

# THE ART & SCIENCE OF RESEARCH.



When and How to Use Qualitative and Quantitative  
Research Methodologies for Corporate, Campaign,  
and Cause-Related Insights

M E E T | N G  
S | R E E T

# INTRODUCTION

**WOULD YOU PUT A HAMMER IN A TODDLER'S HANDS AND EXPECT HIM TO BUILD A HOUSE? NOT LIKELY.**

It's a silly metaphor but it makes a point. Research methodologies are little more than tools. They are pretty standardized across research companies, and even DIY platforms. It's only partly the methods and tools that make research powerful and necessary.

In primary research, the ability to ask the right question, set the right hypothesis, and employ the proper mix of methods are the fundamental steps for producing real, useful insights. Research that leads to insights can be game-changing, whether you're growing a brand, promoting a cause, or positioning a candidate for election.

In this eBook, you'll learn how to create, deploy, and analyze research that generates the kind of truly valuable insights that often hide between the lines.

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# Step One:

# LAYING THE STRATEGY

## WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

The very first step in a successful research project is to craft a strategic plan capable of producing the data you need to produce useful insights. This step is a must — before the first call is made, before the first text is sent, before the first survey is completed.

Here are just a few of the considerations that you should take into account as you begin to build out your research idea:

- **Timeline**
- **Budget**
- **Profile of your impact audience**
- **Profile of your survey audience**
- **How much the survey audience already understands about the topic**
- **How sensitive the topic will be to your audience**

*Once you have the framework of your plan, it's time to articulate what you need to know.*

## WHAT'S YOUR QUESTION?

It isn't enough just to know what topic to research. You have to figure out your central question. Starting with what you need to know will help you structure your research in such a way that you'll get answers, not just data.

For example, do you want to know what type of message will make most young adults likely to try your new product? Do you want to know what your candidate should emphasize at the next town hall to increase community support? Do you want to know how familiar people are with your brand?

*Once you have your question, it's time to develop your hypothesis — basically, your purpose.*

## WHAT'S YOUR HYPOTHESIS?

A hypothesis is a statement or prediction about what you think is going to happen in your study.

## WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH?

Here's where you start to evaluate the right methods. Ultimately, you may decide to use a mix of approaches, but start simple. If you need statistical validation, start with quantitative research methods. If you need opinions, thoughts, feelings, or new ideas, qualitative approaches will be more effective.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF A HYPOTHESIS:



*The wellness program we implemented last year has increased employee morale and productivity.*



*The issue that voters feel most strongly about in this election is a proposed new development in our city.*



*The message that will get more people to donate to our cause is based on creating a better world for their children.*

Your hypothesis supplies the guidance and direction to your study and guides your decisions about questions, method(s), and partner. In other words, it can ensure that your research yields meaningful insights.

# Step Two:

# THE APPROACH

## When and How to Use Qualitative and Quantitative Research

A few notable trends are shaping the research landscape. For one, almost everyone has a mobile device (usually in hand). There's more competition for marketing, sales, and technology budgets. The working population is skewing younger and more inclined toward peer-to-peer working relationships. Research methods and strategies are evolving on pace with these kinds of technology, economic, demographic, and environmental shifts.

Here's where understanding how quantitative and qualitative research methodologies work to answer questions and confirm hypotheses is so vital. With more tactical options and less budget, efficiency is the starting point.

To help you decide which research methods might be best for your particular plan, question, and hypothesis, we'll give you an overview of the various methods, including how they work and what they can help you accomplish.

### Quantitative Research

When you think "quantitative," think "quantity." Quantitative research is countable and precise. If you need to calculate statistics, decide on a specific number from a spectrum of options, or choose between competing messages — quantitative methods are usually your best option. It's great at answering questions like "Which one?" or "How much?" and for producing data you can express graphically.

#### WHEN TO USE

- ✓ *Situations where you need statistical validation or statistical analysis*
- ✓ *Determining the ideal price point for a product or service*
- ✓ *Choosing the strongest message or product from a predetermined set*
- ✓ *Deciding which issue or topic is most important to different groups of people*
- ✓ *Establishing criteria for satisfaction, persuasion, or action*





## Quantitative Methods

### LIVE INTERVIEWER TELEPHONE SURVEYS

Trained interviewers call a targeted list of randomly computer-generated phone numbers and read a list of questions to those who answer. Responses are entered into a database for analysis. This method is effective for getting a high level of randomization in a relatively short amount of time.

