## Chapter 1

The Nature and Relevance of Research

### KEY CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

» *The nature of research.*
» *Experience, common sense and theory.*
» *The characteristics of scientific research.*
» *Good and bad research.*
» *Theoretical and applied research.*
» *Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research.*
» *Inductive and deductive approaches to research.*
» *Issues that require research solutions.*
» *Some problems that may be encountered.*

### 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with a clear understanding of what research is and what it is designed to do. To achieve this, we will explore the nature of research in terms of its main purposes, functions and characteristics. We will also examine different types of research and focus on how these might be used to address or solve theoretical or practical problems, as well as the two basic approaches used to design and conduct research. We will also consider the features that characterise research regarded as good or bad and highlight some of the problems and issues that can arise in any research project, regardless of its scope and size. At the end of this process, you should not only have a clearer understanding of these issues but also feel more confident that undertaking research is perhaps not quite as daunting as you may have believed and developing research skills is not just something you have to do
because it is required on your course but will actually be useful to you when you become a practising manager.

1.2 The Nature of Research

Research is often seen by students on hospitality or tourism courses to be a necessary evil to be confronted. This is especially the case when tutors inform students that they will have to undertake an undergraduate research project or dissertation. This type of activity may be viewed as something different, larger and much more challenging than the normal pattern of learning on a programme and, because it is outside the normal experience of attending lectures and seminars, writing relatively short pieces of coursework and/or sitting examinations that tend to characterise most modules or units on a programme, there may naturally be some apprehension about having to undertake such a venture.

In many respects, hospitality and tourism courses, and the people engaged on them, have strong practical and applied emphases. Indeed, it is perhaps unlikely that you see yourself as a traditional high-flying academic who naturally wishes to engage in theoretical or applied ‘research’ within a chosen academic field or discipline. That sort of thing may be seen as OK for the physicists, chemists, computer scientists, economists and historians of this world, but, you might be asking what relevance does it have to the more practical and pragmatic world of hospitality and tourism? Well, before we go on to consider this question, read Exhibit 1.1 as this may help to demystify some of the misgivings you may have about doing research.

Exhibit 1.1 Research – Do I Need to be Einstein to Do It?

Sarah has just started her final year as an undergraduate student on a BA (Hons) International Tourism Management course and she also works as a part-time waitress at the Mexican Sunrise restaurant. She is usually very bubbly and enthusiastic in her work and well liked by regular diners at the restaurant. However, Carlos Ramirez, the restaurant manager, has noticed that Sarah has looked worried and preoccupied during her recent shifts and this is beginning to affect how she deals with the customers. So, he asks her if she can come to see him in his office after her current shift finishes.

Carlos said, ‘Hi Sarah, come in and have a seat and don’t look so worried – I’m not about to sack you! It’s just that I’ve noticed lately that you don’t appear to be quite your effervescent self with the customers and I wondered if there was a problem I could help with.’ Relieved, Sarah said, ‘Well, you’re right, I am a bit worried about something. When I started the final year of my course, the tutors told me that a major part of this year was going to be taken up with the individual research project and this will account for 30 per cent of my final marks and have a major impact on the degree I get. As if that wasn’t bad enough, they then scared us
out of our wits by saying it would be the real test of how good we are and, because we have never done anything like this before, we had better get on it with it quickly because we will have to deal with things like research philosophy, deduction and induction, hypothesis testing, collecting empirical data and probably use inferential statistics to analyse this. My God, it's like another language and I don't think I can cope.'

Carlos smiled, 'Ah, so that's it. I knew there was something up. OK, Sarah let's see if we can't put your mind at rest a little over some of these things. When I was in your position I felt the same. I felt like I needed to be Einstein to be able to do it, but I learned that, really, all this research stuff is not as daunting as you think. A lot of it is new jargon that you haven't encountered before and, once you learn the research language a little, it will not be so frightening. Let me give you an example. Remember when you first came to work here, you were a little lost because of the jargon we use in the restaurant until I explained it for you in terms you were already familiar with?'. Sarah nodded. 'Well, it's pretty much the same with research,' Carlos said and continued, 'You know more than you think you do. Do you remember when I asked you to come up with some ideas on how we could improve the service in the restaurant?' Sarah nodded again. 'Well, you did, and some very good ones as well. So how did you do it?'

Sarah replied, 'I already had some ideas from what I'd read and studied on the course, from my experience of working here and I went to suss out how a couple of other restaurants operated. Then I thought, well, if we could do X then that might improve Y because I could see the connection between the two. So, if you remember, we set this up as a trial for a couple of weeks to see if it was true.'

'And how did we decide whether it was or not?' Carlos asked.

'We compared the restaurant's performance before the trial with it during the trial and then I wrote this up in a report for you, which proved my original thoughts were right,' said Sarah.

'Exactly,' said Carlos, 'So, let me put this into research jargon for you, because this is what you did, conducted a piece of research! You began by examining existing evidence on how to organise restaurant service, then you used this to formulate some educated guesses, or hypotheses, on likely causes and effects. What we then did, through our trial, was to set up a type of experiment to test your hypotheses to see if they were correct or not. How did we find this out? By analysing the restaurant's performance figures, or data, and then we came to the conclusion that this information indicated the original hypotheses were correct. So, when you wrote up these findings in the report, this gave us the rationale for changing the service system.'

