

PART **2**

Qualitative Marketing Research

7

Choosing Participants for Qualitative Research

Learning Objectives

- 1 Discuss the unique factors to consider when developing a participant profile
- 2 Explain how to construct a sample using the convenience, snowballing and purposive methods
- 3 Identify the steps involved in the purposive method of constructing a sample
- 4 Describe how to develop a participant profile using segmentation characteristics

THE SCOTS MIGHT LOVE SCOTCH BUT WHAT ABOUT OTHER SCOTTISH PRODUCTS?

Migration, which relocates groups of people from the country of their birth to a new home, is not new. It has been going on throughout history. What is new is that businesses are seeing these migrants as a marketing opportunity. However, the question remains as to whether or not these migrants prefer products from their home or their new countries. Research looked at residents of the UK who were born in Scotland or whose parents or grandparents were born in Scotland. Twelve exploratory in-depth interviews were conducted, along with a quantitative online survey of 131 participants. In addition, a survey of 2592 participants was held of which 435 participants were Scottish or of Scottish descent. The result? There was a clear relationship between country of origin (or association) and purchasing. Those who considered themselves Scottish were more likely to buy not only Scotch whiskey but also Scottish mineral water, food and clothing.

Question: What type of research would a company need to do to exploit the marketing potential of local immigrant groups?

Source: Nancarrow et al., 2007

7.1 Choosing Participants for Qualitative Research

The choice of subjects for qualitative research involves nonrandom sampling. When using nonrandom sampling everyone in the population does not have an equal chance to be chosen as part of the sample. However, nonrandom does not mean that a marketing researcher chooses the participants haphazardly or without thought. Even when conducting nonrandom sampling for focus groups, interviews and observational research, subjects will still need to be chosen carefully. There are three basic issues to be considered for selecting research participants which include demographic and psychographic characteristics, a knowledge of the research issue and the geographical location where potential participants live.

The description of which characteristics are important is called the 'participant profile'. While there are similarities in the process for choosing participants for each type of qualitative research methodology, there are also specific issues related to the selection process that differ. Table 7.1 below is a summary of the important issues to consider.

Table 7.1 Ranking important factors when choosing qualitative research subjects

<i>Focus Groups</i>	<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Observation</i>
1 Personal characteristics	1 Research issue knowledge	1 Location
2 Location	2 Personal characteristics	2 Personal characteristics
3 Research issue knowledge	3 Location	3 Research issue knowledge

7.1.1 Focus group research participant selection issues

Recruitment of individuals for participation in focus groups requires the selection of individuals with specific demographic and psychographic characteristics from within a population. Researchers may decide that the sample to include in the research study will be based on demographics such as age, gender, income or ethnicity. These characteristics may be the most important considerations when choosing a sample because the research involves examining the purchasing behavior of one of these specific consumer segments. In addition, a new product may be targeted at a specific psychographic group based on their lifestyle or interests. Therefore it is imperative that researchers include those participants who share these psychographic characteristics so that companies can learn more about their wants and needs.

The location where potential participants live is also a consideration when choosing the sample, as they must be willing to travel to the location where the focus group is being held. If participants do not live within a short traveling distance, they may not be willing to travel in order to take part. Least in importance is that participants have a particular knowledge about the specific research issues. Focus group participants may be selected by usage level, but they will not be expected to have any specific knowledge of the relevant industry or of its competitors.

7.1.2 Interview research participant selection issues

Researchers recruiting a sample for interviews will need to find fewer participants. However, because there are usually only a few interviews conducted it is important to choose each participant carefully. To do so researchers will develop a participant profile based on knowledge of the research issue with personal characteristics being a secondary consideration. This makes selection more difficult as potential interview subjects must be screened about their knowledge level. However, fewer participants are needed because of the time it takes to conduct the interviews. Personal characteristics must also be considered to ensure that the views expressed will provide insight on the target market segment of interest to the company involved.

Location is less important when considering the choice of participants. The knowledge the potential participants have is valuable but it is not reasonable to assume that potential research subjects will be willing to travel to meet with researchers. Therefore researchers will have to travel to interview these experts or the company concerned must be willing to pay for the research participants' travel expenses. The challenge in finding participants will be the time that it takes to choose the correct participants when arranging the interview.