### MIXED MODAL SURVEYS

As the name implies, this process combines multiple surveying techniques. For example, an organization that wants to reach a broad group of people might combine live interviewer telephone surveys with text-based surveys. By gathering data in a variety of ways, you can get increased response rates and answers from a wider variety of people.

### MOBILE SURVEYS

More than 80% of Americans own a smartphone. With mobile surveys, participants answer surveys on their smartphones within a specific time frame. It's a great option for many organizations and particularly effective for segments that may be unlikely to respond to other survey methods.

### ONLINE SURVEYS

The survey is created online and either posted or emailed to participants. Online surveys are simple to create, flexible, and can reach a wide audience quickly, making them a cost-effective option.

### SPECIALIZED COMMUNITY PANEL SURVEYS

Community panels function a lot like social media, with a private network of participants engaging with polls, surveys, and questions. The method effectively generates insights about groups of people who may share a particular interest, occupation, or demographic.

### TEXT-BASED SURVEYS

In this method, survey questions are sent via text message, often one at a time. Participants respond to each question as they receive it. The flexible method works on any type of cell phone.

#### REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: *The US Olympic Committee*

Through detailed surveys in four major metropolitan areas, we helped the United States Olympic Committee to navigate and decide where public support was strongest for future Olympic hosting site bids.

## Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is robust, nuanced, and human. If you need to dig deeper into an issue, learn what your target audience thinks or how they feel, or gather information in a general way, qualitative is usually the best option.

People are rarely predictable. Many responses can't be captured in a list of options. By talking to people and asking questions that allow them to explain their thoughts and feelings in a structured way, these methods can uncover biases, fears, and hopes.

## Qualitative Methods

### ADVERTISING/PROGRAM TESTING

Participants preview and respond to ad concepts, visuals, or execution methods before they are made public. This process typically happens in a confined environment to protect the confidential information. The method gives organizations insights into where to spend time and resources to reach their target audience(s).

### ONLINE ADVERTISING/PROGRAM TESTING

Similar to traditional Advertising or Program Testing, participants preview and respond to ad concepts, visuals, or execution methods. By conducting the testing online, the method allows people to participate from any location. By gathering feedback from their target audience, organizations can make strategic, data-driven decisions.

### BULLETIN BOARD DISCUSSION GROUPS

Using a dedicated message board for an online written conversation, participants type messages to one another in threaded discussions. This effective method can gather rich, valuable insights because respondents have ample time to reflect on their answers and respond to other viewpoints.

### QUALBOARD BULLETIN BOARD DISCUSSION GROUPS

This method employs QualBoard, an online digital discussion group platform. It is especially helpful for facilitating conversations among people who are geographically distant or who would be reluctant to come to an in-person gathering.

### CONSUMER JOURNALS

Participants use an online or paper journal to reflect on an issue. For people who might be intimidated by a group discussion, the method provides a better way to share their thoughts directly and honestly, often producing a wealth of ideas, impressions, and opinions.

### WHEN TO USE

- ✓ *Getting new ideas for products, campaigns, or messages*
- ✓ *Understanding prior knowledge and perceptions*
- ✓ *Determining the strengths and weaknesses of products, campaigns, and messages*
- ✓ *Determining language to use in future quantitative study*
- ✓ *Understanding the reasons why certain products, messages, or campaigns are resonating or not*

### **REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE:**

#### *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) needed to gather brand perceptions from key consumer groups “outside the Beltway.” Specifically, CEIP needed to learn how these audiences regard the think tank and how they would prefer to engage with and use the organization and its resources. To answer these questions and assist in targeting, we conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with academics, media influencers, state and local leaders, and business leaders in targeted cities across the country.

### **DIAL GROUPS**

Participants use a dial to indicate their feelings or preferences. For example, they might be asked to watch a video, turning the dial one way when they are interested and another way when they are bored. This method allows organizations to collect real-time data about the thoughts and feelings of individuals toward the content and messaging being viewed.

### **ONLINE DIAL GROUPS**

Similar to traditional dial groups, this method asks participants to provide an A or B style response, but they do it online instead of in-person. Participants use an online dial or similar tool to indicate their feelings about a piece of content. Online dial groups offer extended reach for organizations when compared to traditional dial groups.