'Wow, when you put it like that, I guess I do know more than I think and maybe it's not going to be such a worry after all. Thanks, Carlos – you've put my mind at rest and I think I'll be OK now. It's really very good of you to take the time and trouble to help me in this way.'

'No problem, Sarah,' Carlos said, 'After all, I do have an ulterior motive. If you're happier and more relaxed, you'll be back to your old self at work and the customers will be happier again.'

'Ah,' said Sarah, 'What was it you said about Einstein earlier? I think you are smarter than you let on!'
Hopefully Exhibit 1.1 will have helped to convince you that research is less highbrow and complicated than you may have thought! As an aspiring hospitality or tourism manager, you know that most of your time as a manager will be spent managing, dealing with real-time, practical issues and problems. Decisions will have to be made within tight timescales, often on the spot, and this implies a more pragmatic approach to solving problems and answering questions. Experience, common sense and quick thinking will be important in this type of environment. There may not be time for an extended investigation, reflective theorising and procedures designed to ensure that the answer arrived at is based on sound and comprehensive facts or data and, therefore, the most valid and reliable one available.

That said, however, and notwithstanding the value of timely managerial decisionmaking, not all managerial decisions can be successfully made on the basis of experience, common sense or quick thinking. One of the problems with these as a basis for determining answers, finding solutions and making decisions is that they are likely to have, at best, a fairly shaky evidence base and tend to be idiosyncratic and inconsistent over time.

Let us just consider this issue for a moment. An individual’s experience is unique to that individual and is comprised of all the experiences he or she has encountered and how the person has thought about, reacted to and learnt from those experiences. Therefore, one person’s experience can never be the same as another’s. Even if the people concerned share similar past experiences, the ways in which they perceive them and learn from them will differ. Thus, answers, solutions and decisions based on experience will tend to be idiosyncratic because the underlying evidence base – the individuals’ experiences and cognitive abilities – used to generate them vary from one person to another.

Similarly, what is common sense? Common sense is a generally accepted view or belief of what is seen to be a sensible way to act or understand certain questions, issues or events. Such a view or belief may indeed be accurate, but, equally, it may not. The problem is that there is rarely, if ever, an opportunity to prove or validate views based on common sense because it is invariably unclear where the origins of the commonsense view in question lie and any evidence base underlying the view is likely to be fragmented, diffuse and indistinct at best. Hence, when challenged, the person using common sense as the rationale or justification for an answer, solution or decision only has recourse to the, rather mythical, strength of the commonsense belief as evidence to support it. Typically the question ‘How do you know that is correct or the right way to do things?’ is answered with the statement ‘Because it’s common sense’ – an answer that invites the questioner to agree with the commonsense belief of the proponent. What happens, though, if the questioner does not accept this? Can there be a logical discussion, with reference to data that could support or refute the claim, to establish which view is correct? No, of course not. The very nature of a belief is just that – it is something people believe for some reason, but is
not something that necessarily can be proved one way or the other. I may believe in God, you may not, but there is no way that we could find irrefutable or incontestable evidence to support either.

So, although not without value, answers and solutions based on experience or common sense alone may have inherent flaws and lead to inconsistent, if not conflicting, policies and practices if they are the sole basis for managerial decisionmaking. In addition, where questions arise that cannot be answered by reference to prevailing common sense or accumulated experience, perhaps because they are entirely new or much more complex, we have to resort to other techniques and methods. Among these is research.

As a practising hospitality or tourism manager, you will have to engage in various aspects of research then – because the questions and problems facing the contemporary manager are increasingly becoming ones that are new and complex and cannot be answered or solved by using experience or common sense alone – but you do actually undertake research in your daily life now. Consider the following issues for a moment: you want to go on holiday, you want to buy a car, you want to find a suitable venue for your twenty-first party, you want to get the best return you can on your savings. How do you decide where to go on holiday, which car to buy, where to hold your party and which form of investment will give you the best return? In a word, research. All of these issues have alternative answers or solutions and you need to find and select the one that fits your needs or criteria the best. How would you do that? Simply by collecting information to identify the options associated with each, then analyse the information and select the best option. In short, you would research the issue in order to identify the most suitable solution.

Many textbooks refer to, or define, research in terms of it being an activity that creates or generates new knowledge or as something that produces a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. The types of words that are commonly used in definitions of what research is include ‘discovery’, ‘investigation’, ‘new facts’, ‘advancement of knowledge’, ‘original insights’ – all of which seem to suggest that undertaking research is likely to be a rather daunting task and create the impression that all research is something very difficult, complicated and requires a high level of intellectual ability on the part of the researcher. However, as we have seen above, in the example of undertaking some research to choose a holiday, a car, a party venue and so on, even these simple ‘research projects’ involved investigation, discovery and, at least for you as the researcher, the generation of new insights and knowledge. Therefore, it is perhaps preferable to think about research in contextual terms such as these. Indeed, the type of research you will be expected to undertake for an undergraduate project or dissertation, or even a Masters thesis, will be relatively limited in scope and expectations.