7.1.3 Observation research participant selection issues

Observation also involves choosing participants. However, with observation the location is the most important choice criteria. Observational research will always take place where participants are involved in the behavior under study. Therefore it is this choice of location that is the most important decision when choosing a sample. If the wrong location is chosen, it will be impossible to observe the right participants.

Of course, the choice of location is also based on the personal characteristics of the desired research subjects who will be found there. Because not everyone at the location is of interest to the researchers, they will have to choose potential subjects based on their personal characteristics. For observational research, these characteristics must be discernable through observation. Even then researchers will need to make a judgment call. Therefore personal characteristics such as age would be described in general categories such as 'young', 'aged 18–22' or 'middle aged, 40–55'. When conducting observational research, researchers gain data without verbal communication. Therefore it is behavior, and not knowledge, that is studied.

7.1.4 Professional recruiters

It can take considerable time and effort to find qualified research subjects for qualitative research. Some researchers may also feel they do not have the expertise to find appropriate subjects. This is especially true if the research subjects are from a population that is ethnically or culturally different from that of the researchers. Professional research subject recruiting firms can provide assistance in these situations (see the box below). These companies continually recruit subjects who are promised payment for their participation. The subjects a research company may need could already be in an existing database compiled by a professional recruiter. Alternatively, they can recruit participants who will be needed for studying a unique segment.

RECRUITING A SAMPLE IS ALSO A BUSINESS

With the demand for qualitative research on the rise, specialized businesses have stepped in to assist with the recruitment of appropriate research subjects. Saros is a company that specializes in the recruitment of qualitative research subjects in the London area. The company keeps a database of 92,000 subjects, which is then screened to find those people who meet the researcher's participant profile. How do they recruit? Most potential participants are added to the database through word-of-mouth referrals. These referrals can then sign up online by answering questions on demographics, including detailed information on family status. In addition, they are asked about their access to computers and their consumption behavior. Finally, they are asked if they have previously participated in research.

Why do people sign up? The benefits described by Saros on their website include having someone listen to your opinions and the chance to earn £30 to £50 for two hours of work!

Source: Saros, 2007

7.2. Constructing a Sample for Qualitative Research

There are three basic methods for constructing a participant sample (see Table 7.2 below). Researchers can use convenience sampling where they ask any individuals who are willing to participate. Snowballing is a system where an appropriate potential participant is identified and is then asked to recruit others with similar characteristics. When using purposive sampling, researchers select potential participants that best meet the sample profile.

7.2.1 Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling is used when researchers choose any willing and available individuals as participants. This method can be implemented when it is known that a specific location tends to

Table 7.2 Methods of sample selection for qualitative research

<i>Method</i>	<i>Description</i>
Convenience	Find the correct location Choose those most likely to participate
Snowballing	Choose first participant based on profile Ask chosen participant to identify others Verify that the referrals meet the profile Invite referrals to participate
Purposive	Identify the characteristics Develop a list of potential participants Invite them to participate

attract the type of individual needed for that research study. The recruitment of participants can then take place in this location as it is where people who meet the profile tend to congregate. For example, if the research question involves a product used by college students, such as textbooks, the participant profile might describe those individuals who attend college. Locating such college students can be accomplished by visiting the college bookstore.

7.2.2 Snowballing

Another method of choosing participants is called 'snowball' sampling. With this method researchers choose the first participant to match the participant profile. This participant then refers others with similar characteristics. The theory for using this system is that the first participant is more likely to know someone like themselves than the researchers. This method is appropriate when the research calls for participants who may be from psychographic or ethnic groups that are very different to those of the researchers.

There are two reasons for using snowballing. Firstly, researchers may not have a knowledge of the relevant participants. Secondly, even if they did, potential participants may not respond to an invitation from the researchers to participate. This may be because they do not understand the process, or trust the researchers. Below is one example of how snowballing that can be used.

DRUG USERS KNOW OTHER DRUG USERS

One of the most difficult sampling issues is finding research participants who do not wish to be found. The UK's Home Office faced such a difficult task when the participant profile for a research study called for occasional drug users. Research executives recruited one group of subjects to be interviewed. However, all of the research subjects subsequently recruited were currently enrolled in drug rehab. This is really not surprising, as the executives in charge of finding participants would have felt comfortable approaching other executives at rehab centers for referrals.

