

Quantitative & Qualitative Research

Introduction (Write this first — 2 - 3 lines)

Simple Core Definition

Research strategy is a general plan or overall orientation that guides how a researcher conducts social research — from where to start, what steps to follow, and where to end.

According to **Bryman**, research strategy is:

"A general orientation to the conduct of social research that provides a framework for collecting and analyzing data."

In social work research specifically, a research strategy is the **broad methodological approach** a researcher adopts to answer a research question — determining whether they will measure social phenomena numerically or understand them through meaning and interpretation.

Elaborated Definition (For 15-mark answers — write 4 - 5 lines)

Research strategy refers to the **overall design and logical framework** that a social researcher follows to investigate a social problem or phenomenon. It specifies the starting point of research, the series of steps to be taken, and the end point at which conclusions are drawn. **It determines the epistemological and ontological foundation of the study** — that is, what the researcher believes about the nature of knowledge and social reality.

In social work research, the **choice of strategy depends on the nature of the problem** — whether the researcher wants to *measure* a social issue or *understand* it deeply. The two major research strategies are **qualitative** (inductive, interpretive) and **quantitative** (deductive, positivist).

Research strategy means a **general orientation to the conduct of social research**. Social scientists distinguish between two major research strategies — **Qualitative** and **Quantitative**. These two strategies differ not just in their methods but also in their **underlying philosophy, approach to data, and purpose of inquiry**. Both are essential tools in social work research.

PART 1 — QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Definition

Qualitative research is an **unstructured, exploratory research method** that studies highly complex phenomena that are impossible to elucidate with quantitative research. It is used to gain an **in-depth understanding of human behaviour, experience, attitudes, intentions, and motivations**, on the basis of observation and interpretation, to find out the way people think and feel.

In simple words: Qualitative research tries to understand the *meaning* behind human behaviour. It asks "**Why does this happen?**" and "**What is the experience like?**" — not "How many times?" The researcher listens, observes, and interprets rather than measuring.

Key Features of Qualitative Research

- 1. Inductive Approach** Qualitative research predominantly emphasizes an **inductive approach** — it places emphasis on the *generation* of theories rather than testing them. The researcher goes into the field without a fixed theory and builds one from what they find.
 - 2. Subjective & Holistic** The researcher gives more weight to the **views and experiences of participants**. Human behaviour is seen as context-specific, so it must be studied *holistically* — as a whole, not broken into isolated variables.
 - 3. Words, Not Numbers** The data collected is in the form of **words, narratives, pictures, and observations** — not numbers. Raw data is verbal and ongoing.
 - 4. Naturalistic Setting** Research happens in the **natural environment** of participants — their homes, communities, workplaces — with minimal disturbance or intervention.
 - 5. Small, Purposive Sample** Only a small sample is selected — not randomly, but **purposively** — meaning those who can give the deepest understanding of the topic.
 - 6. Flexible Design** The research design is flexible and **emerges as the study progresses**. Hypotheses are tentative and evolving, not fixed in advance.
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Philosophical Base

Qualitative research **rejects positivism** and is rooted in **Interpretivism / Phenomenology**. It holds that:

- Social reality is **subjectively constructed** by individuals through meaning and interaction
- The social world cannot be studied the same way as the physical/natural world
- Knowledge comes from understanding how individuals **interpret their own social world**

As your PPT states: qualitative research *"embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation."*

Types of Qualitative Research

- **Case Study** — Deep study of one person, family, or community
 - **Grounded Theory** — Building theory directly from data collected in the field
 - **Ethnography** — Researcher lives within a community and studies it from inside
 - **Phenomenology** — Understanding the lived experience of individuals
 - **Historical Research** — Understanding the past through documents and records
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Methods of Data Collection

- **In-depth interviews** — Long, open-ended, one-on-one conversations
 - **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** — A guided group conversation on a topic
 - **Participant Observation** — Researcher joins and observes the community
 - **Field notes** — Detailed written records of observations
 - **Document collection** — Letters, diaries, official records
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Social Work Example

A social worker wants to understand **why women in a village do not report domestic violence** despite knowing they can. She conducts in-depth interviews with 12 women over 3 months. What she discovers cannot be captured in numbers:

- Fear of being thrown out of the house
- Shame and social stigma attached to speaking up
- Belief that "this is normal in marriage"
- Lack of trust in police
- Financial dependence on the husband

These deep, complex, emotional reasons emerged only because the researcher **listened and observed** — not measured. This is qualitative research at its best in social work.