By now I hope you are convinced that research is not as difficult as you may have imagined. Of course it has its challenges, but, as indicated earlier, you already
do research in your everyday life and the type of research you will be required to
do as an undergraduate, or even a Masters, student is not of the least necessary to
win a Nobel prize. Just in case you are still in doubt, let us consider a couple of
views from the literature. Sekaran (2000: 4) suggests that research is, ‘an organised,
systematic, data-based scientific enquiry or investigation into a specific problem
which is undertaken with the objective of finding solutions or answers to it’. By
contrast, Wilson (1997: VI) takes the view that, ‘research is a process of “princi-
pled compromise”, informed by professional knowledge of the techniques and lim-
itations of research methods, driven by personal energy, and presented with
whatever honesty and objectivity that can be mustered’.

Sekaran’s view of the nature of research is one that we might refer to as con-
ventional. Although it would be difficult to argue against the value of having a
process that had a clear focus and purpose, was organised and systematic and
based on data capable of being verified or challenged, Sekaran’s definition implies
that this process is linear in nature and one that can be conducted objectively by
using the ‘scientific method’ to eliminate the influence of subjective values and
bias. Wilson’s view challenges much of this. His more alternative or, arguably, real-
istic stance contends that research is inherently subject to personal influence and
bias and the idea that a ‘method’, scientific or otherwise, can somehow create an
objective, bias-free process is an illusion. Put simply, because the tools and tech-
niques used to implement the method are chosen by the researcher and it is the
researcher who decides how the results are to be presented, it is inevitable that
personal preferences and biases will influence the whole process.

So, who is correct? Is research always objective and value-free or is it subjec-
tive and value-ridden? The answer is that, in reality, it tends to lie somewhere
on a continuum between these two extremes. Perhaps one way to think about
the significance of this is to consider, as some, but not all, researchers do, the
objective, value-free view as ‘ideal’. Unfortunately, as is the case with most
ideals, it is unlikely to be achieved. In that case, you might ask, why bother? The
answer to this is that, although you may not be able to achieve what is regarded
as the ideal by some, the closer you can get to this the better it will be. This
leads us to consider the notions of what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ research.

1.3 The Characteristics of Scientific Research

Logically, good research should reflect the characteristics of the ‘ideal’, bad
research the opposite. The ‘ideal’ is variously called scientific enquiry, scientific
research or the scientific method and is regarded as having nine general char-
acteristics to distinguish it from other forms of research. As we will see, each
of these, both individually and collectively, are quite sensible and, if embodied
in a piece of research, tend to make it more believable or credible. Whether
or not they can all be achieved, however, is another matter, as we have
discussed above!
1.3.1 **Purposeful**

Any research project should have a clear focus that is achievable as the research process itself is a means to an end. For example, it is a way to obtain answers to a question or solutions to a problem. To make this clear, an overall aim and associated objectives should be specified before the research begins. The aim defines what the overall purpose and output of the proposed research is and the objectives indicate what has to be completed if the aim is to be successfully achieved. For example, the aim of the research might be ‘To determine the critical success factors (CSFs) for UK budget hotel operations.’ To achieve this overall result, a number of tasks or stages will have to be completed. These will be the research objectives and, in this case, might be expressed as follows.

1. To conduct a literature review to identify the nature of CSFs, both in general and in relation to the budget hotel operations context of the project.
2. To develop a theoretical framework/conceptual model of the CSFs from the literature review and produce associated hypotheses.
3. To collect empirical data from budget hotel companies and other appropriate organisations and/or individuals associated with the project’s context.
4. To analyse the empirical data and test the study’s hypotheses.
5. To produce conclusions and recommendations for further research.

If these objectives are achieved successfully, then, collectively, they should enable the overall aim to be achieved.

1.3.2 **Rigorous**

This characteristic is concerned with the quality of the design and how the research is conducted. Essentially, if a piece of research has been conducted in a rigorous manner, it is more likely that it will be seen as credible and the results believed and accepted than would otherwise be the case. To produce a piece of research that is regarded as rigorous requires sound and logically consistent thinking to produce an appropriate overall design (methodology) and the adoption/use of appropriate tools and techniques (methods). A rigorous piece of research will have a sound underlying conceptual basis and have been conducted in a manner that is both transparent and defensible.

1.3.3 **Testable**

Testability is concerned with the nature of the question being researched. For the research to be able to answer the question it is designed to address, the question must be answerable. This means that the question, or a hypothesis derived from it, must be written or phrased in a form that will enable it to be tested or proved. Essentially, this means phrasing the issue in either clear positive or
negative terms so that it can be determined whether the proposition can be supported by the evidence or not. Using our example from above, we might produce a series of such propositions or hypotheses relating to the factors that could be critical for a budget hotel’s operations to be successful. Having reviewed the literature on this topic, we are likely to have identified a range of factors it is suggested may be very important or critical for such success. What we would then need to do is test the assertions by collecting evidence to see if it supports them or not. However, to be able to conduct such tests, we need statements that are testable. For example, one factor that could be regarded as critical for this type of hospitality operation is the cleanliness of the guest bedrooms. So, we might speculate, or hypothesise, that the higher the levels of cleanliness, the more successful the budget hotel would be. Alternatively, we might state that our survey respondents – budget hotel general managers – would indicate guest bedroom cleanliness to be extremely important for the success of the hotel. As we will see in Chapter 5, there are varying forms of hypothesis statements that are capable of being tested and so we may not always want to express them in the form we have used here.

