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19	PROCESS & METHODS FOR RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR <i>DR. ASHOK BHANUDAS NAVALE</i>	72
20	RECENT RESEARCH TRENDS IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT <i>Dr. Shirish Nana Gawali</i>	75
21	Tools ICT in Business Research <i>Mr. Vivek M More, Mr. Vicky Khandagale</i>	81
22	IPR Issues related to Business Research in India. <i>Prof.S.D.Shaikh</i>	84
23	BUSINESS RESEARCH METHODS: A DECISION MAKING TOOL IN THE HANDS OF MANAGEMENT <i>CA. Nikhil Bharat Goyal</i>	86
24	Interdisciplinary Business Research <i>Mr. Vivek M More, Miss. Prachi S Kulkarni</i>	89
25	Research Design: an Overview <i>Dr. Barhate G.H., JawaleMeenakshJanardhan</i>	92
26	Process of Business Research <i>Prof. Kekane Maruti Arjun, Prof. Pinjari Dnyandeo Rangnath</i>	94
27	Research Methodology in Commerce – Research Design <i>Prof. Sayyad Mahejabin</i>	99
28	Good Research Report Writing <i>Miss. Jagtap Mangal Babasaheb, Miss.Priyanka Deepak Rathod</i>	102
29	CHALLENGE OF SOCIALLY USEFUL RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND BUSINESS <i>Prof. Mrs. Gujar P.S., Dr. Adik B.R.</i>	105
30	संशोधन अहवालाचे महत्त्व <i>Dr.B.D.Todkar</i>	108
31	Research in Consumer Behavior <i>Prof. Dr. Kalhapure B. B.</i>	114
32	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION <i>Ghotekar D.B</i>	118
33	USEFUL TRICKS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH PROPOSAL <i>Prof. Riyazkhan H. Attar, Dr. G.H Barhate</i>	122
34	ESSENTIALS FOR A GOOD LITERATURE REVIEW <i>Prof. Riyazkhan H. Attar, Prof. Shantilal R. Jawale</i>	128
35	Research in Higher Education for Quality Improvement <i>DR. BHOSALE J. P</i>	134
36	Morals and Ethic in Business Today <i>Mr.S.R.Pagare</i>	140
37	IPR in India: An overview <i>Mr.Vivek M More, Mr.Samadhan B. Tayad</i>	143
38	Intellectual property right: A way to Economic Growth in India <i>Mr.Vivek M More, Mr. Sanket G kankate</i>	147

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

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• MEANING OF RESEARCH:

Research in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. One can also define research as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic. In fact, research is an art of scientific investigation. The *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* lays down the meaning of research as 'careful investigation or inquiry specially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge.'¹ Redman and Mory define research as a "systematized effort to gain new knowledge."² Some people consider research as a movement, a movement from the known to the unknown. It is actually a voyage of discovery. We all possess the vital instinct of inquisitiveness for, when the unknown confronts us, we wonder and our inquisitiveness makes us probe and attain full and fuller understanding of the unknown. This inquisitiveness is the mother of all knowledge and the method, which man employs for obtaining the knowledge of whatever the unknown, can be termed as research.

According to Clifford Woody research comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions; collecting, organising and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis. I. Slesinger and M. Stephenson in the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* define research as "the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalising to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art."³ Research is, thus, an original contribution to the existing stock of knowledge making for its advancement. It is the pursuit of truth with the help of study, observation, comparison and experiment. In short, the search for knowledge through objective and systematic method of finding solution to a problem is research. The systematic approach concerning generalisation and the formulation of a theory is also research. As such the term 'research' refers to the systematic method consisting of enunciating the problem, formulating a hypothesis; collecting the facts or data, analysing the facts and reaching certain conclusion either in the form of solutions(s) towards the concerned problem or in certain generalisations for some theoretical formulation.

• Research Approaches

The above description of the types of research brings to light the fact that there are two basic approaches to research, viz., *quantitative approach* and the *qualitative approach*. The former involves the generation of data in quantitative form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion. This approach can be further sub-classified into *inferential*, *experimental* and *simulation approaches* to research. The purpose of *inferential approach* to research

is to form a data base from which to infer characteristics or relationships of population. This usually means survey research where a sample of population is studied (questioned or observed) to determine its characteristics, and it is then inferred that the population has the same characteristics.

