

Qualitative Marketing Research

David Carson, Audrey Gilmore, Chad Perry and Kjell Gronhaug

2001

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Introduction

Brower *et al.* (2000) wrote that Sage Publishers offers over 140 books on qualitative research (p. 365). This particular book “*Qualitative Marketing Research*” is very useful to all graduate-level marketing students who are preparing dissertations or research projects (Carson, *et al.*, 2001). The four authors write in a single voice and seem to agree on ontological and epistemological approaches to qualitative research in Marketing. The book is divided into three parts.

Part I

Part one is titled Social Science Research and Marketing. In this section, the authors start by defining the philosophy of research and marketing. They debate the issue whether Marketing is an art or a science from the academic, business or practitioner point of view. While academics may view marketing as a scientific discipline, practitioners view marketing as an activity where requiring more art than science. They finally propose that a blend of the positivism and interpretivism approaches could be taken to perform marketing research. They presented a useful table (I.I, p. 6) of broad definitions and explanations of ontology, epistemology and methodology on the two approaches (positivism and interpretivism).

In Chapter 2 of Part I, the authors defined the scope of research in Marketing, as it may pertain to consumers or have a management focus. Chapter 3 discusses the design of a research problem and discusses how a research topic may be formulated; they present the different perspectives of research that may overlap just like in a Venn diagram. In the business environment, the research may serve an agenda of management and address a profitability issue. The practitioner research may be geared toward problem-solving and decision-making, and they gather marketing information naturally and intuitively. The academic research is characterized by “rigor and validity” and may use quantitative or qualitative methodologies. It is conceded that academic research may have an applied focus when “it is carried out by, or on behalf of, a specific industry, market or business enterprise”.

Part II

While Part I presented an overall picture, Part II focused on qualitative research methodologies in marketing and declared its superiority to other methods because “it



provides information without guidance” (p. 64). Trustworthiness (credibility, dependability and conformability) is essential for current research and allows future researchers to push the boundaries of marketing research. Transparency and quality of findings are also primordial. Part II A discusses the principal qualitative techniques and methodologies including participant observation, content analysis, small-scale surveys, observation, in-depth interviews/focus groups, action research, grounded theory, ethnographic studies and case studies.

In this section, the authors did an excellent job describing each research method, their tactics, limitations, appropriateness and best-use scenario. They believed that observation studies are most appropriate to confirm actions in a discreet manner without involving the subjects explicitly. It could use human, mechanical or electronic means, be structured on unstructured, disguised or undisguised. The authors also suggest ways to prepare for observation studies with respect to the parameters of timing, trust and materials. Each research method is properly described, defined and illustrated. Its appropriateness is also discussed.

Part III

In Part III, the authors discuss the applications and outcomes of qualitative research in marketing. The first chapter of Part III presents ideas on how to organize, process and visualize the data. The use of computer-aided packages like CAQDAS could render the analysis less tedious and time-consuming. The next chapter delivers ideas on the report pre-writing, writing and revising phases of the process. In Chapter 14, the authors discuss the use of mixed qualitative methods for triangulation and better meaning-making.

Grading of material delivery

From the above, the reader can tell that the authors make a systematic expose of the subject from chapter to chapter. They develop it in an easy-to-understand vocabulary that is accessible to the average undergraduate or graduate student. The tone is both conversational and instructional. As discussed in our fifth paragraph, the authors did an excellent job describing each term and method, their tactics, limitations, appropriateness and best-use scenario. The tone is instructional, as the authors give enough instruction to the novice in the field. In the Focus group interviewing section, the authors provide complete planning for a successful data collection.

At the end of each chapter, a summary of the reading is offered to the reader. In this summary, they submit the main points of the chapter and the salient issues for the reader. They also develop a set of two to four questions so the reader can test their knowledge of the subject that was developed in the chapter. The reference list is also appended at the end of the chapter.

A little negative note

In the last chapter of the book, each author has presented their point of view on the future of marketing research. Two authors (Gilmore and Gronhaug) see more qualitative research in marketing in the future with more hybrid methods, transparency and creativity in data analysis. They foresee new and improved research methodologies in the future. The other two authors (Perry and Carson) believed that qualitative methods will be seen more as a complement to quantitative than as a competitor. The book would have been a better product without Chapter 15.

Conclusion

This is an excellent book for the graduate marketing student who is starting qualitative research for their dissertations or research projects. It fits well in the literature of research methods, and most business or marketing schools should use it in their teaching curricula at the graduate level. It is also a practitioner must-have in their marketing collection.

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Reference

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. and Gronhaug, K. (2001), *Qualitative Marketing Research*, Sage, London, p. 239, ISBN 0 7619 6365 0.

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