

**LITTLE**

**QUICK FIX:**

**GATHER YOUR  
DATA ONLINE**

**#LittleQuickFix**

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# Everything in this book!

**Section 1** There are two main types of online data collection.

Extant or elicited approaches can be carried out using qualitative or quantitative methods.

**Section 2** Choose the type of online data collection that fits the research problem. **Decide what you want to know, and from whom**, in order to decide the best approach.

**Section 3** Find and use data that exists online. It is important to **know your options and limitations** for using data in your study.



**Section 4 Recruit and gain consent from participants online.**

Knowing how to develop a sampling strategy, recruit suitable individuals, then build trust and credibility, are important steps if you plan to engage human participants.

**Section 5** Interact with participants online. **Ask structured or unstructured questions** with online interviews, surveys, or questionnaires.

**Section 6 Take scholarly and practical steps to prepare.**

Being able to find and use extant data or recruit and interact with participants is essential to online research. Thinking through your design strategy and building the skills needed to carry it out will make your research a success!



**There are two main types  
of online data collection**

**Section**





**What types of  
data collection  
can I conduct  
online?**

# A



Researchers collect data online  
from human participants or from  
posts, archives, databases,  
and other existing sources.

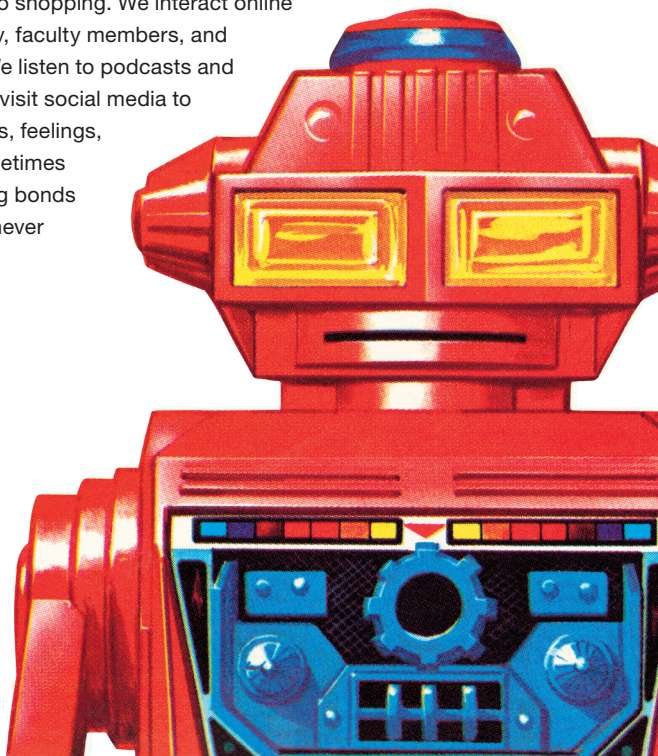


## **The Internet makes it possible to collect varied types of data**

The Internet allows us access to people from across the world and extensive collections of materials. We can collect data that includes verbal, multimedia, visual, and/or text forms. Research options expand as new and mobile technologies become widely available for personal, social, academic, and professional communications. The challenge is to choose the approach that best aligns with the research question and to design the study accordingly.

# DATA IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Some call this the 'information age' because we are immersed in information about what is going on in the world on a minute-to-minute basis. We use the Internet to carry out activities of daily life from banking to shopping. We interact online with friends, family, faculty members, and fellow students. We listen to podcasts and watch videos. We visit social media to exchange thoughts, feelings, and pictures. Sometimes we create enduring bonds with folks we will never meet in person.



# HOW IS IT DIFFERENT TO LOOK AT THE ONLINE WORLD AS A RESEARCHER?

Can we use the same ways we read and download resources, or communicate with friends, when conducting research? Yes, once we **understand key principles**. Researchers have many options for using the Internet for data collection.