Operational Description (from your PPT — use these points directly)

Aspect	Qualitative Research
Purpose	Explain; gain insight and understanding through intensive study of narrative data
Approach	Inductive, subjective, holistic, process-oriented
Hypothesis	Tentative, evolving, based on the particular study
Literature Review	Limited; may not be exhaustive
Setting	Naturalistic — in the field, as it naturally occurs
Sampling	Purposive — for in-depth understanding, not representation
Data Collection	Participant observation, informal interviews, field notes, documents
Data	Raw data is words
Analysis	Ongoing; involves synthesis and interpretation
Interpretation	Tentative, speculative, reviewed on ongoing basis

Advantages

- Captures the **depth, richness, and complexity** of human experience
- Gives **voice to marginalized people** in their own words
- Flexible — discovers **unexpected findings** as they emerge
- Ideal for **exploring new or sensitive topics** in social work

Limitations

- Findings **cannot be generalized** to a larger population
 - **Time-consuming** — requires months of fieldwork
 - Risk of **researcher bias** during interpretation
 - Difficult to **replicate** — another researcher may interpret differently
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PART 2 — QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Definition

Quantitative research is a form of research that **relies on the methods of natural sciences**, which produces **numerical data and hard facts**. It aims at establishing

cause and effect relationship between two variables by using mathematical, computational, and statistical methods. It is also known as "**Empirical Research**" as it can be accurately and precisely measured.

In simple words: Quantitative research turns social reality into numbers and then studies those numbers. It asks "**How many?**" "**How much?**" "**How often?**" and seeks to measure, compare, and predict.

Key Features of Quantitative Research

1. Deductive Approach Quantitative research entails a **deductive approach** — it begins with an existing theory, derives a hypothesis, and then tests it through data. The accent is placed on *testing* theories, not building them.

2. Objective & Value-Free The researcher remains **uninvolved and detached** from the participants. The approach attempts to be value-free and outcome-oriented. Social reality is seen as **external and objective** — existing independently of the observer.

3. Numbers and Statistics Data is expressed in **numbers, graphs, and tables**. Analysis uses statistical, mathematical, and computational techniques.

4. Controlled Setting The research setting is **controlled as much as possible** to isolate variables and ensure accuracy of measurement.

5. Large, Random Sample A **large, representative, randomly selected sample** is used so that results can be **generalized** to the wider population.

6. Structured Design The research design is **strongly structured and specified in detail in advance** — including the hypothesis, methods, instruments, and analysis plan.

Philosophical Base

Quantitative research is rooted in **Positivism** — the philosophical belief that:

- Knowledge comes from **sensory experience and scientific methods**
- Social reality is **external and objective** — it exists outside the mind of the individual
- Social sciences can and should use the same methods as **natural sciences**
- Phenomena can be reduced to **measurable variables**

quantitative research *"embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality."*

Methods of Data Collection

- **Surveys** — structured questionnaires with closed-ended or multiple-choice questions
 - **Experiments** — testing the effect of one variable on another with control groups
 - **Standardized tests and scales** — e.g., Likert scale, rating scales
 - **Structured interviews** — fixed questions, fixed options
 - **Secondary data** — census data, government statistics
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Social Work Example

A social worker wants to study the **impact of a mid-day meal programme on school attendance** among tribal children in Uttarakhand. He collects data from 800 students across 20 schools before and after the programme:

- Average attendance **before programme: 54%**
- Average attendance **after programme: 81%**
- Nutritional improvement recorded in **73% of children**
- Dropout rate reduced by **29%**

These numbers are clear, measurable, and can be used to **convince the government to expand the programme** to other districts. This is quantitative research — hard facts that drive policy decisions.

