

Research Approaches

Research could be classified as quantitative and qualitative research on the basis of the approach (a way of dealing with a situation or problem).

Quantitative Research

The definition given by Aliaga and Gunderson (2000), describes what we mean by quantitative research methods very well:

Quantitative research is **‘Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)’**.

Let’s go through this definition step by step. In quantitative research, we collect numerical data. This is closely connected to the final part of the definition: analysis using mathematically based methods. In order to be able to use mathematically based methods, our data should be in numerical form. This is not the case for qualitative research. Qualitative data are not usually numerical, and therefore cannot be analysed by using statistics. Therefore, as quantitative research is essentially about collecting numerical data to explain a particular phenomenon, particular questions seem immediately suited to being answered using quantitative methods. How many males get a first-class degree at university compared to females?

Quantitative research can gather a large amount of data that can be easily organised and manipulated into reports for analysis. Quantitative research largely uses methods such as questionnaires and surveys with set questions and answers that respondents tick from a predefined selection. Answers can be measured in strengths of feeling such as ‘strongly agree’ ‘disagree’ or numbers such as scales out of 10. This form of research is very flexible in terms of how it’s carried out such as through the post, online or even over the phone.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is defined as **‘a type of research that aims to find out people's opinions and feelings rather than information that can easily be shown in numbers’**.

Unlike quantitative research which relies on numbers and data, qualitative research is more focused on how people feel, what they think and why they make certain choices. For example, observation about any event, discussion (participant observation), indepth interview about any issue or topic.

Qualitative research is largely led with discussion around certain concepts or ideas with open questioning. Attendees are encouraged to explain or describe their reasons for having certain responses. The most common form of qualitative research consist of focus groups relevant to the target or research topic or one to one interviews, conducted face to face or over the telephone.

Qualitative research is useful for studies at the individual level, and to find out, in depth, the ways in which people think or feel. Analysis of qualitative data is difficult and requires accurate description of participant responses, for example, sorting responses to open questions and interviews into broad themes.