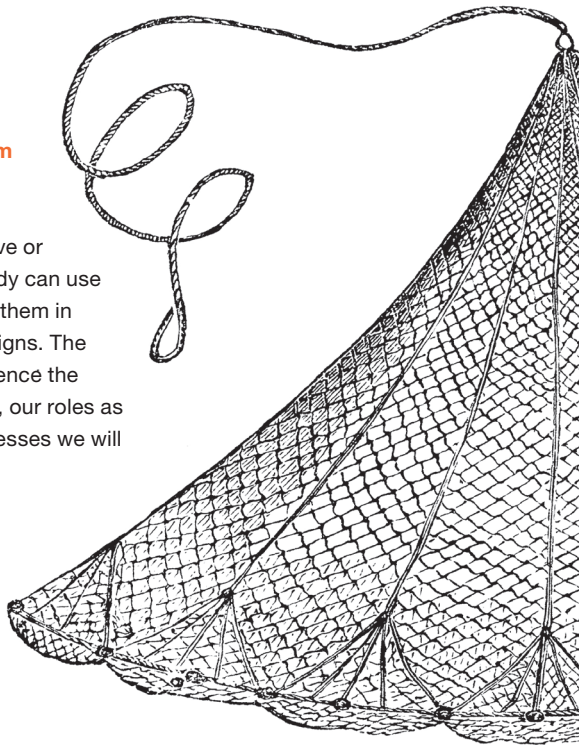
A few key questions can guide us to make choices about the right approach that will help us to find the answers to the research question:

- Does the study involve interacting with human participants or collecting data without interacting with people?
- On what sites or platforms will the data collection occur? Are they open to anyone or do they require membership, registration, or have other restrictions for entry?
- As researchers, what roles will we play and what do we need to know to carry them out?

# DATA COLLECTION: WITH OR WITHOUT HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

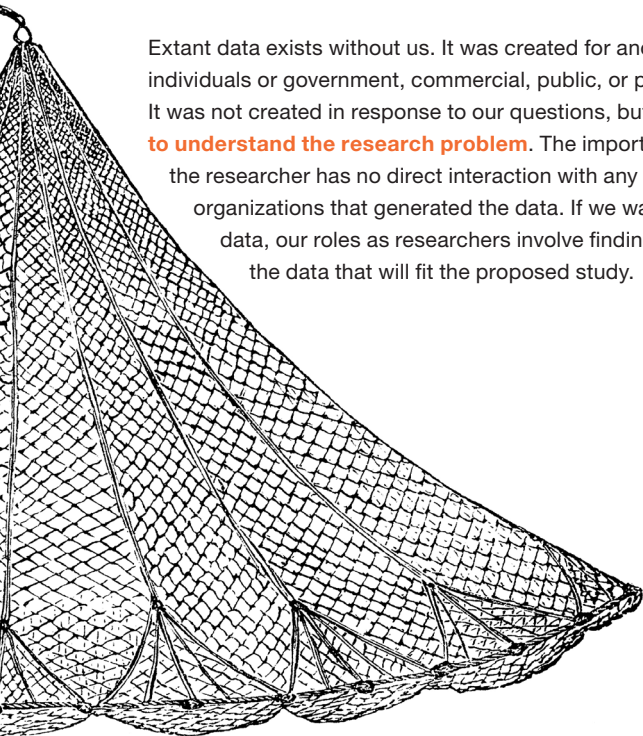
We will explore two broad types of online data collection. **We define them as: extant and elicited.**

These types are used in different ways for qualitative or quantitative studies. A study can use one approach or combine them in mixed or multimethod designs. The choices we make will influence the overall design of the study, our roles as researchers, and the processes we will use for data analysis.



# EXTANT DATA EXISTS WITHOUT US

Extant data exists without us. It was created for another purpose by individuals or government, commercial, public, or private entities. It was not created in response to our questions, but we **can use it to understand the research problem**. The important point is that the researcher has no direct interaction with any of the people or organizations that generated the data. If we want to use extant data, our roles as researchers involve finding and accessing the data that will fit the proposed study.

