THIRD STEP: Defining the Research Plan **(Extra Hacks!)**

Developed by **Prof. Dr. Francisco Tigre Moura**

MusicStats.org

PROBLEM SOLVING: Imagine you arrived late at the train station, your train leaves in 5 minutes, you can only buy the ticket at the machine, it only accepts cash and you only have credit and debit card. And you cannot buy the ticket inside the train. What do you do? What would the best solution to this problem be?

(I'll tell you the answer at the end of this document!)

Choosing the right design and method for your research question is just like solving a complex problem. You need to be SPOT ON. And that's why I've written down some recommendations that hopefully will be useful for you!

INITIAL HINTS

FIRST HINT: We will not make any decision. Yup, exactly as you've heard.

Very often during supervision meetings I hear students say:

- "I want to do a **QUALITATIVE** study because I hate/am afraid/ am disgusted by **NUMBERS** or have anxiety attacks just by hearing the word STATISTICS"!

- "Please don't make me do interviews. I am horrible at dealing with people. I just want to have my SPSS data sheet beautifully prepared and run all my analysis in 5 seconds and be done with".

So let's make something clear here: Neither I or you will define the design or method of your study. **Your RESEARCH AIM (or question) WILL!**

It does not matter if you like numbers or not. It doesn't matter if you are afraid of dealing with people or not. It all comes down to what is the **BEST** way to address the **research question** (or aim, or hypotheses) that you have developed.

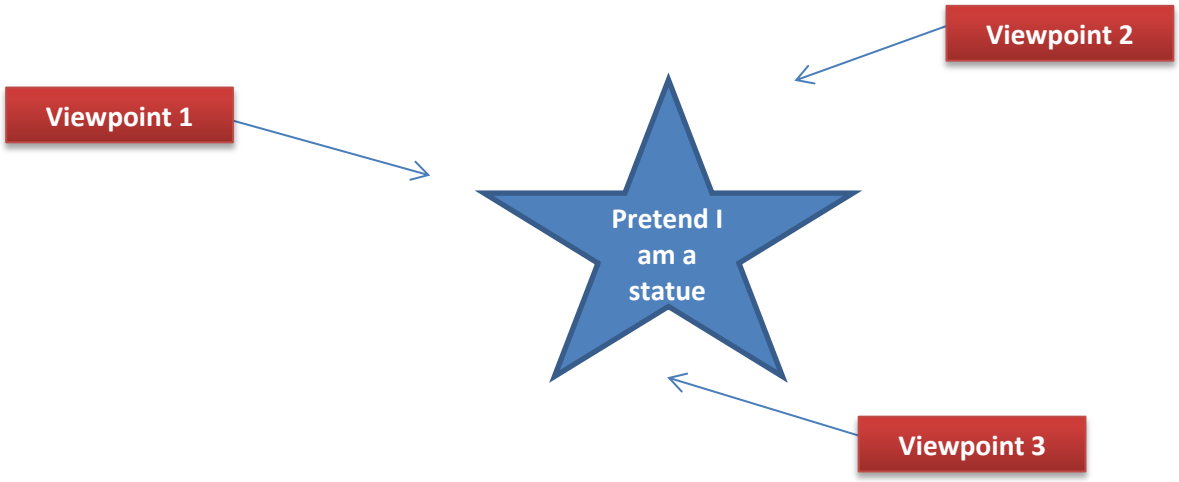
This is the only way for you to do a GREAT job: Focus on addressing the main AIM of your study, not on running away from your fears! (See how philosophical I got here? I should probably charge for therapy advice…).

But then you may think: How come some people (researchers) only do ***qualitative*** studies and others only ***quantitative***?

SIMPLE: Because of the way they see the world! Due to their world views they can only come up with questions that demand either a qualitative or quantitative approach. But the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this document. I would need lots of beer to discuss world views in science with you.

SECOND HINT: There is NO "better" or "worse" research design. It's only a matter of SUITABILITY to a study AIM.

Each design provides a different **VIEW** of a phenomenon due to their characteristics. So imagine a statue of a star (I know it's weird. But don't judge, that's the best I can do in terms of statues):



Are all viewpoints looking at, what should be, a statue? **YES**. Can they all see the entire statue? **NO**. Is each viewpoint incorrect because they only see part of the statue? **NO**. They are all **CORRECT, but ONLY** in terms of their angle **ALLOWS THEM TO SEE**!

Research designs are exactly the same! Each design is not **BETTER** or **WORSE** than the other, they only allow a perspective into a phenomenon! **(Ohhhh… Many academics will disagree with me on this one here!).**

So does this mean that if I use **MORE THAN ONE** design I will have a **GREATER** overview of the phenomenon and have a more INTERESTING study?

YES, YES, YES!!!

These are called **mixed designs** and we'll discuss them again later.

So let's discuss some hacks that can help you identify the most suitable research design for your study:

Hacks

HACK 1: Try to **UNDERSTAND** the nature of your research **AIM** (or question)

Since we just discussed that the research question or aim of your study is what defines the design of your study, you must interpret it to understand its nature. For example:

- **Does it involve trying to understand a phenomenon (or topic, or issue...) in-depth, to gain a general overview or understand the causes of a phenomenon**?
    - An in-depth understanding (e.g. trying to investigate the *"reasons why"* of a phenomenon) might lead you to an **exploratory** design.

    - If you aim to gain a **general overview** of a phenomenon (or topic, or issue...) such as wanting to identify how frequently and how often corporate brands communicate in social media, might lead you to a **descriptive design**.

- If you aim to understand the **cause and effect relationship** between two (or more) factors (e.g. how does different pricing strategies influence consumers buying intention) it might lead you to a **causal design**.

HACK 2: Analyze carefully **EACH** research **OBJECTIVE** that you have set

As discussed on a previous research resource document (START: Structuring a Research Project (or Thesis) Idea) most likely, or often, you will have more than one objective that involves data collection. For this reason, you must analyze the nature of **EACH** objective that involves data collection!

- Is it ok if **each objective** has the SAME research design? **YES**!.
- Is it ok if **each objective** has the DIFFERENT research designs? **OH YES**!
-
    - There is even a name for studies that use more than one design: They are called **MIXED DESIGN**!
    - And usually **MIXED DESIGN** tends to be very interesting studies because they provide a thorough view of a phenomenon! Basically, it complements the positives of different research designs to provide **even more insightful results**!

HACK 3: Investigate what are the PROS and CONS of **EACH** method of the **DESIGN** of your study

- Each research design suits a different purpose. They have pros and cons, and so do their methods. For example:
    - An **exploratory design** is excellent to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. However, it does not allow generalization of findings and due to its small sample sizes the results can be easily questioned (the endless debate between positivist and constructivists).
    - So does it mean that an exploratory is a good design? A poor design? The answer is always: It is **PERFECT** for its **PURPOSE**!

HACK 4: Are you **HAPPY** to conduct this study that way it is set be conducted?

- It is VERY important that you are happy with the way the study will be conducted. In other words: do you personally (your gut feelings!) consider that the method you chose (interviews, for example) will give you results that you would be interested in? If the answer is NO, than my suggestion is:

GO BACK to redefining your research AIM or question in a way that it leads to a design that you consider to provide results that you would be PASSIONATE for interpreting!

"To play a wrong note is **insignificant**;

To play without passion is **inexcusable**."

(Ludwig van Beethoven)

Solution: Did you really come straight here before even reading the document? Oh man…