Operational Description (from your PPT — use these directly)

Aspect	Quantitative Research
Purpose	Explain, predict, or control phenomena through numerical data
Approach	Deductive, value-free, objective, outcome-oriented
Hypothesis	Specific, testable, stated prior to the study
Literature Review	Extensive; significantly influences the study
Setting	Controlled to the degree possible
Sampling	Largest manageable random sample for generalization
Data Collection	Surveys, experiments, instruments, questionnaires, tests
Data	Raw data is numbers
Analysis	Statistical; done at the end of the study
Interpretation	Formulated at end; stated as degree of certainty

Advantages

- Results can be **generalized** to large populations
- **Reliable and replicable** — another researcher gets similar results
- **Objective** — less personal bias from the researcher
- Enables **comparison across groups, regions, and time**
- Provides **hard evidence** for policy-making and programme evaluation

Limitations

- Cannot capture the **depth of human experience** — a number cannot explain *why* something happens or *how it feels*
 - **Context is lost** — numbers don't tell the story behind the data
 - Rigid structure may **miss unexpected important findings**
 - People may give **socially desirable answers** on questionnaires
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PART 3 — SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON TABLE

Draw this as a neat table in your answer — it always impresses examiners.

Basis	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Meaning	Understanding human behaviour and meaning	Generating numerical data through scientific methods
Nature	Exploratory, holistic	Conclusive, particularistic
Approach	Subjective	Objective
Reasoning	Inductive	Deductive
Philosophy	Interpretivism	Positivism
Data type	Words, narratives, images	Numbers, graphs, statistics
Sample	Small, purposive	Large, random
Data collection	Interviews, FGDs, observation	Surveys, experiments, questionnaires
Analysis	Thematic / content analysis	Statistical / mathematical
Hypothesis	Tentative, evolving	Fixed, testable, stated in advance
Design	Flexible, emergent	Structured, pre-planned

Basis	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Researcher role	Involved, insider perspective	Detached, uninvolved
Setting	Naturalistic (field)	Controlled
Output	Initial understanding	Final course of action
Research question	"Why?" "How?" "What does it mean?"	"How many?" "How much?" "How often?"
Generalizability	Low	High
Depth of insight	High	Low

PART 4 — DIAGRAMS FOR YOUR ANSWER SHEET

Draw these by hand — they earn extra marks.

Diagram 1 — Qualitative Research Process (Inductive Path)

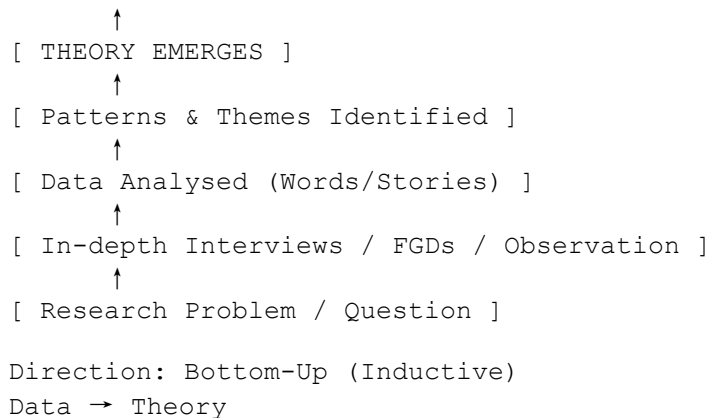
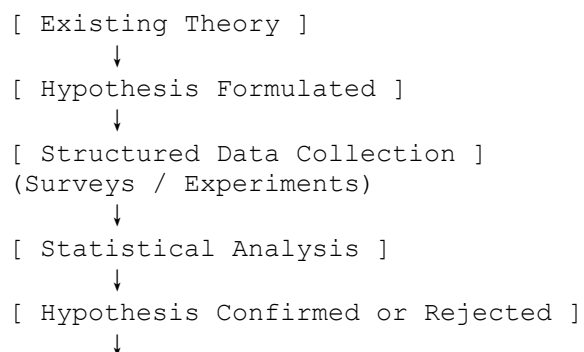


Diagram 2 — Quantitative Research Process (Deductive Path)



[Generalization to Population]

Direction: Top-Down (Deductive)

Theory → Data

Diagram 3 — Relationship Between Both (Best diagram for high marks)