### **IN-PERSON FOCUS GROUPS**

A small group comes together to discuss a specific topic. By hearing other ideas, individuals are encouraged to analyze and articulate their opinions. A trained moderator directs and controls the discussion, often uncovering rich information on a complex topic.

### **ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS**

This method has many of the benefits of a traditional focus group, but people can participate online instead of traveling to location. This allows organizations to hear opinions from a wide variety of people, including those who would be reluctant to come to an in-person focus group.

### **ONE-ON-ONE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

In this method, trained interviewers converse with participants about a topic, using a guide to structure the session. When used with eye-tracking software, this method is also incredibly useful for website and user experience (UX) research that identifies where users go, focus, and navigate. Whether via conversation or tracking software, IDIs generate deep insights for organizations because they allow interviewers to follow-up and personalize their engagement to each individual.



## The Benefits of a Blended Approach

Fewer real-world interactions mean organizations need new ways to capture personal conversations, emotional exchanges, and conceptual nuances that tell a truer story and provide vital context to an issue. An increasingly connected and mobile society offers ready access to an ever-widening demographic pool.

Technology and research landscapes are changing to mitigate and take advantage of realities like these. Individually, qualitative and quantitative research have clear strengths. Combining them to balance statistical and narrative data can amplify the insights.

Organizations can choose a blended approach to gain a complete, well-rounded picture of the question or issue. For example, adding a series of focus groups to a survey can provide deeper insights and broader context. Quantitative data can be gathered from the survey, which can in turn be analyzed and measured. The focus group can provide quotes, messaging statements, context, and dialogue that add richness to the stark data points.

### REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE:

#### *The Minnesota State of Manufacturing*

Enterprise Minnesota helps manufacturing industries become more efficient and improve their profitability. For eleven years, they've partnered with us to create "The State of Manufacturing," a statistically balanced opinion survey of manufacturing executives in Minnesota. Using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods — including surveys, interviews, and focus groups — the report tracks changes in opinions over time and provides an overview of the manufacturing industry.





# Step Three:

# PRODUCING INSIGHTS

Never forget that research methods are tools. They are not the end; they are the means to the end. To be effective, the tool will produce information capable of generating more than data.

## Combining Science and Art

Going back to the start of this eBook — your goal, questions, and hypotheses should shape your expectations for insights. And it's at this place where we see how critical it is that research balance science and art.

The science is the execution. The art is in how you read the black, white, and gray. If research were just a science, we (and every other provider) would always do the same type of research for the same type of question. But it's not. A great research team will walk you through the planning and help you weigh options between modalities.

They will guide you in the subtle and nuanced aspects of your project. And they'll bring objective, deep knowledge to the analysis work.

## The Best Solution for your Budget and Timeline

As commercial and public sector budgets shrink (and they do), there's a lot of discussion about upfront costs, ROI, and timelines. All three of those factors are considered as part of the process of building a research and insights approach.

The right research team will custom build, deploy, and analyze the research you need to get the best data possible and insights you can use with confidence. And they'll do it on time and on budget.

Meeting Street Insights knows every one of these research methods inside and out. We know their strengths and their gaps. We also know the art that goes into generating insights. We listen to you. We'll tailor your research needs with innovation and pragmatism so the insights and outcomes inform your lasting success.

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*They understand the difference between what people are saying and what they really think and believe...There are many companies that do primary research, but none with their specialized expertise. No one else has this.*

*~ Bruce Tyroler, CNN, VP,  
Brand & Multiplatform Research  
at Turner Broadcasting*



# ABOUT MEETING STREET INSIGHTS

Meeting Street Insights is an innovative public opinion research firm. We produce research and insights that shape objectives, issues, and races. Elected officials, corporations, public policy groups, and political advocacy organizations turn to us to solve complex problems, navigate difficult terrain, and make confident decisions. Meeting Street is an award-winning team recognized as an approachable, reliable source of cross-sector experience, creative solutions, and useful information.

**FIND US ONLINE** at [www.meetingst.com](http://www.meetingst.com)

**CONTACT US** at [info@meetingst.com](mailto:info@meetingst.com)

**CALL US** at 703-980-3171

We're proudly based in Charleston, South Carolina.