

Qualitative Research (SBPD7002_LON) Assignment

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Different qualitative research methods available to a social sciences researcher

Research is the single most comprehensive element of academics on the basis of which the whole foundation of academic progress is based. As Jackson *et al* (2007, pp. 21) have stated; the primary function of science is to answer questions with observations.

However as with the human nature, achieving an end result or an answer can mean differently from one person to another. The approach and methods used to derive an answer or a conclusion from different observations are in many ways unique to the individual.

Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015, p3) call the difference in methodologies of research as down to a debate between theory and perspectives or assumptions and purposes. This is more important when the research topic involves social sciences which are essentially a study of human nature, behaviour and observations.

Melinda (2014, pp 276) presents an interesting analysis in this domain. In researching the value of quantitative methods in social validity research, it is observed that using quantitative research methods for understanding social issues is often limited in terms of the amount of information and data they can provide. While the majority of questions asked are linked to either categorical statements like Yes/No or use likert scale variations, the fact remains that data elements analyzed are on the discretion of the researcher deeming them important. Hence the Quantitative method in this regard leaves room open to understand the true social context of that research where questions can be answered with statements such as "Yes, but also....". Qualitative designs on the other hand allow for the participants voices to be heard in their natural settings with their content always at the forefront of the study.

Taylor *et al* (2015, p3) calls out the high-level perspectives in qualitative research in the social sciences world as positivism and interpretivists. Both approaches have been continuously been taken up through the decades of development of social sciences and qualitative research.

However, on a more generic terms, there are number of research methods available to social sciences researchers in the qualitative domain.

Ethnography

This method is utilized to analyze a group of people connected with each other via a shared interest or other elements. From a social sciences perspective this method is often utilized to study similar subjects or sub-groups within a wider scope of people. For example in the business world this is often used on micro-groups or team where researchers immerse themselves with the culture of the subjects in order to analyze them objectively and deduct results. Lewis (2015, pp 474), while analyzing the approaches for research on health promotion practices, has argued that ethnography is the preferred method of research when a specific segment of patients are involved.

Ethnographic research further helps the researcher to understand the particular patterns of communication, habits and structure of social relationships of the subjects (Bailey, 2000). Similarly for

researches focusing on behavioural aspects of any specific social group, ethnographic research provides the opportunity to understand the intricacies of social interactions between that groups that can unlock insights otherwise not available using any other research method or approach.

Interviewing

Interviews are the cornerstone of qualitative research in conducting research around social sciences topics. However, very often social scientists solicit data via interviews in combination with any other quantitative data to have the full scope on things. The aspect of researcher-respondent relationship power status also plays a part in the final output of the interview (Jaber & James *et al*, 1999) and hence academics have often questions relying solely on the interview methods to collate data for a research hypothesis. A fluid but guided approaches to questions often provide the best results with complete context to any of the requirements of the researcher (Seidman, 2013, pp6) and allows for rich and detailed data to be collated for querying.

Focus groups

A small group of individuals interviewed together in a discussion forum setting is the primary aim of focus groups. Health sectors, young people and other certain research topics can greatly benefit from social groups as they enable a progressive dialogue between respondents themselves as well which is often lacking in a one to one setting (Morgan, 1997. P8-9). Focus groups also provide elements of quantity from the aspects of building a group that is nicely representative as a sample of interest for the research topic (Cleary *et al*, 2015, pp.474)

Narrative method

As part of the interpretive approach of qualitative methods, narrative approach works best to analyze the connection between past, present and future of any social issue. This method is used by analyzing existing pieces of research, conversations or interviews or oral histories to ascertain elements of data useful for the researcher (Gagliardi & Dobrow, 2011, pp. 268). These methods provides the flexibility for a social sciences researcher to link their own research paradigm with that of similar or existing research carried out in the field and extract information around specific elements. Bailey (2000) Jackson *et al* (2007) and many other researchers are strong proponents of using this approach in social sciences segments that involve a huge data sample not addressable via interview or focus group options.