1.3.4 Replicable

If the design and procedures used to undertake a piece of research are transparent and available in the public domain for others to see, then other researchers will be able to replicate or repeat that research to test the rigour of its processes and the accuracy of its findings. This is the same idea as one researcher repeating the same experiment a number of times to see if the same results are obtained. If the results from this process are the same, or at least sufficiently similar, then people are likely to have confidence that they are accurate. I am not suggesting here that you will have the time or resources to repeatedly test your research findings, but you may wish to test previous research findings within a different context as the basis for your project. For example, in previous studies on your topic/research question, other researchers may have designed and used particular data collection/analysis instruments, procedures and techniques, but in a different context. Their study may have been conducted in another country to the one you are using in your project and so you may be interested in whether or not it could also be applicable to your country or it may have been undertaken a long time ago and needs updating because conditions have changed. Alternatively, it might have been conducted within the context of an industry other than hospitality or tourism and you want to test if it would also be applicable to your industry.

Whatever the context, the key issues here are those of comprehensiveness and transparency. For you to be able to replicate someone else’s study or for someone else to repeat yours, the process used must be recorded in detail. So, the assumptions made, hypotheses tested and the data collection and analysis
procedures and techniques used must be reported comprehensively and transparently to enable others to test the validity of the findings by repeating the work.

1.3.5 **Precision**

Because of the scale, scope and complexity of most real-world situations, we are often forced to restrict our research to a subset or sample of the full population. Where this is the case, we face an issue concerning the extent to which the findings we obtain from our sample are a true reflection of the population as a whole. If the two are the same, then we can say that they are very precise or accurate. As we may want to generalise the findings from our sample to apply to the larger population, the more precise the findings are, the more we are able to do this successfully.

There are many issues associated with this, particularly those concerned with sample design/selection, that will be dealt with later in this book (see Chapter 8), but just consider the following example, which is likely to be familiar to you, as an illustration of why precision is important.

In all countries there are commercial companies that conduct ‘polls’ or surveys on behalf of clients. For example, Gallup and Mori are well-known names in the UK. These companies conduct, among others, political polls designed to estimate such things as voting intentions, the popularity of political parties or even specific politicians. So, for example, when an election is due, polls will be conducted to try and predict which political party is going to win. As the UK probably has a voting population of around 40 million people, it would clearly be impossible to ask every voter which party he or she intended to vote for. Therefore, the poll has to be conducted on a much smaller number than this. This may be as low as 2000 or 3000 people, which is clearly a very small percentage of the whole voting population. The results from this sample will then be used to predict the overall election results based on millions of voters’ behaviour. As you can see, if the results obtained from the sample polled are not precise, then the prediction of the election result is likely to be wildly inaccurate.

1.3.6 **Confidence**

This is related to precision and is concerned with the likelihood, or probability, that the findings from the sample are correct or, put another way, how confident we can be about the accuracy of the research findings. If we can be 100 per cent confident, then, effectively, we can say that we are certain the same result will be obtained all the time. However, we can never be certain because there is always some potential for error in research work. So, what level of confidence is acceptable?

The general convention is that a 95 per cent level of confidence is the minimum acceptable. This means that the probability of the findings being
incorrect is only 5 per cent and, conversely, 9 1/2 times out of every 10 they will be correct. If we can demonstrate that our findings have such a high level of probability of being correct, they are going to appear to be robust and other people will have confidence in them. The importance of this is that we cannot simply expect other people to believe, or have confidence, in our results without presenting some proof to justify our claims in this respect.

1.3.7 **Objective**

As we have seen earlier, this characteristic is one that has received criticism in terms of whether or not it is really possible for any individual to be truly objective and value-free when designing and conducting research. Whichever stance you accept, the principle here is that the greater the objectivity in the research, the less subjective bias it will have. So, there is an inverse relationship between objectivity and subjectivity – that is, as one increases, the other declines. If the ‘ideal’ is total objectivity, then the closer you can get to that the better it is.

We probably cannot be perfect, but we can try to get as close to being so as possible. Given that we would probably accept it is not possible to eliminate all our subjective impulses, we should be aware that we are likely to bring these into play and constantly challenge ourselves to either not do this or limit it as much as we can. In addition to this, we should be aware of where our subjectivity has influenced the research and be prepared to recognise this and the impact it may have had.

1.3.8 **Generalisable**

It is self-evident that all research is undertaken within a particular context or situation, but this does not mean that the findings from this research will be applicable to other contexts or situations that are related or unrelated to the original context in which the research was conducted. However, it would increase the value of the research if it were to be generally applicable rather than relevant only to that one context. Therefore, the ability to generalise from the results of a research project to other contexts is clearly desirable. Thus, the ability to generalise research results widely increases their value.

