

Choosing the Right Research Approach

Understanding your audience's needs, preferences, behaviors and motivations is the key to remaining relevant. Research produces insights, and **insights help brands make better decisions**.

An experienced research partner can help determine the **right combination of approaches** based on the specific questions you need to answer, but it's helpful to have a basic understanding of the various approaches and where they can be most effective.

A qualitative research partner can create value by...

Use cases

A/B TESTING

A/B testing (also called split testing) compares the performance of two versions of content to see which one appeals more to a test audience. A/B testing can be used to evaluate images and/or messaging.

- Recruiting a representative audience sample.
- Designing questions to understand the "why" behind preference.
- Summarizing the findings in a concise format to facilitate decision-making.

A/B testing is often used to evaluate creative, such as logos, layout, packaging, campaign themes, headlines or editorial style.

DIARY STUDIES

A diary study is a form of qualitative research where participants log information over a period of time, typically using their smartphone. It is a useful tool when seeking to collect data about habits, usage or motivations. Diary studies range from broad (e.g. planning a house project) to very specific (e.g. using a certain tool for a house project).

- Recruiting and qualifying an appropriate participant group.
- Managing the study on a trusted platform to ensure your most salient questions get answered.
- Interpreting the data to identify patterns and opportunities.

Diary studies are most appropriate when seeking to understand behavior patterns and habits over time or throughout a decision-making process. Video diaries are valuable when you want to collect contextual and non-verbal data as well.

DIGITAL SURVEYS

Digital surveys allow you to collect responses to a question set from a large number of participants at once. Digital surveys can be embedded on a website or sent by email, text or social media.

- Selecting and recruiting the right audience size and sample, whether it be your own customers/employees or general consumers from across the country.
- Optimizing survey for maximum participation and meaningful data.
- Leveraging this quantitative tool to test hypotheses suggested by qualitative research with a larger audience.

Digital surveys often complement qualitative research. A survey can be used before or after to collect quantitative data at scale to inform research or explore a finding with a larger audience.

RESEARCH METHOD REFERENCE GUIDE

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CONCEPT VALIDATION

This method is often used at the end of a design sprint as part of an innovation process. Qualitative research is conducted with potential users to collect feedback on rough prototypes or concepts to understand consumer desirability.

- Conducting desk research or a consumer pulse survey to help sprint participants get smart about key themes or needs in advance.
- Recruiting appropriate research subjects based on criteria identified in the process.
- Facilitating user interviews for the sprint team to observe.

Capturing early feedback from customers is an important part of the development process for new products, processes, services, marketing campaigns and experiences.

DESK RESEARCH

Desk research is a method of collecting general information about the business problem through existing (or secondary) data. Findings from other sources and studies are collected, analyzed and summarized.

- Applying knowledge of existing data and data sources to save your team time.
- Identifying important themes and trends to explore in your own custom research.
- Knowing how to craft the best hypotheses to test from the results of the desk research findings.

Desk research is commonly done at the start of any project. It's a cost-effective way to get smart about the area of consideration and gain perspective so that you can ask better questions.

EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT

Best known as mystery shopping, experience assessments send researchers to the field to collect data as a typical user. Assessments can be conducted on your own brand, or on your competitors to better understand how alternatives compare to your own.

- Evaluating how well brand standards are being executed.
- Uncovering gaps in employee training.
- Identifying milestones in the customer journey that can be reinvented or improved.

Experience assessments are useful when a consistent evaluation of a process or service is needed across multiple locations.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are small gatherings of a specific type of participant selected based on a predefined set of criteria to share their opinions about a category, product, or topic. Traditionally, focus groups meant gathering participants together in a physical location, but today focus groups are also conducted online using video conferencing tools and digital platforms.

- Facilitating lively and actionable discussions based on the questions critical to your work.
- Probing with follow-up questions to discover the "why," moving the conversation along, and managing group dynamics so that all participants are heard.
- Having established relationships with facilities and recruit partners, saving you time and getting sessions scheduled efficiently.

