**Descriptive Research**

Descriptive research can be explained as a statement of affairs as they are at present with the researcher having no control over variable. Moreover, according to D.E. Ethridge,

“Descriptive research may be characterized as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what is, while analytical research attempts to establish why it is that way or how it came to be”.

Fox .W. and M.S. Bayat define Descriptive research as “aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method”

In its essence, descriptive studies are used to describe various aspects of the phenomenon. In its popular format, descriptive research is used to describe characteristics and/or behavior of sample population.

An important distinctive trait of descriptive research compared to alternative types of studies relates to the fact that while descriptive research can employ a number of variables, only one variable is required to conduct a descriptive study. Three main purposes of descriptive studies can be explained as describing, explaining and validating research findings.

Descriptive studies are closely associated with observational studies, but they are not limited with observation data collection method, and case studies, as well as, surveys can also be specified as popular data collection methods used with descriptive studies.

**Examples of Descriptive Research**

Research questions in descriptive studies typically start with ‘What is…”. Examples of research questions in descriptive studies may include the following:

* What are the most effective intangible employee motivation tools in hospitality industry in the 21stcentury?
* What is the impact of viral marketing on consumer behaviour in consumer amongst university students in Canada?
* Do corporate leaders of multinational companies in the 21stcentury possess moral rights to receive multi-million bonuses?
* What are the main distinctive traits of organisational culture of McDonald’s USA?
* What is the impact of the global financial crisis of 2007 – 2009 on fitness industry in the UK?

**Advantages of Descriptive Research**

* Effective to analyze non-quantified topics and issues
* The possibility to observe the phenomenon in a completely natural and unchanged natural environment
* The opportunity to integrate the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection

**Disadvantages of Descriptive Research**

* Descriptive studies cannot test or verify the research problem statistically
* Research results may reflect certain level of bias due to the absence of statistical tests
* The majority of descriptive studies are not ‘repeatable’ due to their observational nature

One of the goals of science is description (other goals include prediction and explanation). Descriptive research methods are pretty much as they sound — they describe situations. They do not make accurate predictions, and they do not determine cause and effect.

There are three main types of descriptive methods: observational methods, case-study methods and survey methods. This article will briefly describe each of these methods, their advantages, and their drawbacks. This may help you better understand research findings, whether reported in the mainstream media, or when reading a research study on your own.

**Observational Method**

With the observational method (sometimes referred to as field observation) animal and human behavior is closely observed. There are two main categories of the observational method — naturalistic observation and laboratory observation.

The biggest advantage of the naturalistic method of research is that researchers view participants in their natural environments. This leads to greater ecological validity than laboratory observation, proponents say.

Ecological validity refers to the extent to which research can be used in real-life situations.

Proponents of laboratory observation often suggest that due to more control in the laboratory, the results found when using laboratory observation are more meaningful than those obtained with naturalistic observation.

Laboratory observations are usually less time-consuming and cheaper than naturalistic observations. Of course, both naturalistic and laboratory observation are important in regard to the advancement of scientific knowledge.

**Case Study Method**

Case study research involves an in-depth study of an individual or group of individuals. Case studies often lead to testable hypotheses and allow us to study rare phenomena. Case studies should not be used to determine cause and effect, and they have limited use for making accurate predictions.

There are two serious problems with case studies — expectancy effects and atypical individuals. Expectancy effects include the experimenter’s underlying biases that might affect the actions taken while conducting research. These biases can lead to misrepresenting participants’ descriptions. Describing atypical individuals may lead to poor generalizations and detract from external validity.

**Survey Method**

In survey method research, participants answer questions administered through interviews or questionnaires. After participants answer the questions, researchers describe the responses given. In order for the survey to be both reliable and valid it is important that the questions are constructed properly. Questions should be written so they are clear and easy to comprehend.

Another consideration when designing questions is whether to include open-ended, closed-ended, partially open-ended, or rating-scale questions (for a detailed discussion refer to Jackson, 2009). Advantages and disadvantages can be found with each type:

Open-ended questions allow for a greater variety of responses from participants but are difficult to analyze statistically because the data must be coded or reduced in some manner. Closed-ended questions are easy to analyze statistically, but they seriously limit the responses that participants can give. Many researchers prefer to use a Likert-type scale because it’s very easy to analyze statistically. (Jackson, 2009, p. 89)

In addition to the methods listed above some individuals also include qualitative (as a distinct method) and archival methods when discussing descriptive research methods.

It is important to emphasize that descriptive research methods can only describe a set of observations or the data collected. It cannot draw conclusions from that data about which way the relationship goes — Does A cause B, or does B cause A?

Unfortunately, in many studies published today, researchers forget this fundamental limitation of their research and suggest their data can actually demonstrate or “suggest” causal relationships. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What is the effect of Unemployment on Poverty?

What is the effect of overpopulation on poor standard of living/inflation?