PIVRA

Commissioning Market Research in Pakistan: Costs, Sources and How to Brief a Provider

How desk research on Pakistan works, where reliable data comes from, how to size a market honestly, what fieldwork adds, and how to brief a provider.

Pakistan Market Guide

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Organisations looking at Pakistan from abroad usually need answers to a short list of questions: how large the market is, who the main players are, which rules apply, what customers actually buy, and what could change. Much of that can be answered through desk research, without commissioning a survey, provided the work draws on the right sources and is honest about their limits. Some questions, especially on consumer behaviour, point-of-sale prices and stakeholder views, need fieldwork.

This guide explains how market research on Pakistan is scoped, where reliable data comes from, how to size a market without inventing precision, what fieldwork adds, what drives cost and timeline, how to write a brief that produces a usable answer, and how to judge the deliverable. It is a buyer's guide, not a promise that every question can be answered from a desk.

1. Desk research or fieldwork?

Desk research assembles and analyses information that already exists: official statistics, regulator publications, company filings, trade data, legislation, published research and credible media reporting. Fieldwork collects new information through surveys, interviews, observation or store checks.

Question	Usually desk	Usually fieldwork
Market size and structure	Yes, with triangulation	Sometimes, to validate
Regulation and policy	Yes	Rarely
Competitors and ownership	Yes, from filings and directories	Sometimes, for unlisted firms
Consumer preferences	Limited	Yes
Prices at the point of sale	Limited	Yes, store checks
Stakeholder views and negotiation positions	Limited	Yes, interviews
Distribution and channel margins	Partial	Often yes

Desk research is the right starting point when the question is about market structure, regulation, trade flows, public spending or policy. Fieldwork becomes necessary when the answer depends on preferences, prices or views that are not recorded anywhere. A good provider says which one the question requires before quoting.

2. Scoping the question

A market study is only as useful as its question. "An overview of the Pakistan market" produces a report that is hard to act on. "Whether to enter through a distributor or a subsidiary, for product X, in Punjab and Sindh, over three years" produces a decision file.

Scope should fix five things:

- **Product or service**, including the exact category and adjacent substitutes.
- **Geography**: national, province, city or cluster.
- **Customer segment**: households, SMEs, large enterprises, government, exporters.

- **Time period**: historical base year, forecast horizon and policy cut-off.
- **Decision**: entry, pricing, capacity, partner selection, sourcing or compliance.

A scoping note of one or two pages is enough. It should state what is in and out, the questions in priority order, and the deliverable. The provider can then propose a method and a fixed fee instead of quoting blind.

3. Where reliable information comes from

The quality of desk research depends on its sources. For Pakistan, the most useful primary sources are federal and provincial bodies, and many publish only on official portals or in Urdu.

Source	What it provides
Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS)	Population census, labour force, household income and expenditure, prices, industrial production and merchandise trade.
State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)	Balance of payments, services exports, banking and monetary data, foreign exchange regulations.
Finance Division	Pakistan Economic Survey and federal budget documents.
Federal Board of Revenue (FBR)	Tax law, SROs, customs tariffs and tax statistics.
SECP	Company registration, listed company disclosures and corporate regulation.
Sector regulators	PTA for telecoms, NEPRA for power, OGRA for oil and gas, DRAP for pharmaceuticals, and others.
Provincial governments	Provincial budgets, development plans, statistics bureaus and service sales tax authorities.
International sources	World Bank, IMF, UN Comtrade, ITC Trade Map and OECD data for cross-checks.

Our official data sources guide lists the portals and the practical limits of each. A serious study cites the source and the date for every material figure, not just a link at the end.

4. Market sizing without invented precision

Market size can be estimated top-down or bottom-up. A top-down estimate starts with a national aggregate, such as household consumption, imports or industry output, and narrows it by segment and geography. A bottom-up estimate builds from units, prices and penetration: number of outlets, average volume, price per unit, or number of firms and average spend.

The two methods should be triangulated. If the top-down and bottom-up estimates differ by a wide margin, the gap is a finding, not a number to average away. The report should show the assumptions, the base year, the exchange rate, the treatment of imports and the informal sector, and a range rather than a single point.

Three cautions. First, Pakistan's informal economy is large, so formal statistics understate some categories. Second, provincial and district data are uneven; a national figure may not describe the city where the client will operate. Third, definitions change: a category in the tariff, the tax code and the industry survey may not be the same. State the definition you are using.

5. Competitors, channels and ownership

Competitor research combines SECP filings, listed company reports, regulator databases, trade directories, company websites, tender records and trade press. For unlisted companies, ownership and related-party links are often the hardest part; a name check and a review of filings can reveal a group structure that a website hides.

Channel research maps importers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers and, where relevant, e-commerce. It should show who holds the relationship with the end customer, who carries inventory, who bears credit risk and what margin each layer takes. A market entry plan that ignores channel economics can win a supplier contract and still lose money.

6. When fieldwork is needed

Fieldwork adds primary evidence: a survey of households or firms, in-depth interviews with industry participants, store checks, mystery shopping or observation. It is the right tool when the decision depends on preferences, willingness to pay, actual shelf prices, service quality or the views of people who will not put them in writing.

Fieldwork in Pakistan needs its own design: sampling frames, language, gender access, urban and rural coverage, security and permissions. A small, well-targeted qualitative round can be more useful than a large survey with a weak sample. The proposal should state the method, the sample, the recruitment, the incentives, the quality checks and the limitations.

7. Regulatory and policy research

Regulation is often the deciding variable in Pakistan. The research should identify the federal and provincial authorities, the licence or registration required, the ownership limits, the tax and customs treatment, the repatriation route and any sector-specific policy. It should distinguish enacted law from a draft, a press report, a budget speech and an IMF commitment.