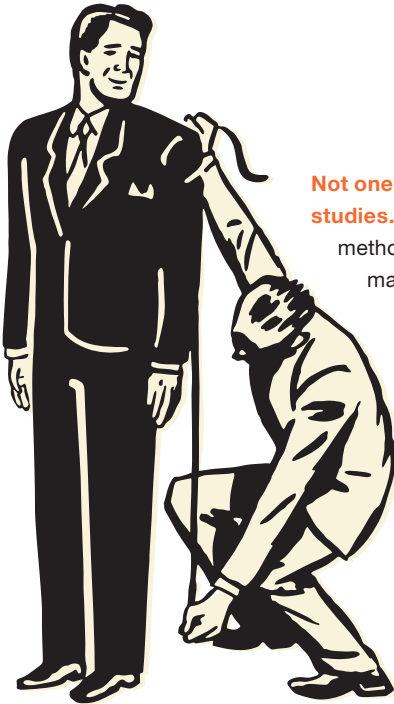


# ELICITED DATA ANSWERS OUR QUESTIONS

**We generate data specific to our own research questions and problems by interacting with human participants.** We elicit their answers to questions or other written, verbal, or visual prompts. The researcher influences the direction of the interaction and probes in ways not possible with extant data collection. This kind of study transforms traditional methods that have been used face-to-face. Qualitative researchers elicit data through online participant observation, interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires. Quantitative researchers elicit data through online surveys. As researchers we formulate questions or prompts, or find instruments we can use for our own studies. Importantly, we select the appropriate technological tools that will allow us to elicit answers from participants.



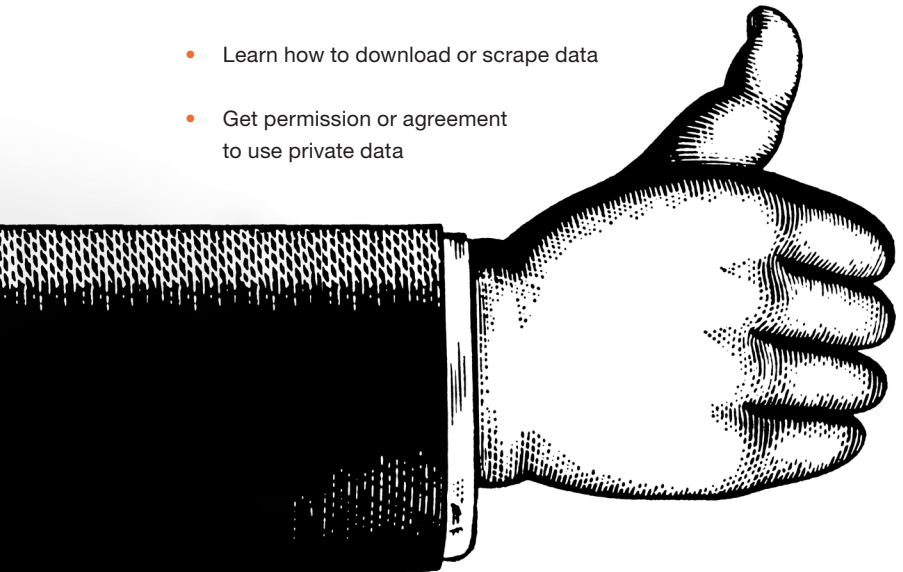
# WHEN IS ONLINE DATA COLLECTION NOT IDEAL?



**Not one type of data collection fits all studies.** There are situations where online methods do not fit. Some kinds of data may not be available online. Some participants would either not have access to the Internet or not be willing to interact online. Think through your study and decide what approaches fit.

# STEPS FOR COLLECTING EXTANT DATA

- Find and access relevant data
- Learn how to download or scrape data
- Get permission or agreement to use private data



# STEPS FOR COLLECTING ELICITED DATA

- Determine questions or prompts
- Decide how to ask questions
- Find the right participants and get their permission
- Choose the right technology or platforms to facilitate the research
- Develop the required technical skills to complete the research



# Got it?

**Q:** What is the main difference between extant and elicited approaches to data collection?

The logo consists of the text "Got it!" in a white, bold, sans-serif font, positioned inside a solid orange rectangular box. The top-right corner of the orange box is cut off by a diagonal line, and the area above this line is filled with a pattern of small, orange, semi-transparent dots.

Got it!

**A:** Researchers interact with human participants when using elicited approaches but there is no direct interaction between researchers and participants in extant data collection.



**Decide what you want to  
know and from whom**



**Section**





**How do  
I choose  
which type(s)  
of online data  
collection fit  
my research?**

# A



You will be able to choose the appropriate online data collection approach when you clarify the research problem, questions, and scope of the study.



