
Research Methodology: Exploratory, Descriptive and Explanatory

Exploratory research is defined as the initial research into a hypothetical or theoretical idea. This is where a researcher has an idea or has observed something and seeks to understand more about it. An exploratory research project is an attempt to lay the groundwork that will lead to future studies or to determine if what is being observed might be explained by a currently existing theory. Most often, exploratory research lays the initial groundwork for future research.

Exploratory research can come in two big forms: either a new topic or a new angle.

New angles can come from new ways of looking at things, either from a theoretical perspective or a new way of measuring something. For instance, computers have allowed large populations to be looked at. Old experiments can now involve thousands of people from around the globe instead of a few people from the local train station.

Descriptive Research

Once the groundwork is established, the newly explored field needs more information. The next step is descriptive research, defined as attempts to explore and explain while providing additional information about a topic. This is where research is trying to describe what is happening in more detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding our understanding. This is also where as much information is collected as possible instead of making guesses or elaborate models to predict the future - the 'what' and 'how,' rather than the 'why.'

Explanatory Research is conducted in order to help us find the problem that was not studied before in-depth. The Explanatory research is not used to give us some conclusive evidence but helps us in understanding the problem more efficiently. When conducting the research, the researcher should be able to adapt himself/herself to the new data and the new insight that he discovers as he/she studies the subject.

It does not aim to provide final and conclusive answers to the research questions but allows the researcher to explore the research with a varying level of depths.

A deductive approach is concerned with “developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis”

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It has been stated that “deductive means reasoning from the particular to the general. If a causal relationship or link seems to be implied by a particular theory or case example, it might be true in many cases. A deductive design might test to see if this relationship or link did obtain on more general circumstances”.

Deductive approach can be explained by the means of hypotheses, which can be derived from the propositions of the theory. In other words, deductive approach is concerned with deducing conclusions from premises or propositions.

Inductive approach, also known in inductive reasoning, starts with the observations and theories are proposed towards the end of the research process as a result of observations. Inductive research “involves the search for pattern from observation and the development of explanations – theories – for those patterns through series of hypotheses”. No theories or hypotheses would apply in inductive studies at the beginning of the research and the researcher is free in terms of altering the direction for the study after the research process had commenced.

It is important to stress that inductive approach does not imply disregarding theories when formulating research questions and objectives. This approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected in order to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory; however, inductive approach does not prevent the researcher from using existing theory to formulate the research question to be explored. Inductive reasoning is based on learning from experience. Patterns, resemblances and regularities in experience (premises) are observed in order to reach conclusions (or to generate theory).

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