The problem with this is that, to maximise the generalisability of the research results, considerable thought, time, effort and, often, money, would have to be devoted to the research design and procedures. In the type of research that you are likely to be conducting, this may not be possible for obvious reasons, in which case you may have to accept that the ability to generalise from your findings may be limited at best.

The most important issue here is not to over-claim the generalisability of your findings. If the results from your study are clearly limited to a particular company, industry sector, country, culture or time period, then it is important to state this when you write up the findings. Of course you may speculate that
the findings could be applicable to a wider context, but you should make it clear that it is precisely this, a speculation, and not a strong or definitive claim to generalisability.

You may encounter this generalisability issue from two possible directions. First, the one described above, where you examine the extent to which your research findings may be capable of generalising to other contexts. Second, your research may be designed to test the extent to which previous research findings can be generalised to the context in which you are conducting your research. For example, you may take an existing theory or set of research findings that have been derived from other contexts and seek to test the extent to which they are applicable to the hospitality or tourism context you have chosen for your study. This is generally known as a 'replication' study, where you repeat or replicate the original, but in a different context. In principle, this procedure is analogous to repeating an experiment under different conditions to test how robust the original findings are when the original conditions are altered. In short, how generalisable the results may be.

**1.3.9 Parsimonious**

This characteristic is essentially concerned with simplicity. Any issue being researched is likely to be one that could be influenced by a wide range of factors, but not all of these possible influences will be equally strong or important to the overall answer. For example, you may ask the question ‘What determines the level of customer satisfaction in this type of hotel, restaurant, destination, theme park?’ When you think about this, it is clear there will be quite a number of factors that could have some influence on the level of customer satisfaction. These might be related to the nature of the product, the abilities and attitudes of staff, accessibility of the premises, price charged, quality of the experience and so on, but they are unlikely to have an equal influence. The question is, which have the largest influence on satisfaction?

Research designed to look for a parsimonious answer would seek to answer this question as well, not just the wider one. Not only would a parsimonious approach to designing the research help to make it more economical and manageable but it would also mean that the results would be likely to have greater practical value.

To illustrate this, think of yourself as a manager who has commissioned some research to answer the broader customer satisfaction question above. If the researchers came back to you and said, there are 15 factors that our research indicates have an influence, how useful would this be? On the other hand, if they came back to you and said ‘Our findings show that, of the 15 factors we have identified as ones influencing satisfaction, the results clearly show that, of these, there are two that have a much greater influence than all the others’, then if would be much more useful for you to concentrate your resources and efforts on improving those, knowing that, if you did, the chances of achieving an
improvement in customer satisfaction and a return on this investment would be pretty good.

1.4 **Types of Research**

Research is research, isn’t it? Well, yes and no! Research may be regarded as sound and good or flawed and bad. It may be viewed as scientific or unscientific. It may be theoretical or more practical in nature. It can be conducted in laboratories or in real-life situations. It may take place at one point in time or over a period of time. It might be limited to one country or could possibly embrace a number of different countries. It may be designed to test existing knowledge to establish how valid it is or to establish entirely new knowledge. It may be concerned with collecting and analysing quantitative or qualitative data. It could be designed to explore, describe or explain the phenomena in question.

So, where do we start? In the first instance, it may be useful to distinguish between what may be referred to as different types of research purposes compared to judgements regarding the quality of research. Descriptors such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ clearly refer to the quality of a piece of research and are, at least in some respects, subjective, although criteria may be employed to distinguish between research that is regarded as good or bad. For example, research regarded as scientific is more likely to be seen as good research than that which is unscientific. The reason for this is that scientific research will embody the characteristics of scientific research discussed in the previous section of this chapter that, as we saw, are desirable features of any piece of research for a number of reasons.

1.4.1 **Exploratory and descriptive**

In terms of differing purposes, exploratory research is really self-evident. Where, perhaps, the situation is very new, has been previously inaccessible for some reason or the research problem is too large and complex to address without some initial, exploratory work, an attempt to generate some initial insights and understanding would be of value. In this sense, a piece of exploratory research designed to surface the key issues and questions may be appropriate as it would help to make the situation clearer and, possibly, set the research agenda.

Descriptive research will be designed to establish a factual picture of the issue under investigation, whereas explanatory research will be concerned with explaining the why and how of the situation (see Table 1.1 for a comparison of the goals of these three types of research).

Explanatory research frequently includes descriptive elements but goes beyond this to identify and explore the causes lying behind the effects and the nature of the relationships between the two. Taking our earlier example of the
factors that might influence customer satisfaction, a descriptive study would only identify these factors and perhaps speculate about their relationship to satisfaction. In contrast, an explanatory study would seek to differentiate between, and measure, the relative influence of the factors and explain the cause and effect relationship between them. In this sense, the explanatory study clearly has more applied value than the descriptive one.