Observation

Observation is considered a form approach where the research is able to collect data in an overt or a cover manner (Lofland, 2006, pp. 30). This approach is particularly of use during active field work where researchers often interact closely with the subjects while maintaining the professional distance required that of ethical and moral standards of the academic order. Via the approach, the researcher is often able to ascertain elements of data that might not come out in any other form of interaction or questioning, hence this works best with the context of having subjects that are either unable to or at times difficult to assimilate information from and hence need an observational approach to understand the critical elements of data.(e.g. studying behavioural characteristics of criminal gang members).

Qualitative vs. Quantitative divide: Real or imaginary?

Arguably there is not a single research that does not infringe at least one method of research or the other. In purely qualitative studies, very often than not researchers utilize elements of sampling, data connections and sometimes mass quantitative research methods such as surveys to support the research hypothesis.

Interestingly enough, sometimes the conclusions deducted from qualitative research can be negated when reviewed under the microscope of quantitative data and vice versa (Pajo, 2018). Hence it is important to ensure that researchers understand the context they are driving in their research paradigm.

Some academics have argued that the difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches are down to the goals, objectives and aims of the researcher more than the actual approach undertaken to carry out the work (Taylor *et al*, 2015). Consider a case of the research output produced by the Indian Universities between 2009 to 2013. Dhawan *et al* (2017) considered the numerous studies carried out by the university researchers during this era and identified the distinction between the research methodology used on the basis of self-identification by the researchers. However closer inspection revealed that every research in its own domain always had some mixed elements of both approaches being utilized in context of the research query.

Another highly interesting divide can be understood from the research area or focus itself in question. Research carried out to understand the performance of financial instruments or derivative during the fiscal crisis of say 2008 will ultimately has to rely on factual quantitative data to back any understanding of performance of the financial sectors against completely relying on qualitative methods of interviewing the traders, financial professionals or authorities during that crisis.

Similarly the research focusing on the traits exhibited by students during their initial years at a university will have to rely on the qualitative data that can only be gathered via interviews, focus groups or specific observational elements utilized during Qualitative research approach.

Another interesting case in point in this regard is the study carried out by Kidwell *et al* (2008, pp 141-15) that analyses the ethical behaviors to different elements of morality in US academics. Primarily utilizing a quantitative research method of surveying, it is highly interesting to review the results reported where the researchers have established a correlation between the subject studies and ethical behaviour exhibited. Students and academics studying more qualitative subjects such as management and marketing displayed highly similar attributes compared to individuals studying quantitative subjects such as accounting and finance.

Furthermore very often the difference in the research methods is more along the lines of the perception of the researcher themselves. Very often qualitative data from interviews is queried using purely quantitative methods to ascertain patterns of responses, combining them together and analyzing them as a sample (Bryman, 2017, pp. 59).

In one way or form, quantitative research often is proceeded by qualitative research.

Researchers often explore the answer to queries first to establish a hypothesis and then carry out a wider net of quantitative research to test their hypothesis with more research and backing.

For example, the question who own a child in a health facility (Shields *et al*, 2003) will need the researcher to explore a number of theories, approaches, scenarios and detailed discussions with the people actually going through those experiences to provide a solid foundation of research. But if you further explore as to what are the needs of a child in a hospital environment, as carried out by a Finnish researcher discerning that emotional needs often proceed physical requirement (Kristjansdotti, 1995), then you need access to data, numbers and proof points to back your argument involving elements of Quantitative research. However there are areas of research that require a particularly quantitative approach more than any specific look into the qualitative elements of the hypothesis. Consider the case of clinical trials, the sample sizing, the effects and impacts are all considered with numbers as they key research parameter. This end result and impact on the hypothesis is often what divides the research methodology in its true sense (Hammersley, 2017).