Another approach, snowballing, was also used. A drug user was asked to recruit peers to participate in the study. This approach resulted in a much more diverse group of subjects, all of whom were drug users and none of whom had previously participated in a research study. This is not surprising either, as drug users know other drug users.

Source: Miles, 2006

When using the snowball process it is very important that the first participant is chosen carefully. The success of any research will depend on their accurate referral of similar participants. Once additional participants are referred, it should still be verified that they meet the stated requirements. When this has happened, participants are then sent information on the research study and an invitation to take part. Even when a nonprobability sampling method such as snowballing is used, the final group of participants should always be analyzed to see if they are significantly different from the profile (Piron, 2006).

7.2.3 Purposive sampling

The research question will define the characteristics of the participant profile. It is important that the participants chosen match this profile so that they have the necessary common experiences which will result in useful research data. If input is needed from more than one type of research subject, then more than one participant profile should be developed and two groups of potential subjects will need to be recruited.

The process of using purposive sampling first includes establishing the participant profile. Then a list of potential research subjects is identified that have the needed characteristics and knowledge. Finally, specific individuals from this list are asked to participate. Researchers may sometimes need to find participants for more than one type of methodology: it is not uncommon for large companies to conduct more than one type of qualitative research at a time. An example of the many types of research conducted by Proctor & Gamble is given below.

CONSUMER RESEARCH AT P&G IS CONSIDERED A SCIENCE

When Proctor & Gamble conduct qualitative consumer research to generate new ideas, some of the tools they use include:

Focus group discussions Focus groups are used for exploring ideas and making initial evaluations. A small group of people is brought together and asked to talk about consumer preference issues.

In-home visits Interviews are used to ask questions about how and why people use a product. Being in the home provides an opportunity to understand the actual conditions under which the task is performed and what the constraints are from the user's point of view.

In-context visits Ethnographic research is used to study people performing a task or using a product. This type of research provides insight into the details of how people use a product, how they judge its benefits, and which improvements they require.

In-store interviews Intercept interviews are used to ask shoppers questions to better understand how actual purchase decisions are made at the point of sale.

Proctor & Gamble also use quantitative research to generate facts on usage and to evaluate product prototypes. The tools they use are:

Habits and practices These are large-scale studies that require respondents to keep written records of the details of product usage for an extended period of time.

Blind tests Blind tests are product usage tests in which a new or upgraded product is given to participants who do not know the brand or the product. Participants are then asked to compare it with the current product or a key competitor's product.

Concept aided usage test / concept and use test Participants are first presented with a concept and then given a product to learn to use to see if the product delivers as promised.

Quality monitoring After people have purchased a product, they are asked if that product meets their expectations.

Source: Science in the Box, 2006

7.3 The Purposive Sampling Process

Qualitative research is only effective if the right participants are selected. Purposive sampling is the most effective method to ensure that this occurs. After all, researchers will have spent considerable time and effort on the design of a research methodology. However, the best methodology will fail if the wrong participants are chosen to participate.

Using purposive sampling to choose the participants to be included in a study is a task that must involve both the marketing researchers and the management personnel that have commissioned the research. The purposive sampling process first involves identifying key characteristics of the individuals who should participate. Once these characteristics are determined, management and researchers will determine the organizations or groups where individuals with these characteristics can be found. Specific individuals from these groups are then invited to participate in the research study.

7.3.1 Identifying characteristics

The first step in this process is to determine what common characteristics the participants should share. These will include their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, and education level. Psychographic characteristics such as lifestyle, attitudes, opinions and values may also be relevant. The geographic area within which participants should live is important for two reasons. First, it might determine if the participants may currently use or have need of a specific product. Second, the geographic area is also a matter of convenience, because if participants live at a distance they may not be willing to travel. The product knowledge or usage pattern of the participants is relevant if the research question distinguishes between non-users, occasional users, and heavy product users.

