

Types of Qualitative Research Design Examples

Qualitative research is the process of acquiring data by studying subjects in their natural habitat. The focus is on understanding the why and how of human behavior in situations, and is defined as a scientific research method to obtain non-numerical data.

Qualitative research is subjective in nature:

- Methods are designed to understand the lives of participants.
- The process is maintained on neutral lines without placing judgment on individual responses.
- Focus areas are cultures, societies and individuals.

Types of Qualitative Research methods:

1. Ethnography:

Ethnography, one of the most popular methods of qualitative research, involves the researcher embedding himself or herself into the daily life and routine of the subject or subjects. Either as an active participant or an observer, the researcher experiences their customs, traditions, mannerisms, and reactions to situations etc. first hand, sometimes for years. Geographical constraints could be a hindrance for the researcher.

Example of application: This on-the-field method can help companies in assessing how consumers use certain products or services, and accordingly develop new products or revamp existing products.

2. Narrative:

In the Narrative method of qualitative research, the researcher gathers data or facts from one or two subjects through interviews, documents etc. over a period of time. Based on a theme, these are then pieced together (not necessarily in the same sequence) to derive answers and suggestions.

Example of application: A business can use this method to understand challenges faced by their target audience that can in turn be utilized for innovation and development of products.

3. Phenomenology:

The Phenomenology qualitative research method is used to study an event or activity as it happens, from various angles. Using interviews, videos, on-site visits etc., one can add on to existing information using perspectives and insights from the participants themselves about the activity or event. It is primarily an experience or perception based research method.

Example of application: Universities can rely on this method to understand how students make their choices about applying to universities/colleges.

4. Grounded Theory:

Grounded theory starts with a question or collection of data. Through systematic data collection and analysis, repetitive ideas or elements are coded, and codes are grouped or categorised. New theories may be formed based on these categories.

Example of application: A product-based company can use this method to understand how their customers use their products or individual features of their product or products.

5. Case Study:

The case study method is used to gather in-depth and detailed information about a subject, which could be any entity, organization, event or something larger like a country. The nature of this qualitative research method can be explanatory or exploratory.

Example of application: For a business, case studies are a useful tool to formulate strategies, understand influences, devise new methods etc.

With open-ended questions, qualitative research methods produce results that are descriptive and inferences that are useful in breaking down complex problems into simpler components. The onus is on the researcher – he or she can change the course of the research based on the responses from or observations of the subjects.

6. Historical Method:

The historical method of qualitative research describes past events in order to understand present patterns and anticipate future choices. This model answers questions based on a hypothetical idea and then uses resources to test the idea for any potential deviations.

Example of application: Businesses can use historical data of previous ad campaigns and the targeted demographic and split-test it with new campaigns to determine the most effective campaign.