Some of the unique differences that remain enact with each research approach can include elements such as:

- Qualitative studies are generally flexible and the research design can morph during the analysis itself. Whereas quantitative research designs are often developed prior to the study itself
- During course of qualitative studies, researcher is the primary data collector with the interviewing, observational or any other approach. However during the quantitative studies data collected instruments are often pre-selected such as surveys, questionnaires and else
- The analysis for a qualitative study is often under a descriptive and narrative approach which quantitative studies bank on numerical data and statistics

Ultimately it is as per the research goals and objectives that a researcher has to build the methodology for. Providing clearly distinctive elements in each research methods are possible, but at one point or another the overlap and integration does take place to reach out for a conclusion (Shields & Twycross, 2003, p24)

Another element of divide between qualitative and quantitative studies is the perceived end point of each research. Qualitative research approach is often utilized to present a new theory or a concept. Something that was previously explored but the researcher builds on with original idea, thoughts and primary data collation to provide a new angle on it. When launching new theories, qualitative approach is far too common in the world of social sciences (Choy, 2014 pp 102). On the same scale when testing an existing theory or research construe, quantitative methods are most generally implemented to provide evidence in regards to the existing nature of the theory.

Hence it can be argued that both the research approaches of qualitative and quantitative analysis are valid and utilized in researches at one point or another. The divide and difference might be mostly from the perspective of the researcher that has defined their research piece following one set of parameters for qualitative aspects of a research compared to other set of elements that purely deal with the numeric aspects of the research. **(Words: 2,012)**

Assignment two: Introduction of articles

The two articles selected for the purpose of this comparative study come from two diverse segments. One tackles with the world of business and marketing while the other one is focused on smoking behaviours of individuals.

Interestingly both the articles deal with a sub-set of wider human population addressing some issues that impact a huge number of individuals. However, the method of research adopted in both cases is a qualitative approach undertaken with use of interviews and focus groups. The research by Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) focuses on the middle income bracket individuals of four African nations which they term as the Middle of the Pyramid (MOP) individuals in the wider income brackets of the African community. The core objective of this research is to bring out the key behaviours, social networks and interactions of this middle of the pyramid individuals of how they behave with the firms offering services and consumer goods in these countries.

In the arguments presented by Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) the academic and business world have focused heavily on the low income bracket of emerging markets, the middle class of the developed countries or limited research in to the middle class bracket of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries. The researchers carried out a detailed study in the 4 countries mentioned as well as conducting around 200+ interviews in two different phases across 2010 and 2012. In conjunction with the interviews the researchers also carried out four focus groups with 8 participants each to understand the observational elements of this income bracket group as well.

Interestingly, the researchers had a core focus of providing insights to the business executives in their core objectives and hence also included interviews with a core group of executives to understand a 360 overview of the topics both from consumers and businesses perspective.

The second article is focused on understanding smoking habits of individuals and how it is linked to their socio-economic backgrounds. The core focus of this research's article is to understand why, how and what aspects of individuals' economic elements result in them taking up smoking and if at all it plays a part.

For the purpose of this research, again researchers Paul *et al* (2010) have gone beyond the numbers and stats and have tried to analyze this concept with qualitative data input directly collated from the individuals in question. This is highly interesting as the core element of this research is about understanding the numbers linked to the individuals; whether it is from their perspective of earnings in the total income sense or their assets and belonging making them part of any specific socio-economic bracket.

Interestingly the researchers have directly linked individuals with lower Socio-economic performance (SEP) to higher rates of smoking and difficulty in quitting. It is argued that people although at times attempted more to quit from smoking, but their anxiety, social status and peer pressure resulted in bringing them back in to tobacco consumption far easily than people from the higher end of the social economic performance groups. The focus groups utilized for this research were broken down by multiple sampling techniques to ascertain a good quality of analytical data to deduct results from.

Evaluation of research paradigms

Both researchers have adopted the qualitative research design with slightly different approaches to data collection.

On the highest level, both researchers can be described as phenomenological explorations as described by Taylor *et al* (2015) and Merriam (2002). With both researchers focusing on understanding a phenomena at play in either the Middle of the pyramid income group in case of the African countries or people from lower socio-economic performance groups in case of the study in Australia.