7.3.2 Identifying organizations or groups

After the characteristics that define the desired participants are selected, the next step in the process is to identify the groups with which these potential participants might associate. It may be that the researchers or management know people who fit the profile, but this would be the exception rather than the rule. Even if the researchers do know appropriate potential subjects, these are not the persons who should be selected. If the potential participants have an existing relationship with a researcher, they may not give objective answers.

If a participant profile calls for current product users, they may be found using internal company information, such as mailing lists or customer databases. For a small business, participants who are product users may be chosen from frequent customers who are currently known to the owner.

Usually a participant profile calls for people who are nonusers. These potential participants can be found by using organizational memberships. An effective means of finding participants is to choose an organization that has members who are similar to those who meet the profile of potential participants. Such an organization may be a business membership group, social or service club, civic organization, nonprofit group, church or sports team. If researchers have access to a membership list this can be used to invite participants. However, because of privacy concerns, such a list will probably not be available. For this reason it may be necessary to contact someone who holds a position of authority in an organization to ask for his or her cooperation.

For example, a sports equipment business that wishes to target college students could recruit focus group participants from sports teams on a campus. Initially, they will need to ask coaches for their permission.

Once the purpose of the research has been explained, these organizational officials may be willing to provide membership information. They are more likely to do so if they see that the purpose of the research is beneficial to their organization's members in some way. For example, if a company needs information on how to adapt products for older citizens to use, members of a senior group may be willing to participate. If the topic is seen as being beneficial to society, such as why do businesses fail, members of small business organizations may be interested in helping with the research. If an incentive is being offered, this should also be stated. However, all researchers should be aware that offering incentives can alter the type of people who agree to participate (see the box below).

IF THEY JUST COME FOR THE MONEY, ARE THEY REALLY ANY GOOD?

Market researchers know that it is becoming increasingly difficult to motivate consumers to participate in research studies, although getting people to agree to join a focus group is not yet as difficult as getting them to complete a survey form. However, even for focus group recruitment researchers often need to use financial incentives for participation. Does the fact that people are paid to participate affect the quality of participation?

That is the question that two researchers at the University of New York decided to research. Before the focus group, the researchers asked participants questions to determine if their primary motivation for attendance was the monetary incentive or if their motivation was an interest in the research topic and process. After the research, the focus group moderator was asked to 'grade' participants based on their level of insight and participation.

Overall, the moderators gave most of the participants high grades. However, when the grades were compared with the results of the survey administered to participants before research the pattern was clear. Of those participants who ranked the financial incentive as the primary motivation for participation, one-third received grades of C, D or F. Of those participants who ranked interest in the topic or research most important, only one-fifth received grades of C, D or F.

Source: Tuckel and Wood, 2001

Participants can also be found by advertising an invitation to participate. This method is used when potential participants may not be members of any official organization. For example, marketing researchers may need to conduct research concerning how to promote to young people who enjoy skateboarding. The researchers could advertise at a local skate shop that they are looking for research participants. In this case, the researchers may need to provide an incentive to encourage participation. This incentive, perhaps skateboard equipment, should be communicated in the advertisement.

Once a list of potential participants has been created, a few short screening questions should be prepared. These questions will verify if the potential research subjects meet the profile

determined by the researchers. The questions can be administered orally and the answers recorded, or a potential participant can be asked to complete the questionnaire.

7.3.3 An invitation to participate

Once all the groups have been identified and the participants have been screened, those that meet the profile and are selected to participate will be sent a letter or email. The letter or email should provide both the name of the research firm and also the name of the company commissioning the research. A short description of both the research firm and the company should be provided to supply credibility. A webpage link or telephone number should also be included so that participants can contact a relevant person if they want more information.

In the letter the purpose of the research should be clearly described without using any research terminology. For example, the methodology and sampling process should not be described in technical terms. Instead, if the invitation is to participate in a focus group the letter should describe how a focus group functions. If the invitation is to participate in an interview, potential participants should be informed of which subjects will be discussed.

The details as to time and location should also be included in the letter. This will ensure that participants are able to commit to the scheduled date and location. The letter should also assure potential participants that the information obtained is confidential and that their participation will not be disclosed. The letter should provide potential participants with a number to call if they are interested in participation. However, it more than likely will take a personal phone call, in addition to the letter, to get a commitment to participate.