Focus groups are a good choice when looking for reactions to a physical product/concept or brainstorming ideas on a specific topic. They are useful to collect multiple opinions at once, particularly about values and motivations.

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) are arranged conversations between a researcher and a participant. IDIs are used to collect a deep level of information or perspective on a topic, such as how consumers make purchase decisions, or what the success of a project would look like.

- Designing a guide appropriate for the typical 30-45 minute session, ensuring that opinions from valued participants such as VIP customers or C-suite leaders are collected consistently
- Bringing third-party objectivity to the project, offering both a safe place for participants to share candid opinions as well as being well-positioned to challenge “shorthand” answers and get to more meaningful responses.
- Tagging and analyzing the large amount of data produced into actionable themes.

IDIs work well when the participants are experts or opinion-leaders, or the nature of the topic is sensitive. They can also help identify key themes before conducting a quantitative study.

MOBILE ETHNOGRAPHY

Mobile ethnography combines the tenets of traditional ethnography with mobile research. Participants use their smartphones to take photos and record videos in response to a research prompt. The ability to capture honest, in-the-moment responses is one of the main advantages of this type of research. Additionally, this method makes it possible to collect data from broader or more varied geographies.

- Creating in-home, at-the-shelf or other experiential assignments that allow you to see your customers in real contexts
- Designing research prompts that get participants sharing their ideas and idiosyncrasies, pain points and preferences, driving insights that will help you understand them deeper.
- Making sense of complexity, looking both broadly and deeply, at individuals and the aggregate, at single points in time and at the journey as a whole.

Mobile ethnography works well for evaluating a specific product or experience, or when trying to identify unmet needs within a certain demographic.

OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH

Observational research is a technique where researchers watch participants experience something to learn about their natural habits and behaviors, eliminating recall errors or participant biases. It's similar to ethnographies and shop-alongs in that the participant is in their real-life setting, but different in that the researcher does not intervene during the experience.

- Selecting the most effective method of observation (field or controlled setting, direct or indirect, etc)
- Dedicating the extended time often required to collect this type of data
- Coordinating observational research (to identify behaviors) with other methodologies (to understand the why)

Observational research is best suited for situations where a person's reported behavior might differ from the actual events, or where an experience is dependent on multiple events that the participant may not even be aware of in the moment.

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ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Online community research gathers a targeted group together in a digital setting. Over a defined period of time, participants are given research prompts which often ask them to engage in discussions with other members of the community.

- Recruiting & screening participants
- Developing research prompts to encourage interaction between participants
- Designing study to enable asynchronous participation, making research with difficult-to-schedule participants possible

Online community research works well when participants span many geographical locations/time zones or if the nature of their work makes it difficult for them to gather at a single assigned time.

SHOP-ALONGS

Shop-alongs pair a qualitative researcher with a participant to capture the participant's behavior as they shop. This type of research typically takes place at a physical location such as a retail store or showroom. Mobile shop-alongs— where the shopper records their experience and completes assignments from the researcher using their smartphone – can often be a more efficient approach.

- Capturing actual behaviors as they occur (vs. asking the consumer to recall his/her thoughts or actions)
- Asking probing questions to learn more about specific behaviors (“*What made you select that product in particular?*”)
- Identifying key themes and opportunities within a large volume of information

Shop-alongs allow for in-the-moment feedback from consumers and are useful for understanding what shoppers are seeing, thinking and feeling as they make their purchase decision.

SHOPPER INTERCEPTS

Shopper intercepts are short, impromptu interviews that take place either during or immediately following a shopping experience.

- Developing a questionnaire that collects both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Capturing perceptions about a specific product or category.
- Identifying barriers to purchase or issues with a process.
- Collecting a large amount of data in a short period of time.

Shopper intercepts can be an efficient way to capture real-time feedback about store layout/navigation or experiences such as checkout or customer service.

Inquisitive is a woman-owned business that works with curious brands and their trusted agency partners to explore human preferences, attitudes, motivations, and buying behavior through research.

To discuss which research methods can best deliver the results you need, email hello@inquisitiveinsights.com.