Experimental approach is characterised by much greater control over the research environment and in this case some variables are manipulated to observe their effect on other variables. *Simulation approach* involves the construction of an artificial environment within which relevant information and data can be generated. This permits an observation of the dynamic behaviour of a system (or its sub-system) under controlled conditions. The term 'simulation' in the context of business and social sciences applications refers to "the operation of a numerical model that represents the structure of a dynamic process. Given the values of initial conditions, parameters and exogenous variables, a simulation is run to represent the behaviour of the process over time."5 Simulation approach can also be useful in building models for understanding future conditions.

Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Research in such a situation is a function of researcher's insights and impressions.

Such an approach to research generates results either in non-quantitative form or in the form which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis. Generally, the techniques of focus group interviews, projective techniques and depth interviews are used.

- **Significance of Research**

"All progress is born of inquiry. Doubt is often better than overconfidence, for it leads to inquiry, and inquiry leads to invention" is a famous Hudson Maxim in context of which the significance of research can well be understood. Increased amounts of research make progress possible. *Research inculcates scientific and inductive thinking and it promotes the development of logical habits of thinking and organisation.*

The role of research in several fields of applied economics, whether related to business or to the economy as a whole, has greatly increased in modern times. The increasingly complex nature of business and government has focused attention on the use of research in solving operational problems. Research, as an aid to economic policy, has gained added importance, both for government and business.

For instance, government's budgets rest in part on an analysis of the needs and desires of the people and on the availability of revenues to meet these needs. The cost of needs has to be equated to probable revenues and this is a field where research is most needed. Through research we can devise alternative policies and can as well examine the consequences of each of these alternatives.

Decision-making may not be a part of research, but research certainly facilitates the decisions of the policy maker. Government has also to chalk out programmes for dealing with all facets of the country's existence and most of these will be related directly or indirectly to economic conditions. The plight of cultivators,

the problems of big and small business and industry, working conditions, trade union activities, the problems of distribution, even the size and nature of defence services are matters requiring research. Thus, research is considered necessary with regard to the allocation of nation's resources. Another area in government, where research is necessary, is collecting information on the economic and social structure of the nation. Such information indicates what is happening in the economy and what changes are taking place. Collecting such statistical information is by no means a routine task, but it involves a variety of research problems. These days nearly all governments maintain large staff of research technicians or experts to carry on this work. Thus, in the context of government, research as a tool to economic policy has three distinct phases of operation, viz., (i) investigation of economic structure through continual compilation of facts; (ii) diagnosis of events that are taking place and the analysis of the forces underlying them; and (iii) the prognosis, i.e., the prediction of future developments.

Research has its special significance in solving various operational and planning problems of business and industry. Operations research and market research, along with motivational research, are considered crucial and their results assist, in more than one way, in taking business decisions.

Market research is the investigation of the structure and development of a market for the purpose of formulating efficient policies for purchasing, production and sales. Operations research refers to the application of mathematical, logical and analytical techniques to the solution of business problems of cost minimisation or of profit maximisation or what can be termed as optimisation problems. Motivational research of determining why people behave as they do is mainly concerned with market characteristics.

In other words, it is concerned with the determination of motivations underlying the consumer (market) behaviour. All these are of great help to people in business and industry who are responsible for taking business decisions. Research with regard to demand and market factors has great utility in business. Given knowledge of future demand, it is generally not difficult for a firm, or for an industry to adjust its supply schedule within the limits of its projected capacity. Market analysis has become an integral tool of business policy these days. Business budgeting, which ultimately results in a projected profit and loss account, is based mainly on sales estimates which in turn depends on business research. Once sales forecasting is done, efficient production and investment programmes can be set up around which are grouped the purchasing and financing plans. Research, thus, replaces intuitive business decisions by more logical and scientific decisions.

Research is equally important for social scientists in studying social relationships and in seeking answers to various social problems. It provides the intellectual satisfaction of knowing a few things just for the sake of knowledge and also has practical utility for the social scientist to know for the sake of being able to do something better or in a more efficient manner. Research in social sciences is concerned both with knowledge for its own sake and with knowledge for what it can contribute to practical concerns. "This double emphasis is perhaps especially