

Review:

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Hy Mariampolski (2001). Qualitative Market Research: A Comprehensive Guide. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 321 pages, ISBN 0-7619-6944-6 (hardback), \$106.95 US, ISBN 0-7619-6954-3) (paperback), \$35.95 US

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Abstract: MARIAMPOLSKI's book successfully meets its stated promise of a comprehensive guide to qualitative market research. The author has taken a cookbook approach to the discipline and provides a considerable amount of forms and checklists to support that approach. The highlight of this book is its ability to provide a recipe for qualitative research methodology in market research. Because of the author's thorough identification of procedures and forms, it provides a basis for understanding of the best practices employed by qualitative market research practitioners. MARIAMPOLSKI meets his educational research objective fairly well with this effort. For students who are unfamiliar with market research methodologies, this book would serve as a comprehensive guide to conducting that research. As such, one should not be disappointed that the book is heavily weighted toward practical applications and light on theoretical issues in qualitative research. After all, the purpose of the book is not to expand or explore the theoretical concepts surrounding qualitative methods but to provide data to support meaningful brand marketing. This book clearly meets the stated objectives.

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1. Introduction

Qualitative Market Research: a comprehensive guide, from Sage Publications fulfills the promise of the title. It provides a comprehensive, introductory guide to qualitative methods in market research. In the introduction, MARIAMPOLSKI identifies specific objectives for this book. These objectives include:

- Using the book to help plan programs and implement studies
- A cookbook and rule book that provides standards and best practices
- A resource for improving the quality of services
- An educational resource and encyclopedic reference. [1]

This comprehensive guide then would serve as a normative foundation upon which practitioners can build. [2]

2. Overview of the Book

The introduction states the purposes of meeting the needs of a number of different target audiences as well as serving as a reference guide. The general structure of the book identifies the components of a research project from the perspectives of both the user of the research and the practitioner. [3]

In the first chapter, the author describes qualitative research and includes a short section on the philosophical foundations of qualitative research. MARIAMPOLSKI cites that qualitative research practice is based on a broad and rich intellectual heritage dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century. He cites human behaviorists, scientific methodologists and social realists as providing the intellectual underpinning of qualitative research. A short section on that intellectual heritage includes summaries on the concepts of human behavior as maintained by the psychoanalysts Sigmund FREUD and Carl JUNG, the psychotherapist Carl ROGERS and the cultural researcher Edward T. HALL. The German economist and social historian Max WEBER, and Robert Ezra PARK and the Chicago school represent the scientific methodologists. Georg SIMMEL, a German sociologist, the phenomenologist Edmund HUSSERL and Herbert BLUMER of the "symbolic interactionism" camp represent the social realists of the intellectual heritage. [4]

A discussion of quantitative methodology and qualitative methodology is included in this chapter as well. MARIAMPOLSKI divides the issue into two basic explanations or prescriptive approaches. Qualitative methods are called for when information needs include discovery, customer familiarization, positioning, idea generation and process description or when the information is expected to provide insights into market-related needs, behaviors and feelings (p.25). Quantitative methods are required when the objectives of the research demand enumeration or probabilistic projections (p.26). [5]

Management of a qualitative research project is covered in the second chapter and this is where the cookbook approach begins to emerge. In this chapter, MARIAMPOLSKI covers such topics as the project brief; project planning and budgeting, facilities and screening. [6]

The third chapter is devoted to group moderation and interviewing techniques. Considerable effort has been expended on identifying the breadth of the subject of group moderation and interviewing techniques. In this chapter, MARIAMPOLSKI discusses preparation for an interview including ethics and a briefing checklist, the frame of the mind of the qualitative researcher. In this section some desirable attributes of a qualitative researcher are identified. A qualitative researcher should be objective, direct and specific, non-judgmental, a good listener, sensitive to body language, friendly and open, professional, respectful, flexible and creative; all qualities that contribute to any attempt to make the interview a good experience. He also cites the need for an understanding of human behavior. The research study intends to reveal consumer patterns described as behaviors, meaning and tools. As researchers,

the author emphasizes the need to listen, think creatively and to act as effective moderators. To assist in effective moderation, the author offers yet another checklist. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to using group dynamics effectively and identifying techniques for projection and elicitation to gauge respondent reaction. In closing the chapter, the author devotes a few pages to dealing with special populations such as adolescents, seniors and professionals as well as participants in sensitive topic areas. [7]

