

6 Steps for Choosing the Right Research Methodology

[March 20, 2014](#) [Rose Cooper](#)



When starting a research project, the most challenging question can often be, “What type of research do I need?” Selecting an appropriate research methodology is one of the key factors that can make or break a research project. Here are six factors to help you select the right research methodology.

Goals:

When selecting a research methodology, start with the end result—your research goals—as the first consideration. Carefully considering what your research project needs to accomplish will greatly inform the methodology selection. Are you just looking for more information? Do you need “go” or “no-go” decisions? Do you need to find out all the information in one fell swoop, or will you have the opportunity for follow-up research? Knowing what type of information you need to confidently possess at the project’s conclusion will often narrow your

available methodologies right from the start.

Statistical Significance:

Once you have established your research goals, the next key factor for selecting a research methodology is the statistical significance of the results. When a result is *statistically significant*, it means that it is highly unlikely that the result occurred by chance alone. If you need definitive, clear, black-and-white, highly data-driven research results, or then you are generally looking for statistically significant answers. This means you will need quantitative data, and a large sample size, both factors that inform your research methodology. Statistical significance is key when extrapolating results from a sample set to a larger population, which is an important factor to consider in research.

Quantitative versus Qualitative Data:

In addition to the statistical significance of data, it's important to consider whether you need quantitative data, qualitative data, or both. Methodologies that capture qualitative data, such as focus groups, can be excellent for capturing consumer insights and open-ended reactions. Other methods for qualitative data collection, like highlighting tools and heat maps, allow for consumers to indicate areas of strong like or dislike. Conversely, quantitative data provides more cut-and-dry results. If you have many questions that need to be asked, a survey with quantitative questions may be best, as consumers can answer these quickly. In addition, new online survey tools allow for quantitative questions to be much more interactive, helping to prevent survey fatigue.

Sample Size:

When considering your research goals, sample size often comes into play, which again helps select a research methodology. How big does your sample size need to be for you to be confident in making business decisions based upon the results? For example, if you are investigating price tolerance for a new product, will you be confident in the results after surveying 20 people, or would you prefer to survey 2,000? If you need a larger sample size, that will eliminate time-consuming, smaller-format methods such as focus groups and in-person interviews.

Timing:

How quickly do you need results? If you need quick turns on completion of data collection, you may want to consider an online survey, where national panels can field hundreds of completed surveys in just a few days. If you have a longer lead time, methods that are more time-intensive, such as in-home interviews, are possible. The project's timing will also affect your screening criteria used in your participant selection—a general rule is that the stricter the screening criteria, the longer it will take to find the required number of participants.

Availability of Existing Information:

A final factor for consideration is one that is often overlooked, "Does the data I need already exist via another source?" If you answered "yes" to this question, you may not even need to conduct primary research, and may be able to accomplish your project via secondary research sources such as Forrester Research, Market Research Insights (MRI), Nielsen, or Mintel. While secondary research is not as

customizable as conducting proprietary research, it is a valuable research resource for a variety of topics. Keeping these six factors in mind when selecting a research methodology will help you successfully navigate the research process and, more importantly, achieve your research goals.

To learn more about Martino Flynn and our research capabilities, contact Rose Feor at rfeor@martinoflynn.com.