

# [Football information services: fanzines, match of the day and the modem](https://assignbuster.com/football-information-services-fanzines-match-of-the-day-and-the-modem/)

Research, as defined by the Collins Gem English dictionary (2004), is a ‘ systematic investigation to discover facts or collect information’. Expanding on this definition, Collis and Hussey (2003, p1) quantify research as, ‘ a process of enquiry and investigation, that it is systematic and methodical, increases existing knowledge, and requires you to be thorough at all stages’. There are a number of research techniques available to a researcher and the methodology used will be dependent on a number of different factors, such as the kind of topic you are covering, the results you wish for, and the type of analysis you wish to undertake following the receipt of your results. An individual’s personality may also determine the kind of research they wish to carry out, for example a shy person may not be keen on the humanistic approach and therefore would probably carry out research via non face to face contact, such as via a questionnaire or survey.

The objective of this assignment was to select two papers that used differing methods of research, and critically evaluate both of the articles in relation to the different characteristics of the research processes used. The articles selected were taken from two different journals. The first article I chose was from the ‘ Aslib Proceedings’ journal – ‘ Football information services: fanzines, Match of the Day and the modem’ a paper by Green (1999). The second article was a paper by Beech, Chadwick and Tapp (2000) on ‘ Emerging trends in the use of the Internet – lessons from the football sector’. This paper is from ‘ Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal’.

Throughout this paper I will review the methods chosen by both researchers, analysing and reflecting on their suitability, considering if any alternative methods would have been better suited to the research and in the final section, I will summarise my findings. Paper One – ‘ Football information services: fanzines, Match of the Day and the modem’The first paper I reviewed, as seen in appendix one, was a research paper by Green (1999). The intention of Green’s study was to research the ‘ quantity, quality and types of information services available’ in the football sector, and to gain opinion on whether the information provided was meeting demand. The paper used a positivistic approach to its study of football clubs and supporters. Using a quantitative method to collect the data, questionnaires were mailed to all 92 England and Wales based football clubs, and a smaller sample (72) was handed out to football supporters. In the paper, there is a brief statement on the methodology used, and this gives the reader information on how the research was structured, although it does not go into detail why this methodology was selected – this is a failing itself as the methodology section should ‘ explain how the problem was investigated and why particular methods and techniques were used’ (Bell, 1993, p155).

The methodology chosen to obtain the data is important and questionnaires were chosen as it allowed the researcher to concentrate on specific, set questions that would allow statistical analysis following the return of the questionnaires. The nature of the study shows that the researcher selected the correct method of research – that being basic research, as there is no specific emphasis on solving a problem – only collecting information. The research was split into two parts, with a specific questionnaire issued to the 92 league clubs focussing on the information services that they provide. In this sample, the clubs were also asked about their perception towards official and unofficial sources, such as fans forums and football magazines. A second questionnaire was then issued to supporters, and was distributed in London and Manchester giving the North/South perspective on the results.

72 questionnaires were issued, with questions ranging from what sources of information do the fans use, which services should their clubs provide, to how often they sought the information and how much they paid for it. From the 164 questionnaires issued, 80 were returned, giving an overall return of 48. 7%. This is a typical rate of return, as the average response rate to paper based questionnaires is between 30% and 50% (Baruch, 1999; Dillman 2000). When broken down even further, it shows that 52 returns were from the football clubs (57% response rate) whereas only 28 were returned from the supporters (39%), which is deemed as a small response rate (Dillman, 2000). In this case, it’s usually advised to seek additional sources of data to substantiate the research (Thomas, 2004).

The first problem with the chosen method of research is that the number of questionnaires issued is comparatively low if you consider the amount of football fans in England and Wales. The paper details that a 1997 study by Bradford and Reeve outlined that there were over 18 million football fans in England and Wales. A positivistic approach is usually used when selecting large samples (Collis and Hussey, 2003, p55). So immediately, you can see that the chosen sample of only 164 is not a very large representation; in fact it covers less than 0.

001% of football fans in the UK. When you take out the 92 issued to football clubs, then this figure looks even poorer. Finally, when you consider the amount of returned questionnaires from supporters (28) then it appears to be a paper lacking much credence, especially when you take into account that this kind of research provides a generalisation from the sample. Questionnaires can be used in both positivistic and phenomenological methodologies.

The approach taken by Green appears to have been that of closed questions, which suggests the positivistic approach. However, a feature of this methodology is selecting a large sample, which is something Green has not done. Collis and Hussey (2003, p155) believe that in a positivistic study, a good sample is one in which the results obtained can be taken as true for the whole population. It should also be ‘ large enough to satisfy the needs of the investigation being undertaken’.

The sample size in this research did not meet the above criteria. When considering the research aimed solely at the football clubs, the researcher targeted all the clubs in the English league and as such, could not really target them in a better or more efficient way. However, only issuing 72 questionnaires to football fans and only doing this in 2 locations is not really targeting a large enough cross section of football fans. For a subject area with as wide an audience as football, it would have been far better to select a larger sample. This is something that would have been fairly easy to achieve.

Although 18 million football fans may not be totally active fans, you can assume that perhaps at least half of this number actively participates in watching the game at some level. There are many ways in which the sample size could have been increased, and it wouldn’t have required the researchers to change the methodology used. It just seems that the sample is not large enough to give conclusive proof of its findings. Another failing of this research is that during the planning phase of the research, the researcher spent time interviewing representatives from both football clubs and the media.

These interviews were with the intention of creating the context for the questionnaires. The scope of people interviewed was pretty wide, covering journalists, broadcasters, freelance writers, football club officials, museum and archive curators, commercial service providers (websites and phone lines), academics, football administrators, supporter association officials and individual fans. There is nothing particularly wrong with carrying out this phenomenographic research, but whilst its OK to combine research methods, this particular research does not seem to have embraced the resources at its disposal. Time obviously had to be dedicated by the researcher to interviewing the people in collating the questions. The people interviewed also gave up their time to do this, and it would have been a better method of collecting data had direct interviews taken place on the subject itself.

In reality, little was gained by holding these interviews – after all, the questions should write themselves for this subject matter. Wouldn’t it have been better to spend the interviewing time on data gathering instead of the creation of questions? However, I also feel as though the researchers missed a bigger opportunity, this being the distribution of the supporters questionnaire. Perhaps it would have been more logical to try and work with the clubs who the original questionnaire went out to, as they have an immediate audience in the supporters that buy their merchandise. For example, it could have been requested that a questionnaire was put in the programme on behalf of the researcher.

OK, not every club would have been receptive to this idea, but it would have been worth discussing this with the clubs. This would have vastly increased the size of the target audience. The only potential stumbling block with this approach would be the costs involved. The researchers could have targeted online users via mail shot or via fans forum websites. Perhaps even arranged for a survey to be put on the official club websites.

It would have been better for the researcher to target a greater number over a specific period. This particular method would have had minimal cost impact. Vogt (1993, p196) states that research design is the ‘ science (and art) of planning procedures for conducting studies so as to get the most valid findings’. In the planning of this research, I feel Green did not obtain the most ‘ valid findings’, and did not make the most of the opportunities he had.

In fairness to the researcher, I do feel that the answers obtained would still have been pretty consistent had the research covered a greater sample, as the responses and statistics are what you would expect to see. The paper itself is both well structured and thought out, and gives the reader the information necessary to understand what the study is about. The abstract is clearly written; the introduction sets out the purpose of the research and the methodology section details how the research was carried out. The statistics provided are shown in tabular form, which is deemed the best graphical representation when reporting on small data sets (Tufte, 1983, p56).

Overall it is a good paper but there are a number of ways it could have been improved.