The research around the consumers in Africa is of particularly good value in terms of using the phenomenological paradigm as it revolves around consumer behaviours of a certain bracket of people. Wilson (2012, pp 234) has argued strongly in this favour commenting that qualitative research paradigms using a phenomenological approach are critical if the academics or businesses are to understand the true essence of consumer behaviours. Furthermore, as the research objectives from Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) point out, one core reason they wanted to conduct the research was to help major businesses understand how best to develop marketing strategies for these middle of the pyramid consumers (pp. 400-401). In this regards again Wilson (2012, pp 230) has suggested that any study of consumer behaviours has to adopt a qualitative design rather than banking purely on quantitative data presented on the back of surveys or questionnaire distributions.

Choy (2014) further argues that studying human behaviours without the full qualitative context of their experiences and background deduced via interviews or focus groups can very often provide a singular view of the case at hand; and often provide the false information.

This is especially true when you consider the first conclusion drawn by the research of Chickweche & Fletcher (2014, pp 407) where they speak about the emerging social networks of influence within the wider middle of the pyramid group of consumers. The study speaks about the memberships and associations of these individuals to certain social networks depending on their personal backgrounds and understanding of their social status. Wilson (2012) again argues that the elements relating to consumer thinking is something that can only be fleshed out with a qualitative approach as numbers cannot capture ideas as such.

However, another interesting element of Chickweche & Fletcher's research is the focus to understand social structures within the target group. This is a similar approach undertaken by Alfakhri (2018, pp 524) while carrying out research on consumer behaviours in the hospitality industry. What is common in both instances is the use of a case study approach within a wider phenomenological querying model of the full paper. The research while overall has a focus on marketing to middle of the pyramid individuals, provide a flavor of social structures within the wider audience using specific set of questions with a case study connected approach. In view of Taylor *et al* (2015) and Merriam (2002) this is the greater flexibility of qualitative research paradigm that allows for a subject to grow with the research and not be limited by the measurable instruments already put in place at the beginning of the study.

The second research paper by Paul *et al* (2010) on the other hand builds using a phenomenological approach but also borrows heavily from a case study method. The sample selection and then breakdown into focus groups based on similar traits is often conducted as part of a case study method exploring a specific phenomena (Wilson, 2012). However in the context of the SEP breakdown of audience, it is highly relatable to the wider groups and hence more appropriate to be identified as phenomenological study.

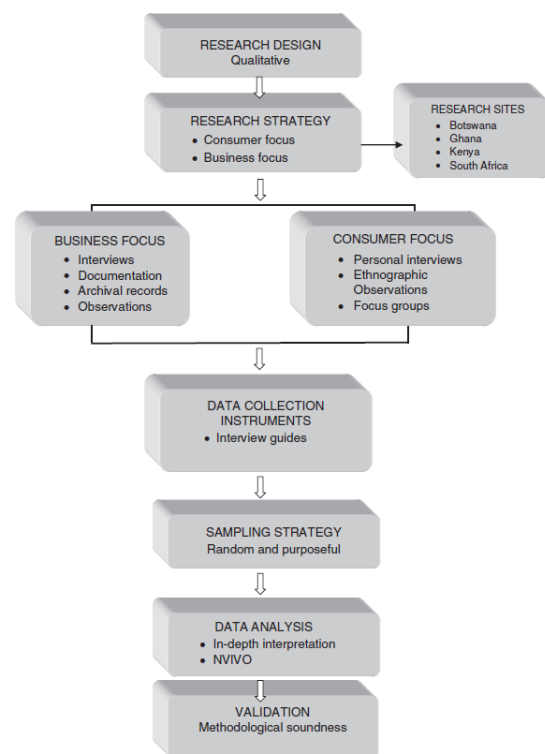
Considering the study by Paul *et al* (2010) also entails elements of understanding dimensions within the focus group of understanding different habits and social behaviours involved; it is a commendable effort on behalf of the researchers to identify the outcomes via a focus group method. While they wanted to find out if socio-economic performance of individuals have a direct link to their smoking habits, it is always of great value to have that dimension of dialogue and interaction between subjects to bring out elements that might not surface when the same subject might be providing answers in an interview setting. Fusch and Ness (2015, p 1408) although have provided guarded views in this regards mentioning that very often in a focus group environment, a groupthink phenomena takes over which results in the a singular thought taking up as the voice of the full group. Slightly more vocal personalities dominate the discussion and rather than a vivid picture emerging of individual thoughts, a dominant thought is agreed upon and relayed by majority of the group.