For some qualitative techniques, particularly those that require significant participant interaction, another step may be added to the process. If participants will be required to work extensively with projective techniques, researchers will want to know if they will be sufficiently motivated to give their full attention and creativity to the process. In this instance, researchers may want to hold a short pre-focus group where they can get to know the personalities of potential participants. Only those who the researchers feel will add to the dynamics of the focus group would be invited to participate (DeNicola, 2007).

Invitation letter components

- Name of company commissioning the research
- Names of research firm and researchers
- Purpose of research
- Research details
- Benefits of research to society or consumers
- Incentives for participation

7.4 Using Segmentation Characteristics to Develop a Profile

Consumers are at the heart of the marketing concept and the marketing mix of product, price, place and promotion is designed to attract a specific market segment. Therefore it is not

Table 7.3 Profile for research participants based on segmentation characteristics

<i>Segmentation</i>	<i>Possible characteristics</i>	<i>Example of participant profile</i>
Demographic	Age, income, education level, gender, ethnicity	Age 65–75, middle income
Psychographic	Attitudes, opinions, values, lifestyle	Active, adventurous
Geographic	Availability of product, convenience	Live in the UK
Usage	Non-user, user of competing product, occasional user, frequent user	Currently nonuser

surprising that participants for research studies are often chosen to match the characteristics of a company's current or potential target market segment of consumers. Of course the company will want to know more about what this segment of current or potential customers feels about issues such as their marketing mix for current products or about new product ideas. Table 7.3 provides a summary of how these characteristics can be used.

Organizations can, however, use qualitative research to gather information on those consumer segments to which they currently do not market. Information from these participants will be specifically needed for research on such subjects as proposed new products. For example, during a focus group session product ideas can be described and the potential consumers' responses recorded. This information can then be used as one factor in the decision-making process. In addition, interviews with participants from a potential target market segment can use questions on such issues as product quality, customer service and the additional services that could be offered to customers.

Because of the time, money and staffing that are needed to design and conduct a qualitative research study, the choice of participants in any research study is critical. This is why time must be spent developing the participant profile. One method to begin the process of developing the participant profile for a qualitative research study is to start with segmentation characteristics. The main bases for segmentation are demographic, psychographic, usage and geographic.

The research question will provide information as to who should be included in the research sample. However, the information provided in the research proposal might not be specific as to details. For example, the proposal might have stated that research was to be held with current customers, or with young single professionals who were not currently customers. When the proposal has been accepted and the study is being designed much more detailed information on the participant profile as to who will participate must be specified.

7.4.1 Choosing participants based on demographics

Probably the easiest place to start developing the participant profile would be to define the potential research study sample participants by demographics. These characteristics will include gender, age, education, income, ethnicity, and even physical characteristics such as height and weight. Because of the nature of the research question it might be easy to decide that only males or females are needed or desired. Products that are specifically designed for one gender may require a group that consists of men only. For example, a company might wish to expand their skin lotion product line with a product designed specifically for men. However, even if the product is for men, if potential purchasers will include women they may also need to be included in the participant profile.

The age of potential research participants also needs to be considered. Once again, this may be determined by the research question. If it specifically asks about the opinions and attitudes of younger or older consumers, then those participants must be chosen with their

age in mind. Likewise groups should be composed of participants from the relevant income, education and ethnicity groups specified by research question. However, today there is less reliance on age than other characteristics when choosing participants, as it has been found that it does not readily correlate with other psychographic characteristics as once had been believed (Stroud, 2005).

If the research question does not specify what demographic characteristics are needed, then researchers must decide what criteria should be considered. Even if the benefits a product offers are not specifically designed to be targeted at males or females, gender might still be important. For example, an automobile company may not be aware of why sales for a specific product are below expectations. The company's management may believe that the issue has to do with the higher price of gas, making the automobile less attractive to consumers than more fuel efficient vehicles. Even when gender is not under consideration as a factor, it is important to have both males and females represented in a study. During research on the mileage issue, for instance, it may be discovered that male participants were unhappy with a recent redesign of the vehicle while females were unaffected.