However, you should not necessarily be led by this to conclude that you should aim to produce an explanatory study rather than a descriptive one. Other things being equal, it would be preferable, but, depending the existing state of knowledge on the subject, it may be that a good descriptive study is what is required at a particular point in time. For example, although today scientists and doctors are able to prove and explain the relationships and mechanisms between such things as smoking (cause) and lung cancers (effects), it was not the case many years ago. Without earlier, more descriptive, studies that found correlations (non cause and effect relationships) between these two

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<th>Table 1.1  The goals of exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research</th>
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<td><strong>Exploratory research</strong></td>
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<td>Become familiar with the basic facts, people and concerns involved.</td>
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<td>Develop a well-grounded mental picture of what is happening.</td>
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<td>Generate many ideas and develop tentative theories and conjectures.</td>
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<td>Determine the feasibility of doing additional research.</td>
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<td>Formulate questions and refine issues for more systematic enquiry.</td>
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<td>Develop techniques and a sense of direction for future research.</td>
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*Source: Adapted from Neuman, Social Research Methods, 2nd edition. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston MA, © 1994 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.*
things, it is possible that the more detailed, explanatory work would not have taken place.

1.4.2 Pure and applied

You will also find that the research methods literature will almost universally distinguish between pure, or basic, and applied research as two types of research with very different purposes (see Table 1.2). Pure research, sometimes called ‘blue sky thinking’, is an activity that has no immediate use value or application to real-life problems. It is designed to contribute new thinking or knowledge to an existing field of enquiry in its own right, without having any other specific purpose. Its role is to expand and/or improve the body of knowledge, in its broadest sense, within the field concerned. Therefore, it is not utilitarian in nature, although it is quite possible that such intellectual advancements may be translated into more practical circumstances in the future. Pure research is invariably conceptual or theoretical in nature and concerned with intellectual reflection, discovery and invention. It is driven by intellectual interest and curiosity rather than a need to address a particular real-world problem.

Applied research, on the other hand, as the name suggests, is a more practical and focused type of research. It is generally concerned with practical problem-solving and finding solutions to real-world problems. In this sense, it is much more focused and goal-directed than pure research and, therefore, more utilitarian. It has a clear use value and concentrates on explanation, action and implementation of solutions. This is likely to be the type of research you will be more interested in as it has more immediate relevance to the type of applied course you are engaged on and the challenges you will face as a hospitality or tourism manager.

1.4.3 Theoretical/empirical and primary/secondary

Similar, but not quite the same, to the distinction between pure and applied research are those between theoretical and empirical and primary and secondary research. The distinction between the latter pairing is one based on the type of data or information to be used in the research project. Secondary research relies on data that already exists – in short, that contained in the literature relating to the issue in question – whereas primary research involves the collection of new data. Another way to think about this distinction is to consider something that is obtained first hand (new) compared to that obtained second hand (old). Although virtually all research that collects and analyses primary data will also use the same basic procedures for secondary data, secondary research is limited to the use of secondary data alone. Though there is a close connection between these two types and theoretical and empirical research, the two pairings are not necessarily synonymous.
Often, theoretical research is viewed as secondary research in nature and practice and, in the main, this is probably a reasonable view as it tends to take an abstract, conceptual and reflective stance in relation to the existing body of knowledge. Its role is to improve and extend the conceptual and, ultimately, concrete understanding of the issue. This invariably means that existing, secondary knowledge is questioned, tested, re-evaluated and revised. Nevertheless, theoretical research can be conducted by means of the collection and use of primary data and, hence, be empirical in nature. Let us return to the smoking and lung cancer example we used above to illustrate this.

By collecting empirical data on the connection between people who smoked and the incidence of lung cancer, researchers began to analyse this data and develop theories to explain the relationship between the cause and the effect, so these theoretical developments were stimulated by the collection of new primary data, at least in the first instance.

So, theoretical research may be conducted by using secondary or primary data. It is not the type of data that is critical here but the purpose of the research – whether it is conceptual or theoretical understanding. On the other hand, empirical and primary research are synonymous in the sense that the former always involves collection of the latter kind of data, though, as we have seen, such data may be used for theoretical or applied research purposes.
One thing that should be clear from the above discussion is that it is not always easy to decisively separate these so-called different types of research into totally discrete categories. Indeed, most research is likely to involve secondary and primary data, both theoretical and empirical considerations and contain descriptive and explanatory elements. The question is not if a piece of research is definitively one or the other, but what its main emphasis and purpose is. This leads us to consider what are often termed the two main approaches to research – induction and deduction.

### 1.5 The Main Research Approaches

#### 1.5.1 Induction

This is an approach that essentially works from the unknown to the known. As Figure 1.1 illustrates, the starting point for an inductive approach to conducting research is the identification of the problem or question to be addressed. In this respect it is synonymous with the deductive approach, but that is where the similarities end, as will become evident as we proceed to examine the two approaches. As the main purpose of induction is to build new theory, rather than test existing theory, its main empirical focus is on collecting data from the real world as a resource to be used in developing explanations or theory. Thus, the collection of empirical data occurs much earlier in the inductive approach than in the deductive approach and its role is different from that found in deduction. The inductive approach is generally regarded as one that favours the use of ‘ideographic’ methodologies, which we will explore further in Chapters 6 and 7, such as case studies or ‘in the field’ enquiries – that is, participant or non-participant observation (Gill and Johnson, 1991; Robson, 1993) because it is rooted in a philosophical view of the world that emphasises social construction, perceptions, meanings and subjectivity as important in understanding and the development of knowledge. As we shall see, this is known as phenomenology or, sometimes, interpretivism and, in Chapter 2, this is discussed in more detail.