## Choosing an online data collection method

It all starts with a research problem and the questions we want to answer. We don't choose the data collection and then think about what question that would answer; we think about the questions and then determine the kinds of data we need to collect, from whom or where, to gain answers. Our choices and options are so extensive, the decision about what type of data to collect and how to use the Internet to do so can seem overwhelming. While no formula exists to guide our decisions, by reflecting on the nature of the problem we can consider what type, or combination of types, are best suited to the study.

# IS EXTANT DATA COLLECTION APPROPRIATE FOR MY STUDY?

This type of data collection relies on existing materials developed without the researcher's influence, meaning it is essential that relevant materials are available. Here are some questions to consider:

- **Synchronous or asynchronous?** The researcher could observe a synchronous online event or chat. For example, a researcher studying disaster response could collect extant data as the situation unfolds in real time. However, extant data collection is typically asynchronous (or rather, occurs over a period of time) since archived records, documents, or materials may have been posted at different times.
- **Common or unusual problems?** If the research problem is widely known, discussed, and present over a period of time, the likelihood is good that documents or databases will be available. If you are studying a new or emerging problem, less extant data might be readily obtainable.



- **Sensitive or safe problem?** Researchers tackle problems that might otherwise remain unknown or inadequately understood. Some difficult topics are widely discussed, while others are held private. These topics could be of a personal nature, as well as problems associated with proprietary or protected information. This kind of research might be more difficult to carry out with extant data, so might be better suited to an approach that involves responses from participants.
- **Macro-, meso-, or micro-level problem?** Researchers are interested in large scale global or societal problems, sometimes referred to as *macro*-level studies. Researchers are interested in the lived experience of individuals, sometimes referred to as *micro*-level studies. Topics related to communities, groups, organizations, or *meso*-level studies, also interest researchers. Extant approaches for data collection are typically most appropriate in studies of problems at the macro- or meso-level, unless the researcher has access to individuals' records or diaries for a micro-level study.

# EXTANT DATA IN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

**Qualitative researchers collect extant data** using methods such as observation, document, text, or discourse analysis, and archival, diary, or narrative research.

**Quantitative researchers use extant data** using methods such as statistical analysis of data sets or databases, text mining, and analysis.



# IS ELICITED DATA COLLECTION APPROPRIATE FOR MY STUDY?

This kind of data collection relies on participants' interactions or responses to questions or other prompts. The researcher can influence the direction or level of specificity and can probe in ways not possible with extant data.

- **Synchronous or asynchronous?** Elicited data collection can occur either synchronously or asynchronously. For example, an interview may be conducted using a synchronous text or video exchange or an asynchronous email exchange.
- **Structured or unstructured?** The researcher might have carefully planned questions or interactions can be loosely structured to allow ideas to emerge through conversation, role play, or arts-based experiences. A questionnaire or survey is structured because the questions are fixed, whereas synchronous interviews allow for follow-up questions when clarification is needed.
- **Macro-, meso-, or micro-level problem?** Elicited approaches for data collection are typically most appropriate in studies of micro- or meso-level problems, or in studies of individual perspectives on macro-level problems.

# ELICITED DATA IN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

**Qualitative researchers use elicitation approaches online** using methods such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and creative arts-based methods.

**Quantitative researchers elicit data online** using methods such as surveys.

## *Remember:*

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers use experiments, simulations, or games to collect data online. Keep in mind that **you might choose more than one type of data collection**. You might determine questions from extant data and decide to conduct some interviews to gain new perspectives. Or perhaps you discover some new issues from your interviews and you want to know how widespread they are, so you decide to look for extant data to learn more. Keep an open mind as you move through the design process!



# CHOOSE THE RIGHT TYPE OF DATA FOR YOUR STUDY

To decide what type of data would best fit your research, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I want to learn about the problem by viewing, reading, or analysing materials?
- Do I want to learn about the problem by interacting directly with participants?
- Is the problem I plan to study common or is it a new issue not widely discussed?
- Is the problem I plan to study of a personal or sensitive nature?
- Is the problem I plan to study at the macro-, meso-, or micro-level?
- Would it be better to collect data in real time (synchronous) or to collect data anytime (asynchronous)?
- Do I want to determine questions in advance or be flexible about discussing the problem with participants?
- Do I want to talk with participants, or communicate in writing?

**I NOW KNOW WHICH  
TYPE OF ONLINE DATA  
WOULD BEST SUIT MY  
RESEARCH QUESTION!**





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**Know your options and limitations**