**Methods used to design marketing research studies**

There is a strong relationship between the research purpose and the research objectives which are the goals of the research. Businesses create research objectives to help answer the research problem. For example, if the problem is service, one objective might be to determine customer satisfaction with delivery. Strategies are plans of action, or activities, for achieving goals and objectives. A procedure is the step-by-step process personnel follow in performing a specific task.

Exploratory research is marketing research that collects information to help the business define its issue, situation, or concern and decide which direction to go in order to address it. For example, a business experiencing a drop in sales might conduct exploratory research to determine why it is happening. It might form a plan of action to figure out whether the problem involves customer-service issues, lack of promotion, lack of salesperson knowledge, product quality, etc. After the business decides to conduct exploratory research, it can determine the types of primary and/or secondary information that it needs, which may include formatting any necessary surveys and developing a framework for sampling.

Observation is a marketing-research method that gathers data by watching consumers. It is an effective research approach that provides information about what they do and how they interact with others. People do not know they are being observed so they behave in a normal way that provides useful information. The survey, experiment, and interview methods involve contact with people so they may not provide the most truthful or accurate information about what they do.

This technique is expensive because it involves setting up the research situation, such as developing a new product and then testing it on groups of consumers to determine their response. An example of the experimental research approach is quick-serve restaurants testing a new sandwich in certain markets. Technological is not a research approach. Recording means to keep track or to keep a record of something. Questioning is a variation of the survey research approach.

Observing the way in which employees and customers interact is one way to obtain information about customer service and customer satisfaction. This technique involves watching how the employees and customers communicate with one another without them knowing that they are being observed. The observation approach often provides the researcher with insight (verbal and nonverbal cues) that s/he cannot obtain by holding a telephone interview or by distributing a survey. For example, if observation research indicates that several employees have problems helping customers select the appropriate product, the business can take steps to train employees so they can better help customers. An experiment involves manipulating certain factors in a controlled environment to determine the cause and effect of variable combinations. An experiment would not be the appropriate approach to determine how employees interact with customers.

**The nature of sampling plans**

The target population is usually very large, such as all of the people who live in North America. Therefore, it is often impossible to survey the target population. As a result, researchers identify a sample of the target population, which is an accurate segment of the entire population. By surveying the sample, researchers can obtain a fairly accurate representation of the target population. The business community, the mass audience, and the general market might be the target population depending on the research and the specific research problem.

A sampling plan is the course of action or blueprint for gathering marketing information from a section of a target market. When a business designs its sampling plan, it must determine the size of the group that it intends to survey and the process that it intends to use to select the participants. Researchers determine the validity of the data after coding and analyzing it, which can only occur after the sample group has been selected and surveyed. Researchers usually assign response codes during the survey-development process. Predicting the sample group's responses is not a necessary action to take when a business develops a sampling plan.

Since marketers do not want to destroy all of an item being studied, it is better to use a sample. A sample is a representative group of the population--all of an item being studied. Use of a well-planned sample can provide more accurate data than a poorly identified population. In addition, it will cost less and be less time-consuming than use of the population.

It is highly unlikely that all 100 girls in a sample would be exactly the same height. However, it could happen by chance--even with little chance of occurrence. Interviewer bias occurs when the presence, actions, or attitudes of the interviewer influence a respondent's answers. The scenario provides insufficient information to determine whether non-response error occurred. This problem happens when researchers fail to sample the people who didn't respond to determine whether there were statistical differences between respondents and non-respondents. Inadequate information is provided to know whether the question was asked in such a way that it influenced responses.

A simple sampling strategy is used when the researchers believe that the population is relatively homogeneous for the characteristic of interest. In this case, the researchers would feel that people sharing the same major, business, would have similar interests. Proportionate sampling is used when subgroups vary dramatically in size in our population. Researchers can select more participants from larger groups to ensure that they are adequately represented. Stratified random sampling is used when subgroups in the population differ a great deal in their responses or behavior. To overcome this issue, researchers treat the population as though it were multiple, separate populations and then randomly sample within each subgroup. Marketers would choose cluster sampling when it would be impossible or impractical to identify every person in the sample. As an example, imagine that a large international business wants to survey its employees but does not have a staff directory from which names could be sampled. It would be easier to sample by department. The researchers could randomly sample a percentage of employees within each randomly selected department rather than trying to sample that percentage of employees companywide.