Descriptive Research

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Abstract:-

Descriptive research can be explained as a statement of affairs as they are at present with the researcher having no control over variable. Moreover, "descriptive studies may be characterised 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" Descriptive research is "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 behaviour of sample population.

An important characteristic of descriptive research 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. Case studies and surveys can also be specified as popular data collection methods used with descriptive studies.

Descriptive Research: Definition

Descriptive research is defined as a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. This methodology focuses more on the "what" of the research subject rather than the "why" of the research subject.

In other words, descriptive research primarily focuses on describing the nature of a demographic segment, without focusing on "why" a certain phenomenon occurs. In other words, it "describes" the subject of the research, without covering "why" it happens.

For example, an apparel brand that wants to understand the fashion purchasing trends among New York buyers will conduct a demographic survey of this region, gather population data and then conduct descriptive research on this demographic segment. The research will then uncover details on "what is the purchasing pattern of New York buyers", but not cover any investigative details on "why" the patterns exits. Because for the apparel brand trying to break into this market, understanding the nature of their market is the objective of the study.

Characteristics of Descriptive Research

The term descriptive research then, refers to research questions, design of the research and data analysis that would be conducted on that topic. It is called an observational research method because none of the variables that are part of the research study are influenced in any capacity.

Some distinctive characteristics of descriptive research are:

1. **Quantitative research:** Descriptive research is a quantitative research method that attempts to collect quantifiable information to be used for statistical analysis of the population sample. It is an popular market research tool that allows to collect and describe the nature of the demographic segment.
2. **Uncontrolled variables:** In descriptive research, none of the variables are influenced in any way. This uses observational methods to conduct the research. Hence, the nature of the variables or their behavior is not in the hands of the researcher.
3. **Cross-sectional studies:** Descriptive research is generally a cross-sectional study where different sections belonging to the same group are studied.
4. **Basis for further research:** The data collected and analyzed from descriptive research can then be further researched using different research techniques. The data also can help point towards the types of research methods are to be used for the subsequent research.

Applications of Descriptive Research with Examples

Descriptive research can be used in multiple ways and for multiple reasons. Before getting into any kind of survey though, the survey goals and survey design is very important. Despite following these steps though, there is no way to know if the research outcome will be met. To understand the end objective of research goals, below are some ways organizations currently use descriptive research today:

- **Define respondent characteristics:** The aim of using close-ended questions is to draw concrete conclusions about the respondents. This could be the need to derive patterns, traits and behaviors of the respondents. It could also be to understand from a respondent, their attitude or opinion about the phenomenon in question. For example, understanding from millenials the hours per week they spend on browsing the internet. All this information helps the organization conducting the research make informed business decisions.
- **Measure data trends:** Data trends can be measured over time with statistical capabilities provided by descriptive research. Consider if an apparel company conducts research between different demographics like age groups from 24-35 and 36-45 on a new range launch of autumn wear. If one of those groups doesn't take too well to the new launch, this provides an insight into what clothes are like and what are not and the ones that are not, are dropped.
- **Conduct comparisons:** Organizations also use descriptive research to understand how different groups respond to a certain product or service. For example, an apparel brand creates a survey asking general questions that measure the brands image. The same survey also asks demographic questions like age, income, gender, geographical location etc. This consumer research helps the organization understand what aspects of the brand appeal to the population and what aspects do not. It also helps in making product or marketing fixes or in some cases even create a new product line just to cater to a high growth potential, group.
- **Validate existing conditions:** Descriptive research is widely used to help ascertain the prevailing conditions and underlying patterns of the research object. Due to the non invasive method of research and the use of quantitative observation and some aspects of qualitative observation, each variable is observed and an in-depth analysis can be concluded. It is also used to validate any existing conditions that maybe prevalent in a population.
- **Conduct research at different times:** To ascertain if there are any similarities or differences, the research can be conducted at different periods of times. This also allows any number of variables to be evaluated. For the purpose of verification, studies on prevailing conditions can also be repeated to draw trends.

Descriptive Research Methods

There are 3 distinctive methods to conduct descriptive research. They are:

- **Observational Method**
The observational method is the most effective method to conduct descriptive research and both quantitative observation and qualitative observation are used in this research method.

Quantitative observation is the objective collection of data which is primarily focused on numbers and values – it suggests "associated to, of or depicted in terms of a quantity". Results of quantitative observation are derived using statistical and numerical analysis methods. It implies observation of any entity that can be associated with a numeric value such as age, shape, weight, volume, scale etc. For example, the researcher can track if current customers will refer the brand by using a simple Net Promoter Score question.

Qualitative observation doesn't involve measurements or numbers but instead just monitoring characteristics. In this case the researcher observes the respondents from a distance. Since the respondents are in a comfortable environment, the characteristics observed are natural and effective. In descriptive research, the researcher can chose to be either a complete observer, an observer as a participant, a participant as an observer or a complete participant. For example, in a supermarket, a researcher can from afar monitor and track the selection and purchasing trends of the customers. This offers a deeper insight into the purchasing experience of the customer.

- **Case Study Method**
Case studies involve in-depth research and study of individuals or groups. Case studies lead to a hypothesis and widen a further scope of studying a phenomenon. However, case studies should not be used to determine cause and effect as they don't have the capacity to make accurate predictions because there could be a bias on the part of the researcher. The other reason why case studies are not an accurate way of conducting descriptive research is because there could be an atypical respondent in the research and describing them leads to poor generalizations and move away from external validity.

- **Survey Research**
In survey research, respondents answer through surveys or questionnaires, or polls. They are a popular market research tool to collect feedback from respondents. In order for a survey to gather good quality data, it should have good survey questions, which should be a balanced mix of open-ended questions and close ended-questions. The survey method can be conducting online or offline which is makes it the go-to option for descriptive research where the sample size is very large.

Examples of Descriptive Research

Some examples of descriptive research are:

1. A speciality food group launching a new range of barbecue rubs would like to understand what flavors of rubs are favored by different sets of people. To understand the preferred flavor palette, they conduct a descriptive research study using different methods like observational methods in supermarkets. By also conducting a survey whilst collecting in-depth demographic information, offers insights about the preference of different markets. This can also help tailor make the rubs and spreads to different preferred meats in that demographic. Conducting a thorough descriptive research helps the organization tweak their business model and amplify marketing in core markets.

2. Another example of where descriptive research can be used is if a school district that wishes to evaluate teachers attitudes about using technology in the classroom. By conducting surveys and observing their comfortableness using technology through observational methods, the researcher can gauge what the can help understand if a full-fledged implementation can face an issues. This also helps in understanding if the students are impacted in any way with this change.

Some other problems and/or research questions that can lead to descriptive research are:

- Market researchers that want to observe habits of consumers.
- A company that wants to evaluate the morale of its staff.
- A school district that wants to understand if students will access online lessons rather than textbooks.
- An organization to understand if its wellness programs increase the overall health of the employees

Advantages of Descriptive Research

Some of the major advantages of descriptive research are:

- **Data collection:** Descriptive research can be conducted by using specific methods like observational method, case study method and survey method. Between these 3, all major methods of data collection are covered which provides a lot of information. This can be used for future research or even developing hypothesis of your research object.
- **Varied:** Since the data collected is both qualitative and quantitative, it gives a holistic understanding of a research topic. This causes data that was not planned to be collected gets tracked and the data is varied, diverse and thorough.
- **Natural environment:** Descriptive research allows for the research to be conducted in the natural environment of the respondent and this ensures that high-quality and honest data is collected.
- **Quick to conduct and cheap:** As the sample size is generally large in descriptive research, the data collection is quick to conduct and is cheap.
- **Forms basis for decision-making:** As the data collected in descriptive research represents a larger population and is robust, it is easy to make decisions on the basis of the statistical analysis of that data.

Disadvantages of Descriptive Research

Some of the major disadvantages of descriptive research are:

- **Confidentiality:** Respondents aren't always truthful if questions are too personal or they feel that they are being "watched". This may negate the validity of the data.
- **Halo effect:** If the research observer has a potential bias towards the research topic or some respondents in the research, the observations then maybe considered as invalid or untrue.
- **Sample isn't representative:** Due to the randomness of the sample, it is very tough to validate that the sample is an accurate representation of the whole population.
- **No scope to learn cause:** Since descriptive research only focuses on the "what" of an objective or phenomenon, it does not delve into the "why or how" and that is a limitation in learning specific causes.

Conclusion:- Descriptive research is a study of status and is widely used in education, nutrition, epidemiology, and the behavioral sciences. Its value is based on the premise that problems can be solved and practices improved through observation, analysis, and description. The most common descriptive research method is the survey, which includes questionnaires, personal interviews, phone surveys, and normative surveys. Developmental research is also descriptive. Through cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, researchers investigate the interaction of diet (e.g., fat and its sources, fiber and its sources, etc.) and life styles (e.g., smoking, alcohol drinking, etc.) and of disease (e.g., cancer, coronary heart disease) development. Observational research and correlational studies constitute other forms of descriptive research. Correlational studies determine and analyze relationships between variables as well as generate predictions. Descriptive research generates data, both qualitative and quantitative, that define the state of nature at a point in time. This chapter discusses some characteristics and basic procedures of the various types of descriptive research.