Policy research has a date problem. A rate or incentive can change with a finance act, an SRO or a provincial notification. The deliverable should state the cut-off date and flag the provisions most likely to change, especially where the client is making a multi-year investment.

8. What drives cost and timeline

The fee for market research is driven by four things: how broad the question is, how hard the sources are to reach, how quickly the answer is needed and what form the deliverable takes. A single defined question resting on well-published national data costs less than a sector-wide study requiring provincial records, Urdu material, company filings and a data annex.

Timeline follows scope. A focused desk brief can be delivered in days to a few weeks; a multi-province study with interviews and a data model takes longer. The provider should give a work plan with milestones, a draft for comment and a final date. A fixed fee should state what is included, how many revision rounds, and what is excluded.

9. How to write the brief

1. **The decision.** What will the research change?
2. **Three to six questions**, in priority order.
3. **Scope**: product, geography, segment, time period.
4. **What you already know**: reports, figures to verify, internal data.
5. **Deliverable**: brief, full report, data annex, slide deck, call.
6. **Deadline and budget range.**
7. **Confidentiality and conflict rules.**
8. **Acceptance criteria.** What must the report contain to be usable?

10. What a good deliverable looks like

- Every material figure is referenced to a source the client can check, with a date.
- Data gaps, old figures and contested numbers are stated, not smoothed over.
- Findings are separated from interpretation and recommendations.
- The questions in the brief are answered before additional material.
- Market size comes with assumptions, a range and a method.
- Regulatory statements distinguish law, draft, proposal and commentary.
- The executive summary can be read in ten minutes and still be accurate.
- The data annex is usable, with definitions and sources.

11. Common mistakes

1. **Buying a report instead of a decision.** A generic market report rarely answers the specific question.
2. **Accepting a single market-size number.** Demand a method, assumptions and a range.
3. **Ignoring the informal sector.** Formal statistics may understate the category.
4. **Using national data for a city decision.** Province and city economics differ.
5. **Treating a draft policy as law.** Date every regulatory statement.
6. **Commissioning fieldwork without a sampling plan.** A weak sample produces false confidence.
7. **No conflict check.** A provider that also advises a competitor may not be independent.
8. **No acceptance criteria.** The report arrives, but it does not answer the brief.

12. How PIVRA can help

PIVRA works through desk research and structured expert consultation. We scope the question, assemble the official and company sources, build a transparent market model and write a deliverable that distinguishes evidence from judgement. Where a question needs primary data, we say so rather than substituting secondary sources. Request a quote or see Pricing.

Sources and methods

This guide draws on PIVRA's research practice and the official portals listed below, accessed 24 October 2026.

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

State Bank of Pakistan.

Finance Division, Government of Pakistan.

Federal Board of Revenue.

Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan.

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority; NEPRA; OGRA; DRAP.

World Bank Open Data; IMF Data; UN Comtrade; ITC Trade Map.

PIVRA's official data sources guide.

Questions and answers

Can market research on Pakistan be done remotely?

Yes for desk research. Official statistics, regulator publications, company filings, trade data, legislation and credible reporting can be assembled and analysed remotely. Fieldwork, such as surveys, store checks or stakeholder interviews, usually needs a local team.

How much does market research in Pakistan cost?

Fees depend on the scope, the difficulty of the sources, the deadline and the deliverable. A focused desk brief costs less than a multi-province study with interviews and a data model. Ask for a fixed fee and a written scope after a scoping call.

How long does a market study take?

A focused desk brief can take days to a few weeks. A sector-wide study with provincial records, company filings, interviews and a data annex takes longer. The proposal should give milestones, a draft for comment and a final date.

Where does reliable data on Pakistan come from?

The main sources are the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, State Bank of Pakistan, Finance Division, FBR, SECP, sector regulators such as PTA, NEPRA, OGRA and DRAP, and provincial governments. International sources such as the World Bank, IMF, UN Comtrade and ITC Trade Map are used for cross-checks.

How do you size a market in Pakistan?

Use top-down and bottom-up estimates and triangulate them. Show the base year, exchange rate, treatment of imports and the informal sector, and present a range with assumptions rather than a single number.

Why do official statistics understate some markets?

Pakistan has a large informal economy, and some activity is not captured in formal surveys or tax records. Provincial and district data are also uneven. A good study states these limits rather than presenting false precision.

When is fieldwork necessary?

Fieldwork is needed when the decision depends on consumer preferences, willingness to pay, point-of-sale prices, service quality or the views of stakeholders who will not put them in writing. It needs a sampling plan, recruitment, quality checks and a local team.

What should a research brief contain?

The decision the research supports, three to six questions in priority order, the product and geography, the customer segment and time period, what the client already knows, the deliverable, the deadline and budget, confidentiality and acceptance criteria.

What makes a good research deliverable?

Every material figure is referenced and dated, data gaps are stated, findings are separated from interpretation, the brief is answered first, market size has a method and a range, and the executive summary is accurate and short.

Can a provider also advise competitors?

That is a conflict of interest. Ask for a conflict check and a confidentiality undertaking before sharing sensitive information. A provider that advises a direct competitor may not be independent.

Does PIVRA do fieldwork?

PIVRA works through desk research and structured expert consultation. Where a question needs primary data, the proposal says so rather than substituting secondary sources.

What is the most common mistake buyers make?

Buying a generic report instead of a decision file, accepting a single market-size number without a method, ignoring the informal sector, using national data for a city decision or treating a draft policy as law.