If a research study does not specify that a certain gender, age, education, income or ethnicity is relevant, participants should be chosen to represent as many of these characteristics as possible. Researchers might learn (when analyzing the data) what demographic characteristics are actually relevant to the research question. Sometimes it can be nationality that is relevant. This is particularly true if a researcher is recruiting participants for expert interviews. In the box below is an example of how doctors in India gave Proctor & Gamble the idea for a new product.

THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION MAY DEPEND ON THE NATIONALITY OF THE ANSWERER

What factors help a baby develop? When ACNielsen surveyed over 200 pediatricians in India, the six factors that were mentioned most often were breast feeding, balanced diet, uninterrupted sleep, physical contact, outings and massage. In fact 93 per cent of pediatricians felt that uninterrupted sleep helps babies to be healthier.

These data led Proctor & Gamble to develop a different type of Pampers diaper for the Indian consumer market. The product, 'New Pampers', has an absorbent gel material that prevents leaks. If babies are not woken by wet diapers, they will sleep more comfortably.

Why develop a special Pampers product just for India? Secondary research showed that India has the largest number of babies of any country in the world. In fact India has a huge market potential market of 45 million babies. Proctor & Gamble's 'New Pampers' can now give these babies what doctors recommend – a good night's sleep.

Source: Vyas, 2006

7.4.2 Psychographic characteristics

Choosing participants by demographic characteristics is quite easy to accomplish. After all, some of these characteristics can be determined simply by looking at a person. A researcher can

determine other characteristics with a quick question about the potential participant's income or education level.

Psychographic characteristics, on the other hand, are not so easy to determine. However, they may be even more important in choosing research participants than demographics. Psychographic characteristics focus on a consumer's lifestyle, including their opinions, interests and attitudes. These are more often the characteristics that influence consumer purchases than demographic factors.

A consumer lifestyle, such as an interest in extreme sports, may still predominately attract a specific demographic group such as young males. Their interests would focus around sport, including viewing the sport on broadcast media and reading about it in specialist publications. For these young males their identity would be based on the values associated with the sport, including a glorification of risk taking and an anti-establishment attitude. Consumers today are less likely to identify themselves based on the traditional demographic categories of age and gender. Instead they are more likely to identify with groups based on lifestyle. Age in particular can no longer be looked upon as a predictor of consumer behavior (Stroud, 2005).

For example, other lifestyle groups such as snowboarders may have started out with a specific demographic profile say, young males. However, this demographic profile may now also include females, older consumers and families. A company would then have to define the population and participant profile based on psychographic interest instead of demographics. Once a lifestyle involves new demographic segments, other aspects of lifestyle such as opinions, values and attitudes might remain the same or they may change. Families involved in snowboarding may value the interest as a way to spend time together rather than as an extreme sport. They would not be likely to value risk and in fact may be quite concerned about safety issues.

Lifestyle can be defined as how people cope with the choices they need to make in their everyday life. This would include choices about their physical environment such as their dwelling, clothing and food. It also includes the values that develop as a result of family and social influences. Marketers know that it is lifestyle that often influences the choice of a product. Therefore, a participant profile for qualitative research is often chosen based on lifestyle choice. In fact, the trend now is to segment even more finely. As an example, grocery stores now segment on lifestyle and attitude by a single store when researching what products consumers want to purchase (Harris and Margraff, 2007).

Predetermined psychographic profiles

It isn't necessary for researchers to construct a psychographic profile. There are standardized profiles that are available for defining research samples. These standardized systems have been developed by commercial companies. Unfortunately, many researchers who are academically trained are unaware of the availability of products from the commercial research sector (Keegan, 2007). Two that can be considered when trying to determine who should participate in a qualitative study are VALS and PRIZM.

VALS (Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles) is a system of categorization by psychographic characteristics and is based on the idea that our actions are determined by our personality. These actions include consumer purchase behavior and brand choice. VALS is a short survey that divides people into one of eight categories (SRI, 2006). The categories are based on consumers' primary motivations and resources. VALS defines motivation as the guiding principle that defines a consumer's actions. Consumers' purchases are made to give expression to these guiding principles of who they are. VALS uses the term 'resources' not just to refer to whether or not a consumer has enough cash to make a purchase, it also refers to whether a consumer has the

inner drive to make the purchase. These aspects are then combined with basic demographic data to create profiles.

