

The first step in writing focus group objectives is to ask yourself why you’re convening the group rather than using an online, telephone or in-person survey. Ask yourself what you can get from a focus group you can’t get from a survey. This will help guide you in emphasizing these more important needs and help you avoid wandering into areas you could research using other means.

## Review the Four Ps

Marketing research includes evaluating your product, price, promotions and places of distribution. This requires you to analyze the competition, define your target user and create a brand image in the marketplace. Determine if you need to cover any or all of these in your focus group, even if the purpose of the group is to discuss a specific product, service, website page, advertisement or promotional campaign.

## Set Your Goals

Ask yourself what you hope to achieve from the focus group. This might include soliciting feedback on a specific topic, looking for new ideas you hadn’t considered or determining which of several options you are considering will be the optimal choice based on customer feedback. List specific questions you want answered and specific information you want collected. Think about how you will use that information once you’ve collected it to solve your problems or make your decision -- don’t collect information that can’t be applied to your needs. For example, asking focus group members if they like something doesn’t let you take that information further. Ask why they like something to give you specific information you can use later.

## Write Your Script

A focus group script should include an introduction and an explanation of why the group has been convened. Be careful not to tell the group what answer you’re seeking or what information you want, to prevent them from telling you what you want to hear. For example, if you want to learn if potential customers are looking for a low-fat breakfast option, start the discussion by telling participants you’re interested in learning about their eating habits and if they take steps they take to choose healthier foods. Avoid making the majority of your focus group leader-driven. Ask open-ended discussion questions that require the group to interact and volunteer information. Use pointed questions to steer conversations that begin to stray.

# How to Set Up an Effective Focus Group

Before starting a focus group to test out a new idea, it is vital to make sure that it is an effective and realistic segment of your intended market.

**1.** Screen participants before the focus group is scheduled to start. To make sure you are getting a true representation of your market, you will need to first select a group of those you believe are in the correct demographic and then further refine this group down to participants that have the qualities you need. For example, if you have a large group of women between the ages of 25 and 35 but your product is geared only toward mothers, you would need to weed out respondents that do not have children.

**2.** Assign someone to moderate the focus group. The moderator is one of the most important components of a focus group. They keep the entire group on task and can interpret subtle cues from participants. Hire someone who is experienced in focus group moderation.

**3.** Conduct more than one group. Every consumer is unique and the answers you get from one group of people may be entirely different than the answers you would receive from another one. Schedule at least two to three focus groups and then compare all of the answers together.

**4.** Record the proceedings. It is one thing to take notes and monitor the focus group, but you may miss some things. Record the proceedings with a voice or video recorder so that you can go back over it in leisure.

**5.** Plan for logistics for your focus group. The group meeting should be held in a very convenient location for the participants. In addition, refreshments should be offered and the moderator should be tasked with making sure that the group is engaged in the proceedings. A bored, hungry and uncomfortable focus group will produce very different results from a group that is enjoying the process.