# Different Approaches

Descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory studies

**Descriptive study**

# After the research topic has been chosen, the next task is to formulate a specific research question or hypothesis. Here we require to differentiate between descriptive and explanatory studies. Descriptive studies tell only what happened, and explanatory tell why or how it happened. Exploratory research is the initial research into a hypothetical or theoretical idea.

Descriptive studies usually have one or more guiding research questions but generally are not driven by structured research hypotheses. This type of research aims to describe characteristics of populations based on data collected from samples. It often requires the use of a probability sampling technique. Data from descriptive research may be qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative data presentations are normally limited to frequency distributions and summary statistics, such as averages (Wimmer & Dominic, 2015). Customer satisfaction surveys, presidential approval polls, and class evaluation surveys are examples of descriptive projects.

**Importance**

This is mainly because it is important to have a proper understanding of what a research problem is about before investigating why it exists in the first place. For example, an investor considering an investment in the ever-changing Amsterdam housing market needs to understand what the current state of the market is, how it changes (increasing or decreasing, for example, the current uncontrolled inflation), and when it changes (time of the year) before asking for the why. This is where descriptive research comes in.

**Definitions**

# Descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. It can answer what, when, where, when and how questions, but not why questions. A descriptive research design can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables (Esser, 2012).

# Descriptive research is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. It does not answer questions about how/why, the characteristics occurred. Descriptive research cannot be used as the basis of a causal relationship, where one variable affects another (Wimmer & Dominic, 2015).

**Types**

**Descriptive-survey: This** research uses surveys to gather data about varying subjects. This data aims to know the extent to which different conditions can be obtained among these subjects. For example, a researcher wants to determine the qualification of employed professionals in any institution/ organization. He uses a survey as his research instrument, and each item on the survey related to qualifications is subjected to a Yes/No answer. This way, the researcher can describe the qualifications possessed by the employed demographic characteristics (Babbie, (2010).

**Descriptive-normative survey:** This is an extension of the descriptive-survey, with the addition being the normative element. In the descriptive-normative survey, the results of the study should be compared with the norm. For example, an organization that wishes to test the skills of its employees by a team may have them take a skills test. The skills tests are the evaluation tool in this case, and the result of this test is compared with the norm of each role. If the score of the team is one standard deviation above the mean, it is very satisfactory, if within the mean, satisfactory, and one standard deviation below the mean is unsatisfactory (ibid).

**Exploratory research**

Exploratory research is the initial research into a hypothetical or theoretical idea. It is "the preliminary research to clarify the exact nature of the problem to be solved." It is used to ensure additional research is taken into consideration during an experiment as well as determining research priorities, collecting data and honing in on certain subjects which may be difficult to take note of without exploratory research (Esser, 2012). It can include techniques, such as:

* secondary research - reviewing available literature and/or data
* informal qualitative approaches-- discussions with consumers, employees, management or competitors
* formal qualitative research through in-depth interviews, focus groups, projective methods, case studies or pilot studies.

**Goal**

The goal of exploratory research is to formulate problems, clarify concepts, and form hypotheses. Exploration can begin with a literature search, a focus group discussion, or case studies. No need to examine a random sample of a population; rather, researchers conducting exploratory research usually look for individuals who are knowledgeable about a topic or process. Exploratory research typically seeks to create hypotheses rather than test them. Data from exploratory studies tends to be qualitative. Examples include brainstorming sessions, interviews with experts, and posting a short survey to a social networking website (Wimmer & Dominic, 2015).

**Characteristics**

* Exploratory research is inexpensive, interactive, unrestricted, and close-ended question in nature.
* It is an unstructured type of research.
* Exploratory actions are done in order to discover something or to learn the truth about something.

Some of the popular methods of explanatory research design include literature searches, depth interview, focus groups, and case analysis. Literature search: A literature search is one of the fastest and least expensive means to discover hypothesis and provide information about the subject we're studying.

**Explanatory Research**

Such type of study generally attempt to explain a phenomena, e.g., an explanatory of terrors movement would seek to discover the causes of the movement and why converts are attracted to it. Basic goal is to increase our understanding of society. How can we judge whether we understand or not? One form of explanation to answer why and how questions such as “why does racism exist?” or “how do social movements begin?

**Definitions**

* It is conducted for a problem which was not well researched before. Demands priorities, generate operational definitions and provides a better-researched model. It is actually a type of research design which focuses on explaining the aspects of your study in a detailed (Manner, 2018).
* Exploratory research is defined as a research used to investigate a problem which is not clearly defined. It is conducted to have a better understanding of the existing problem, but will not provide conclusive result (Wimmer & Dominic, 2015).

**Goal/ purpose**

The goal of exploratory research is to formulate problems, clarify concepts, and form hypotheses. Exploration can begin with a literature search, a focus group discussion, or case studies. The primary purpose of explanatoryresearch is to explain why phenomena occur and to predict future occurrences. Explanatory studies are characterized by research hypotheses that specify the nature and direction of the relationships between or among variables being studied. Probability sampling is normally a requirement in explanatory research. The goal is often to generalize the results to the population from which the sample is selected. The data are quantitative and almost require the use of a statistical test to establish the validity of the relationships (ibid).

**Difference**

**Descriptive** study tell us what is happening? For example, a researcher doesn’t know about some groups—Baloch liberation army, or Pushoon tahafoz movement—he o she would wish to simply know what is happening? To answer this question, gathering information about specific groups member in the movements (who is the leader, how does one become a member, how is discipline maintained, how the group supported, what is the division of workers, and individual members, such explanations are often called descriptive studies because, they attempt to describe phenomena in details to describe what is happened.

**Explanatory** studies tell why and how it is happening. Explanatory study of the cited movements would seek to discover the causes of the movements and why converts are attracted to it? The basic goal of research is to increase our understanding of society. However, what is meant by the term **understanding** is less clear. How can we judge whether we understand or not? One basic form of explanations such as “why does racism exist” or “how do social movements begin.”

**Summary**

We began exploring something new with exploratory research. Then, we conduct descriptive research to increase our knowledge of it. Explanatory research is defined as an attempt to connect ideas to understand cause and effect, meaning researchers want to explain what is going on. Descriptive research helps fill in the research community's understanding of the initial exploratory studies. Last is explanatory research, which attempts to connect ideas to understand cause and effect. The descriptive research uses tools like mean, average, median and frequency. On the other hand, explanatory research allows the researcher to use the tools which are more qualitative in nature.