Chapter four is devoted to data collection, analysis and reporting. The author devotes the largest section of this chapter to reporting. He wisely advises the writer to discuss reporting formats with the client, taking care to reposit the need for focus, style and the distribution of the report. Never deviating from the cookbook approach, the author provides a suggested organizational style for the report as well. Writing styles and the writing process are addressed in this chapter. Some key elements of this section include his advice to take a position on issues and to highlight important ideas; he reinforces some basic elements of good report writing. An appendix consisting of report samples and forms supports the entire cookbook or rules based effort. References and an index are included as well. [8]

3. Highlights

The highlight of this book is its ability to provide a recipe for qualitative research methodology in market research. Because of the author's thorough identification of procedures and forms, it provides a basis for understanding of the best practices employed by qualitative market research practitioners. MARIAMPOLSKI meets his educational research objective fairly well with this effort. For students who are unfamiliar with market research methodologies, this book would serve as a comprehensive guide to conducting that research. As such, one should not be disappointed that the book is heavily weighted toward practical applications and light on theoretical issues in qualitative research. After all, the purpose of the book is not to expand or explore the theoretical concepts surrounding qualitative methods. Rather, the book seeks to provide the novice qualitative researcher or the student unfamiliar with qualitative research a set of rules to allow such research to be conducted that will yield a meaningful impact on brand marketing (p.57). [9]

To the author's credit, he devotes a few pages to the philosophical foundations of the discipline. However, eleven pages can barely summarize the rich basis for qualitative methodology. Still, MARIAMPOLSKI makes an attempt to at least acknowledge that philosophical foundations exist. [10]

Qualitative research is a "systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (SHANK 1994). MARIAMPOLSKI grounds his introduction in this notion of seeking meaning and motivations behind behavior (p.1). Similarly, the author establishes the importance of qualitative methods in market research to complement quantitative methods. In a very short section, the author provides some helpful appropriate uses of qualitative research to meet both exploratory and explanatory

objectives (p.23). The author draws distinction between these two types of objectives by noting that exploratory objectives attempt to discover the meaning that products and services hold for consumers regarding their preferences and attitudes. Explanatory objectives are those that provide data for market-related needs, behaviors and feelings. [11]

In one of the more useful sections in the first chapter, a number of practical examples of qualitative research applications are identified. These types of examples support the objective of the book serving as an educational resource and a cookbook guide to qualitative market research. One can easily imagine a student with a market research assignment using these examples to help define the methodology to be employed. [12]

Researcher bias is addressed in a short two-page section. While it is important to address the issue of reducing bias and error, especially for the novice researcher, MARIAMPOLSKI devotes little more than two pages to this important topic. He does remind us that we are serving a paying client and offers several means of "guaranteeing that conclusions reached through qualitative research and achieve a meaningful impact on brand marketing" (p.57). MARIAMPOLSKI advises us here not to over-promise and under-deliver. Objectivity is stressed in selecting competent researchers who have the capacity to clarify assumptions and expectations, be critical, interview enough respondents, properly screen respondents, and to hire multiple suppliers as a means of validating research findings. [13]

To address the seemingly endless debate over validity and reliability in research methods, the author states that "qualitative research aims toward a substantive validity—that is, the approach works in that it produces findings that are valuable in designing products, programs, and communications" (p.57). In a single moment the author reminds us that the needs for qualitative market research and qualitative research in other fields are substantively different. [14]

Qualitative research concerns itself with illumination and meaning. As researchers, we at times, have the freedom to follow where the data may lead. Our destination and our results may be less important ultimately to the documentation of our process or methodology and the contribution to learning. We are required as good qualitative researchers to do what the data require us to do. In Qualitative Market Research we serve a paying client. We are engaged in a business, helping our clients to meet marketing objectives. Qualitative Market Research and our paying client may require us to abandon the pursuit of meaning or interesting and important revelations in favor of obtaining results that will have the greatest economic benefit for our client. [15]