However closely looking at the research by Paul *et al* (2010), the specific mention of experienced research conductors with focus on keeping discussions objective are built in to the paradigm perhaps to avoid this key consideration.

Evaluation of research design and methodology

The approach by Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) is well laid out in terms of its design structure and flow. Hennik *et all* (2011) identifies a clear and simple design of a study as the central pillar on the basis of which all arguments are then developed.

The study collected data in two separate phases between 2010 and 2012. Now ordinarily this should not have much impact on the end-results, but data creation, safe keeping and utility over a longer period of time is far more complex than researchers that short, timely and precise (Wilson, 2012). Another element described as part of the methodology of this research is the use of third party associates from those local countries to build segments on a local level. Arguably this can work at times in the favour of the



Research Design Illustrated by the researchers
(Chickweche & Fletecher, 2014)

researcher as it allows for the local population to speak openly to people from with their own geographical and social contexts, however this needs to be taken in to consideration if any serious recommendations are to be drawn from this data that the researchers were banking on the primary research of some other individuals who conducted it for them. But overall, the design and methodology in this study is kept very concise, clear and effective for all participants.

Purposeful sampling technique was used in this research to build out a segment of people from the wider audience across the 4 sub-saharan countries. Duan *et al* (2015) have provided detailed arguments in support of utilizing this not so common measure of optimal design to build a purposeful sampling segment for researchers. Considering the total middle of the pyramid size mentioned by Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) is in excess of 1.5 billion individuals, it must be imperative that a sampling technique is used that can correlate to the original number of people impacted by the matter at hand. Hence the purposeful sampling technique utilized helped bring the number down to a manageable mean of individuals who can be reached out to for interviews and collate results from.

On the other hand the research by Paul *et al* (2010) was focused more on a specific sub-segment of individuals in a particular socio-economic performance bracket of Sydney. Again, the researchers adopted a purposive sampling technique to obtain a selected sample of people with low socio-economic performance and from specific age groups. Their argument of using the purposive sampling was to ensure a diverse group of individuals are brought forward rather than achieving a statistical generalisability of the representatives.

This approach of breaking down a large pool of representatives into a manageable data sample is particularly effective in the social sciences domain as it provides for the key learning outcomes that are otherwise non available en-masse (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, the research method adopted by the team of researchers included a remuneration element to cover for the costs of participants. This is well in line with the process often adopted by the researchers to specific topics and themes, however one element mentioned during the process of not declaring the selection criteria to the participants feel a bit on the edge of ethical considerations. Furthermore the researchers have described that oral confirmations in an informal manner were achieved to confirm that the participant did belong to the specific socio-economic performance group or had the intended employment status to discuss the topic in detail with the focus group. Where necessary, replacements were also sought in case a focus group was not formed to the optimal design.

Matthews & Ross (2010) term this as a flaw on the basis research design adopted. Ultimately the quality of research when going through a case study or phenomenological perspective is highly dependent on the input received from the subjects of research. A researcher if adopting a narrative or observational approach to describe what he saw or learned from the research subjects will ultimately be limited to the understanding derived from participants of that research. Hence changing and sapping of focus group participants is sometimes the easiest and the most natural thing to do.

Data gathering approach and framework

When data collection from the preferred approach to research is considered, the detailed process undertaken by both set of researchers is apparent in the descriptions provided in each article. Taylor *et al* (2015) clearly identify the phase of data gathering as unique and different to adopting an interview or focus group based approach. The subjects and the researchers have to in some way or form work together towards the same goal of achieving the understanding of the issue at hand; this relationship framework develops especially in a qualitative study environment where the participants are very often in direct interactions with the researcher (Wilson, 2012). The dynamic of this relationship very often determines the result of the data collated (Merriam, 2002 and Fusch & Ness, 2015). The more objective the discussions and open the debate in the content of a focus group; greater are the chances to have quality input for the research question at hand.