VALS profile motivators

- Innovators – many resources, successful life
- Thinkers – ideals
- Achievers – achievement
- Experiencers – self-expression
- Believers – traditional, concrete beliefs
- Strivers – opinions of others
- Makers – self-created self-expression
- Survivors – few resources, narrow life

Market researchers could use this system by first working with the client company's management to identify which of the VALS' types of consumers would most likely be able to provide the information needed to answer the research question. Participants could then be chosen who would meet this profile.

The PRIZM system of consumer classification is based on research that has been gathered from many different sources, including psychological studies and census data (Claritas, 2006). The classification system combines consumer behavior information with family status and geographic information. The family status information includes household income, family size and age, while geographic information includes housing condition, housing prices and the percentage of home ownership. Using this psychological and demographic data, PRIZM has identified 14 different groups with 66 different segments. PRIZM then allows researchers to identify the predominant groups in a geographic area. Even the names of the groups give an indication of the characteristics of lives in an area, as can be seen in the box below.

THE PRIZM DIFFERENCE

Williamsport, Pennsylvania is a small city of 27,000 people located in rural North Central Pennsylvania. Virginia Beach, Virginia is a large city located on the Atlantic coast and Chesapeake Bay. While both communities contain a range of people in terms of demographic and psychographic characteristics, when looking at the community in terms of groups there are distinct differences. According to PRIZM, the following groups dominate in each city.

Williamsport, PA
Bedrock America
City Startups
Family Thrifts
Hometown Retired
Park Bench Seniors

Virginia Beach, VA
Boomtown Singles
Middleburg Managers
Up-and-Comers
Upward Bound
White Picket Fences

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Without even knowing in detail the descriptions of these segments, the differences between the populations of the two cities become clear. Williamsport is a conservative city with an older, stable population of long-time residents. Virginia Beach is a city where the population is growing from the movement of young people into the area, people have good jobs and life is more affluent.

Source: Tetrad, 2006

7.4.3 Geographic characteristics

Researchers may consider geographic location when developing a participant profile based on product availability. If the product to be researched is only available in specific geographic locations, then the research subjects must also come from these areas. For example, if researchers are conducting a study on consumer motivation when purchasing a locally brewed beer, the potential research participants will need to be recruited from the area where that beer is sold.

To motivate potential research subjects to participate in the research, they will need to perceive the location as being convenient. Therefore the distance a potential participant might be willing to travel would need to be considered when developing the profile. This distance will vary based on the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the research subjects. Working professionals will want to have the location of the focus group or interview close to their offices so that additional time is not wasted in a second commute. Suburban dwellers may not be willing to travel to the city. Certain populations, such as the elderly, may find transportation a problem as they may no longer drive. Researchers should remember that they must choose participants within a certain distance so that they are willing to participate.

7.4.4 Usage characteristics

Another aspect of usage to consider as part of a participant profile is product loyalty. Sometimes researchers may describe the participant profile as consumers who are new, lapsed or frequent product users. These characteristics cannot be determined without occasional screening questions about the type of product usage. Therefore the screening questionnaire must ask if a potential participant is familiar with the product, their level of usage and if they have used competing products.

WHAT DO CHILDREN REALLY WANT? SANTA KNOWS

Every year approximately half a million children send letters addressed to Santa at the North Pole, Alaska. (The North Pole is a real city in Alaska – and of course Santa is equally real, in case any children are reading this book.) Duracell Batteries sponsored an

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analysis of the content of the letters sent to Santa at the North Pole to determine which gift items were most requested. This is the only known occasion when Santa has been assisted by secondary marketing research, as normally Santa relies on one-on-one intercept interviews with children at store locations. While secondary research does have the personal touch, personal interviewing limits the number of children involved in research as not all can travel to a store. Analyzing the letters allowed the gift choices of many more children to be discovered. The top ten gift choices for children were:

- 1 Clothing
- 2 Dolls and action figures
- 3 Gaming systems
- 4 Portable gaming devices
- 5 Video games
- 6 Sports equipment
- 7 Toy vehicles and planes
- 8 Portable music players
- 9 Remote control vehicles
- 10 Movies/DVDs

Even a quick analysis of these secondary data by Santa's elves will quickly let them know that technology is hot, with almost 60 per cent of children requesting this item! (Santa is still shaking his head about the child with the very long letter who requested 118 toys.)

