

Introduction to Research Methods in Commerce

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Key concepts, steps, and tools for conducting reliable commercial research

1. Why Research Matters in Commerce

Purpose	Example
Decision-making	Choosing a market entry strategy
Problem solving	Identifying causes of declining sales
Opportunity identification	Spotting unmet consumer needs
Performance evaluation	Measuring the impact of a promotional campaign
Risk reduction	Assessing creditworthiness of a new supplier

2. Types of Commercial Research

Category	Description	Typical Use
Exploratory	Preliminary, open-ended investigation to clarify problems or generate hypotheses.	New product concept testing, market trend scouting.
Descriptive	Systematic description of phenomena (who, what, where, when).	Customer profiling, sales volume reporting.
Causal (Explanatory)	Tests cause-and-effect relationships through manipulation or statistical control.	Pricing elasticity studies, impact of advertising on purchase intent.
Qualitative	Non-numerical data (words, images) gathered via interviews, focus groups, observations.	Understanding consumer motivations, brand perception.
Quantitative	Numerical data collected through surveys, experiments, secondary datasets.	Market size estimation, demand forecasting.

3. The Research Process – Step-by-Step

1. Define the Problem & Objectives

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- Write a clear research question (e.g., “What factors drive repeat purchases of brand? X?”).

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- Set SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

2. Review Existing Knowledge

- Conduct a literature review (academic journals, industry reports, competitor analysis).
- Identify gaps that your study will fill.

3. Develop a Conceptual Framework

- Map variables and hypothesized relationships (e.g., **Price ? Perceived Value ? Purchase Intent**).
- Choose a theoretical model (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior, Diffusion of Innovations).

4. Select Research Design

- **Exploratory:** focus groups, depth interviews.
- **Descriptive:** cross-sectional survey, observational study.
- **Causal:** laboratory experiment, field A/B test, quasi-experiment.

5. Choose Data Collection Methods

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Surveys (online, face-to-face, telephone)	Large samples, standardized data	Response bias, limited depth
Interviews	Rich insights, flexibility	Time-consuming, smaller samples
Observation	Real-world behavior	May miss internal motivations
Secondary data (financial statements, market databases)	Cost-effective, longitudinal	May be outdated or not perfectly aligned with research need

6. Determine Sampling Strategy

- **Probability sampling** (simple random, stratified, cluster) ? generalizable results.
- **Non-probability sampling** (convenience, purposive, snowball) ? useful for exploratory work.

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- Calculate sample size using formulas (e.g., Cochran's) or power analysis for experiments.

7. Design the Instrument

- Draft questionnaire or interview guide.
- Use validated scales where possible (e.g., Likert-type items for attitude).
- Pilot test ? refine wording, order, and length.

8. Collect Data

- Follow ethical guidelines (informed consent, confidentiality).
- Monitor response