A project management approach to qualitative market research allows the author to narrow the margins for error in this type of research. The practical applications for this approach are not to be ignored. In the business community, consumption of resources must produce meaningful, profitable (measurable) returns. Similarly, in the general research community, research must produce meaningful results,

although they may not be measurable results in terms of profit. The research methodology must still answer the research question, what is it that we want to know? What we want to know is the meaning that will result in the most economic benefit. [16]

Project management methods help control the resources of time and money (budgets) while meeting the stated qualitative market research project objectives in terms of outcomes and deliverables. MARIAMPOLSKI aims at eliminating the disastrous result of producing market research that lacks value in terms of findings that help ultimately in increasing market share or identifying new markets. It would seem that he is able to accomplish this goal quite effectively. [17]

In a promising effort, the author discusses the need for locating appropriate research facilities and recruitment methods. It is in this section that the author shows his experience in the field and provides a considerable checklist for items to be considered in using a research facility. [18]

In summation, this cookbook, checklist approach to locating research facilities and recruitment methods again narrows the margin of error for the inexperienced or novice researcher. The second chapter discusses various recruitment methods comparing the use of independent and in-house recruiters and client supplied lists. The physical plant or location for the interviews is given considerable space, discussing the importance of location of the facility for the participants. He also discusses locations for the interview including the living room, the office suite, the conference-room and the characteristics of a good conference room, mini-group rooms, and test kitchens. In addition, the author discusses the characteristics of a well-equipped observation or viewing room. [19]

The remainder of the book is devoted to interviewing techniques, collecting data and writing the report. This is where the qualitative researcher is revealed not as researcher in the traditional sense, but as moderator between the interviewer and the participants in the study. All of the effort in these remaining chapters is focused on the systematic production of valid and meaningful consumer information in keeping with the contractual deliverables of the research project. [20]

Finally, the author provides a considerable appendix of forms and checklists to assist in narrowing the margin of error for inexperienced qualitative practitioners. Highlights of this section include a project brief, sample screener respondent specifications, and parental permission screener. Also included are a legal release form, consent form, discussion guide, and observation guide. These guides should prove extremely useful to the novice researcher and should facilitate the completion of qualitative market research at substantially reduced legal risk. [21]

4. Evaluative Commentary

Qualitative Market Research does indeed provide a comprehensive guide to qualitative market research techniques. The strength of the book, its cookbook or rule based approach, is a two edged sword. The cookbook approach certainly helps achieve the objective of serving as a guide to qualitative market research, but such rules based approaches also serve to limit the research to pedestrian results. In the business community tried and true methodologies are not easily replaced by new methodologies unless those methodologies can demonstrate greater economic value usually expressed in meaningful impacts on brand marketing. For the world of market research, that might be enough. This book would be improved significantly if the author could at least touch upon the limitations of such rule based approaches and pursue a more inter-disciplinary view regarding the best practices in other fields of qualitative research. [22]

Similarly, while attempting to identify some of the philosophical foundations of qualitative research, the author forces himself to be too limiting. The work could be improved by a more in depth discussion of these philosophical foundations. DENZIN, LINCOLN and GUBA fail to make the author's list of references and a review of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 1994) might provide an insightful reference to the use of qualitative methodologies in other fields. The field of market research may indeed benefit from the exposure to such a volume, befitting an educational resource and comprehensive guide as this book aims to become. [23]

An examination of the 134 references cited in the work, reveal that 53 are from *Quirk's Marketing and Research Review*. The danger in relying on a single source, even a source such as *Quirk's*, is to rely too heavily on sources subject to a single peer or editorial view. This aspect of scholarship is where the work can be most improved. The book lacks an exposure to the work of other practitioners in qualitative research and what they can bring to the field. It is this aspect of MARIAMPOLSKI's work that presents us with the greatest opportunity and challenge. We may build upon what he has provided as a comprehensive guide and compendium of best practices while embracing the opportunity to incorporate the best practices from the best practitioner's into future works. [24]

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