Source: Proctor & Gamble, 2006

Summary

- 1 Qualitative studies use participants chosen as a nonrandom sample. Fewer participants are used and this means that extra care must be taken to choose the correct research subjects. If the wrong subjects are chosen the research findings will be useless. The most important criteria for focus groups are personal characteristics, while for interviews it is usage or product knowledge. One of the most important criteria for observation research is the location where the subjects can be found. Researchers must decide if they will need the help of professional recruiters.
- 2 Samples can be constructed using convenience sampling, where anyone who is willing and available is asked to participate. The snowballing method finds one qualified participant who then recruits others. Purposive sampling first develops a profile of the characteristics that a qualified research subject should possess.
- 3 The process of finding the participants for purposive sampling uses organizations and advertising. A list of qualified participants is developed using organizations to which they belong. It is possible that a person in a position of authority in an organization may

supply researchers with a list of members. However, due to privacy concerns it is more likely that the head of an organization will relay the invitation to interested members. Letters or emails of invitations are then sent. If the invitees agree to participate, additional information as to the time and place of the focus group is sent.

- 4 Segmentation characteristics can be used to develop the research participant profile that is needed in snowball and purposive sampling. The profile will describe the relevant demographics of participants, which might include age, gender, income or a combination of characteristics. Psychographic characteristics are also important including lifestyle, attitudes, opinions and value. Geographic characteristics are important if the product or issue under study is only relevant to a specific area. Usage characteristics will describe in the research subject a non-user, an occasional user, a frequent user or the user of a competing product.

Key Terms



convenience sample research subject selection method that asks any available and willing individual

incentives providing money or products to potential qualified research subjects to reward them for participation

participant profiles description of who should be recruited to be included in the research

professional recruiters companies that maintain databases of willing research participants or will find qualified research subjects for a project

purposive sample sample that, while not a probability sample, does select participants based on specific characteristics

snowballing participant recruiting method that uses one appropriate participant to recruit others with similar characteristics

Discussion Questions

- 1 Why are personal characteristics more important choice criteria for focus groups than interviews?
- 2 What type of problems would you encounter when recruiting research participants for a study on young people's opinions on TV reality shows?
- 3 How could the use of incentives to recruit participants bias the outcome of the above study?

- 4 Can you name a situation where you feel it would be more appropriate to use a professional recruiter to find research subjects?
- 5 How could snowballing be used to choose participants for a focus group on the entertainment choices of students involved in alternative lifestyles?
- 6 What would be the steps in using purposive sample selection for finding participants for a study of professors' attitudes toward student athletes?
- 7 What argument could be made for including participants who have an existing relationship with a researcher?
- 8 Which characteristics that might be used when choosing participants for a qualitative marketing research study on cosmetics do you feel are the most critical?
- 9 Why could it be argued that psychographic characteristics are even more important to consider than demographic characteristics?
- 10 If you were conducting research to determine why students were not enrolling at your university, what segmentation characteristics would you consider important when choosing participants?

Recommended Reading



Belk, Russell W. (ed.) (2007) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. An excellent resource on everything that is new in qualitative research methodology.

Daymon, Christine and Holloway, Immy (2002) *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications*. London: Routledge. A practical guide that thoroughly covers all aspects of qualitative research. While the book focuses on public relations and communications it also applies to any type of marketing research project.

Hackley, Chris (2003) *Doing Research Projects in Marketing, Management and Consumer Research*. London: Routledge. Focuses on how interpretive research fits into the qualitative research methodology. While the book covers philosophical perspectives it is also useful for new researchers.

Stevens, Robert., Wren, Bruce., Sherwood, Philip K. and Ruddick, Morris E. (2005) *The Marketing Research Guide*. New York: Business Books. This book is written from a management perspective and covers how marketing research can be used to solve marketing problems. It also includes chapters on industrial and international marketing research.

Stewart, David W., Shamdasani, Prem N. and Rook, Dennis W. (2007) *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE. While covering all aspects of planning and conducting focus groups, the book specifically looks at the issue of participant recruitment and selection.