Having collected the empirical data, the inductive researcher then has to make sense of it by analysing it for patterns, connections, relationships and so on in order to interpret its significance and produce meaningful explanations or theories. Ultimately, although these may be tested by other researchers using a deductive process, that is not the purpose of inductive research. As the philosophical beliefs and types of methods used by the inductive researcher are likely to value rich, narrative, descriptive information far more highly than statistical data, inductive research invariably involves the collection of qualitative rather than quantitative data. In this sense, inductive research is frequently seen as synonymous with qualitative research and, as we shall see below, the reverse is true of the deductive approach.
However, some caution should be adopted in uncritically accepting this deceptively simple distinction. Inductive research could be conducted by means of the collection of quantitative data and deductive research by collecting qualitative data. Indeed, many research projects, adopting one or the other approach, are designed to collect both types of data. Inductive research may collect basic numerical data to facilitate the description or indicate the scope and boundaries of the situation being studied. For example, in a case study of a company, the research findings may well include data relating to its size (turnover, capital employed, number of employees or operating units and so on) and perhaps the volume of its operations (output, sales and so on). Similarly, a deductive study designed to discover the volume of a market and understand the preferences of different types of consumers in that market would probably collect quantitative data relating to the size of the market – that is, the number of consumers and qualitative data to explain why they buy certain items and not others.

One question we have not addressed yet is when would it be more appropriate to use an inductive rather than deductive approach to conduct research? Apart from the influence of the researcher’s fundamental beliefs regarding the nature of the real world and knowledge, the use of induction would generally be more appropriate when the topic is so new or unique that the existing body of knowledge on it is non-existent or very limited or when it has not previously been possible to gain access to the real-world contexts in question to collect the
data. In short, when, for a variety of possible reasons, there is not a sufficient body of knowledge in the literature to sensibly adopt a deductive approach.

1.5.2 Deduction

This is the approach to research adopted by the archetypal scientist who believes that the world and knowledge are factual and objective. This is based on a set of beliefs known as positivism and we shall explore these beliefs and their implications further in Chapter 2.

As Figure 1.2 shows, this approach takes the existing body of theoretical and empirical knowledge as its primary starting point. It is embodied in the literature existing on the issues being researched and is accessed by conducting a review of this literature (see Chapter 4) to determine the theory, or theories, that will be tested in the research. So, deduction is concerned with testing existing theory, whereas, as we have seen, induction seeks to create new theory.

Once the literature has been reviewed, the deductive researcher will be in a position to develop the theoretical framework that informs and helps to structure and guide the remainder of the research process. We shall consider this in more detail in Chapter 5, but it should indicate to you that the deductive approach is generally more highly structured, focused and constrained, in terms of how the data collection and analysis procedures are designed and implemented, than is the inductive approach. This is highlighted even more when you consider that what the deductive research process will test are the
logical consequences of the theory, the hypotheses. As these will be highly specific and relatively limited in number, they focus the design of the data collection procedures and instruments to ensure that only the data required to test them is collected. At the end of the process, once the data has been analysed, the theory tested during this process will either be supported, or confirmed, by the evidence or it may require modification in the light of the evidence or, in extreme cases, it may need to be replaced by an entirely new theory.

1.6 Research Issues, Questions and Problems

We shall consider, in more detail, many of the considerations relating to choosing a research topic, formulating the question(s) or problem(s) to be addressed in the research project in Chapter 3, but here it is worthwhile to briefly reflect on the types of issues and questions that practising hospitality or tourism managers may wish to grapple with or answer and speculate on how they might use research principles and methods to achieve this. Consider the following questions, which are probably fairly typical issues such managers would be interested in.

- How can we increase the level of satisfaction among the guests who stay in our hotel?
- What would be the best types of location for our new branded restaurant outlets?
- How can we reduce the level of staff turnover?
- Which advertising media and methods would give us the greatest return for our expenditure?
- What do we have to do in order to attract more visitors to this part of the country?
- Why have fewer people visited our theme park this year than in previous years?

These all represent common practical issues and problems faced by hospitality or tourism businesses. At the same time, however, they all suggest a relationship between at least two things – a cause and an effect. Often, but not always, we know what the effect is, but the cause of it may be far more uncertain. In the questions above, we know that the levels of customer satisfaction are not as high as we would like them to be, the level of staff turnover is too high, some locations are likely to be preferable to others for our restaurant operations, visitor numbers are not as high as we would like or that they have declined for some reason and certain types of advertising media/methods are likely to be more efficient for our purposes than others, but which ones?

So, we know what the problem is, but not how to solve it. We know what we would like to achieve, but not how to get there. This is the case because our knowledge and understanding are not sufficient to enable us to close the gap. To remedy this, we need to increase our knowledge and understanding to help find the solution. The question then is, how do we do that? We could attempt to simply guess why the effects have occurred. We could commission or employ others – consultants and so on – to investigate the problem for us or undertake
some type of more systematic investigation or analysis of the problem ourselves.

