

Getting to Grips with the Terminology

It is important to remember when looking at definitions that there is always a lot of discussion about every aspect of research-nothing is absolute.

Mixed Methods

Using a range of methods to collect your data, both quantitative and qualitative

Quantitative Methodology

Tend to be those associated with the collection of numerical data. Quantitative Research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a larger sample population. Quantitative Research uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research. Quantitative data collection methods are much more structured than Qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys – online surveys, questionnaires, mobile surveys and kiosk surveys, face-to-face interviews based on questionnaires, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls, and systematic observations.

Questionnaires as a means of collecting 'hard' data are often associated with Quantitative methodology.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem. Qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations. The sample size is typically small, and respondents are selected to fulfil a given quota.

Focus Groups

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn about opinions on a designated topic, and to guide **focus group is different in three basic ways:**

- The main difference is the group has a specific, focused discussion topic.
- The group has a trained leader, or facilitator.
- The group's composition and the group discussion are carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment in which people are free to talk openly. Members are actively encouraged to express their opinions.

Because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time.

Focus groups help people learn more about group or community opinions and needs. In this respect, they are similar to surveys. But needs assessment surveys typically have *written, closed-ended, relatively narrow* questions which are *quantitatively scored*. The person being surveyed often responds with a numerical rating, rather than with a verbal statement. Such surveys can be very useful; but they usually can't capture all that a person is thinking or feeling.

Responses in a focus group, on the other hand, are typically *spoken, open-ended, relatively broad, and qualitative*. They have more depth, nuance, and variety. Nonverbal communications and group interactions can also be observed. Focus groups can therefore get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling, even though their responses may be harder -- or impossible -- to score on a scale.

Which is better? *Both* of these methods are useful. And both can be used together, to complement each other. Which should you use in a specific situation? That depends upon your own needs and purposes, and the resources available to you.

When should you use a focus group?

- When you are considering the introduction of a new program or service.
- When you want to ask questions that can't easily be asked or answered on a written survey.
- When you want to supplement the knowledge you can gain from written surveys.
- When you know, or can find someone, who is an experienced and skilled group leader.
- When you have the time, knowledge, and resources to recruit a willing group of focus group participants.

Sampling

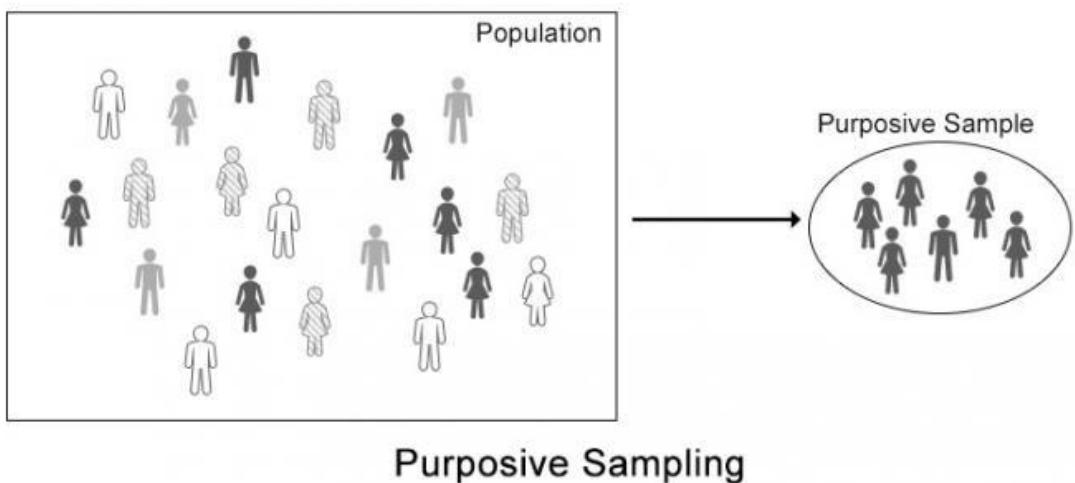
Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs when "elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money"

TV reporters stopping certain individuals on the street in order to ask their opinions about certain political changes constitutes the most popular example of this sampling method. However, it is important to specify that the TV reporter has to apply certain judgment when deciding who to stop on the street to ask questions; otherwise it would be the case of random sampling technique.

Alternatively, purposive sampling method may prove to be effective when only limited numbers of people can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of research design and aims and objectives. For example, for a research analysing affects of personal tragedy such as family bereavement on performance of senior level managers the researcher may use his/her own judgment in order to choose senior level managers who could particulate in in-depth interviews



Triangulation

Triangulation means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. This is a way of assuring the validity of research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection.