

# Communications Campaign Best Practices



Authors



Contributing Editors



## Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research Overview

	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
<b>When to use it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand <i>how</i> people think (e.g., patterns of reasoning, connections to other issues, private or unconscious feelings and emotions, core values)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop statistical information on <i>what</i> people think</li> <li>Typically used to answer “how much” in absolute or relative terms (e.g., how much support do we have for this ballot initiative?; how much does this message affect people’s opinions?)</li> </ul>
<b>Most common uses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand the target audience mindset for development of messages</li> <li>To test reactions to messaging and creative</li> <li>Used before quantitative research to help fine-tune the survey questions</li> <li>Used after a survey to dig deeper into the results (e.g., why people have answered in certain ways)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand the level of support for a key issue</li> <li>To test messages at a statistically valid level (helps understand <i>if</i> the message is effective without insight as to <i>why</i>)</li> <li>To track trends over time (i.e., longitudinal studies)</li> <li>To influence politicians (by showing levels of support)</li> <li>To track campaign effectiveness (e.g., tracking attitudes pre, during, and after a campaign)</li> </ul>
<b>How it works</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research participants are deliberately selected based on certain desired characteristics</li> <li>Methods use direct interaction and conversation, usually in the form of open-ended questions designed to help researchers understand how people think and reason about a topic</li> <li>Because the format is often very conversational, analysis is subjective, and the results may vary greatly depending upon who conducts the research</li> <li>Methodology can include techniques like word association, sentence completion, role playing, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research participants are selected randomly and asked to answer questions that have discrete answers or fall on a numerical scale (e.g., “How would you rate President Bush’s performance on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very good” and 5 being “very poor?”)</li> <li>Usually done by telephone, though may also be done through paper surveys or the Internet</li> <li>Any researcher should be able to duplicate the survey with similar results (that is, results within the margin of error)</li> </ul>
<b>Main types</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one interviews</li> <li>Focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey/questionnaire administered via telephone, online, in person, or via mail</li> <li>How a survey is administered depends on the survey goals and objectives (e.g. mail surveys have much more limited use than phone surveys)</li> </ul>
<b>Drawbacks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because of the low number of respondents involved, it cannot be used to generalize to the larger target population</li> <li>Subjective and unstructured; also subject to “group think” and unintentional influence by the moderator or interviewer</li> <li>Data collection and analysis may be labor intensive and time-consuming</li> <li>May not be effective for certain types of research (e.g., hostile political ads can have a “sleeper effect” where ads test poorly immediately after being shown, but are effective in changing public opinion over time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It takes human behavior out of context and ignores the effects of variables that haven’t been included in the research questions—it tells you “how much” but not “why”</li> <li>Results are limited by the questionnaire design (e.g., respondents answer the questions they’re asked, but aren’t able to expand on their answers or provide additional insight/rationale)</li> <li>Polling and other large surveys can be costly</li> </ul>

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