Of course, which route is chosen is likely to be influenced by the amount of time, expertise and resources at our disposal. If we had little time and lacked the necessary expertise, but had the resources, we might consider commissioning an outside agency, such as a consultancy company or specialist research organisation, to do the research for us. Although this undoubtedly would produce some answers and solutions, it may be very expensive and not as timely as we might wish for. Of course, buying in external expertise has its value, but, often, we need answers more quickly than they can provide them and may want to develop our own, in-house, knowledge base and expertise for the future. To do this, we need to develop our own research skills. In addition, even if we were to commission an external agency to undertake the research for us, we would want to have an understanding of the principles, techniques and procedures likely to be adopted by such people because we would have to give them a brief in the first instance and be capable of critically interpreting their methods and findings (Shoemaker, 1994). So, either way, this type of knowledge is useful to a practising manager.

To give you some indication of the areas of hospitality and tourism businesses where research is being undertaken by managers in such companies, consultancy organisations and public-sector bodies, I conducted a piece of small-scale, exploratory research when preparing this text. This essentially constituted the design and implementation of a survey, using a mailed questionnaire to a sample of 845 members of a UK professional body, The Tourism Society. The questionnaire listed a range of possible areas where research might have been taking place and asked the respondents to indicate if they were involved in any of these.

The overall response to this was a little disappointing, with only 45 questionnaires returned, a response rate of 5.4 per cent, but it illustrates one of the issues discussed earlier. Being dependent the goodwill of the potential respondents, when they are very busy people and there is nothing of obvious benefit to them in filling such a questionnaire in, can often produce low response rates, over which we have little or no control. The obvious problem this raises here is the validity of the results. Put simply, how can we be sure that the 95 per cent who didn't respond would have made similar choices to those of the 5 per cent who did? The answer is, of course, that we cannot, so the results need to be viewed with some degree of caution in terms of whether or not they are representative of the types of research activity being undertaken across the hospitality and tourism industries as a whole. In addition to this, the composition of the 45 respondents included very few managers from private hospitality or tourism companies. Most of the people who responded were from public-sector bodies, consultancy companies and trade associations. Therefore, there is a potential problem of bias in the pattern of the results.

These issues demonstrate that, even a small-scale, simple piece of research can have similar problems to those endeavours that are much larger in scale. The point here is not the existence of the problems per se, but how they
are recognized and dealt with. Any research you undertake may suffer from similar problems, but this is not necessarily disastrous. As we shall see in Chapter 11, it is what you claim and don't claim in relation to your results that is important. If you produce conclusions and make claims that are not supported by the evidence within your research, then you will be heavily criticised.

Table 1.3 shows that the areas or topics of greatest research activity for the respondents are market research, new product/service development, benchmarking and customer surveys, followed by advertising effectiveness, site location/feasibility and service quality measurement. Bearing in mind the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of research activity</th>
<th>Percentage involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New product/service development</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market research</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitor intelligence</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site/location feasibility</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New equipment evaluation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipe/dish development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menu development</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot/test studies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee surveys</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer surveys</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw material/supply sourcing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising effectiveness</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service quality measurement</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental scanning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy management</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment analysis/appraisal</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT systems/applications</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecommerce</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business process re-engineering</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities design</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other areas:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic impacts of tourism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sales force management</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>revenue planning and management</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>distribution and channel management</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>training assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>tourism master planning</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>tourism sector reviews</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>destination branding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visitor management plans</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customer/marketing studies</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural and Heritage tourism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consumer choice criteria</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>accommodation quality standards</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>brand research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skills audits</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reservations expressed above, and perhaps not unsurprisingly, it would seem that there is a general emphasis on those aspects of hospitality and tourism business directly concerned with markets, customers, competitors and the product/service. These are all areas that tend to be complex, difficult to control and can be problematic to understand and predict, while, at the same time, being critical to success or failure. They are also areas where change can be rapid and innovation may be crucial to succeed. Indeed, if the ‘other’ areas indicated by the respondents were added to these, this view would be further reinforced as many of them are also concerned with markets, customers and competitors. These are also areas where it is often difficult to be as sure as possible of the relationships between causes and effects. Given that these environments are complex and dynamic, it is invariably problematic to isolate one or even a few factors that are the main causes of the effect/s and, hence, knowledge and understanding of them tends to be less than perfect.

**SUMMARY**

- Research is a purposeful activity designed, planned and undertaken to investigate and discover answers to questions and solutions to problems.
- It can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory in purpose and theoretical or applied in emphasis.
- It can help to develop our conceptual and practical knowledge and make us better practitioners.
- There are two basic approaches that can be adopted to inform the design of research and how it is conducted — induction and deduction.
- To design and undertake research that will produce credible results, there are a number of issues to be considered — the characteristics of scientific research.
- Although research can be carefully designed, planned and executed, there are invariably elements that we cannot predict or control and, therefore, despite our best intentions, successful outcomes do have an element of luck.

**Further Reading**