Consider the example of Chickwece & Fletcher (2014) where while discussing the interviews and focus groups, the researchers mention that they conducted three focus groups further expanding in to detailed observations across different life details of the people as well. The research mentions that observations were made (in addition to the interviews and focus groups) with visits through to interviewee's homes, joining them on shopping trips and also attending their local social networking activities. This is again true to what Choy (2014) has mentioned about qualitative design researches growing with the time and gaining a flexibility to mediums from purely conversational styles such as interviews and focus groups to purely observational styles such as edging on the active/immersive research.

Considering the case of Paul *et al* (2010) around data gathering, a point of note mentioned earlier is about the pre-selection of the sample based on statistics of their socio-economic performance (SEP). This again is an interesting perspective as although the qualitative research's aim is to study and understand the problem from its core, the method adopted here for data gathering mentions that the first and perhaps the most important data point that enabled the subjects to be a part of the research originally came from an external source (Australian Bureau of Statistics). Taylor *et al* (2015) and Merriam (2002) have explained this arrangement of a data collation approach as the core issue for qualitative enquiry coming from a quantitative question previously addressed. The data element that qualified individuals for the research did not stem from this research itself, but the use of purposeful sampling meant that their data was a factor in making them part of this research.

Another interesting element of data collation and utility methodology used in the research by Paul *et al* (2010) is dependence of external research recruiters to identify and recruit individuals for their research. The research promotion is described as 'A study to understand the smoking and quitting behaviours of individuals' and then the scope was defined as the persons of specific SEP bracket. This process helped researchers develop outcomes that were targeted and relevant for action in the context of people who participated as subjects.

Ethical considerations and limitations

Oye *et al* (2016) have argued for the ethical understanding in qualitative research to be determined under the view of relational, situational, contextual and emerging ethics. Not only limited to the handling of personal or sensitive data, but also to what extent the data collated can be analyzed under the auspicious of qualitative querying also needs a thorough understanding before researchers can ascertain the best approach to ethics.

Consider the questions asked during the interviews conducted by Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) around the personal habits, shopping considerations and social networks of individuals in their research subjects. In the environment of data privacy and considerations around the use of personal data by third party organizations; it is imperative that a clear direction on the use of data and privacy issues is provided to the subject of participants. Oye *et al* (2016) have suggested that even after the collation of data and ensuring it's safeguarding, when it comes to converting that data in to insights and learning for the consumption of a wider audience, the researchers do need to remember the multi-dimensional impacts of ethics on their work.

This is ever so more important in the case social performance linked research as conducted by Paul *et al* (2010). Also, as mentioned above, the research work by Paul *et al* (2010) centered around people from lower end of the socio-economic performance scale and there was a reward on offer of around 90 Australian dollars for participants. Hence ethical considerations for such research should have been paramount.

However the issues of ethics is largely ignored in both research papers. The research focusing on the African countries has provided sparse details on the ethical considerations and largely focused on the ethical interactions of the people with their social networks within their own individual aspects. Interestingly while writing about the future research directions on this topic, the researchers have mentioned that future academics will need to address the ethical considerations of the topic as well as understand how marketing can reach out to these audience members in a highly ethical and objective manner.

On the health research article, the only consideration given for ethics is around a mention of approval from the internal ethical committee of the academic institute where the researchers were working. This is also light in terms of ethical details and considerations for such a topic involving a number of individuals.

On the limitations side, a quick arises as to if the total population in the prescribed middle of the pyramid bracket by Chickweche & Fletcher (2014) was around 1.5 billion people then why did the researchers not adopt the quantitative research method to ascertain the behaviours of a wider audience before analyzing the results with qualitative analysis? Essentially even using purposive sampling technique to bring in elements of diversity in data, it is difficult to ascertain authoritative research on the back of such sample sizes.

This element is accepted and deliberated upon by both researchers while addressing the need to carry out further academic research in the topics raised by the researchers. The research on the middle of the pyramid income bracket individuals has suggested that the middle-income households are often effectively addressed in the developed economies or the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations, but largely neglected in the emerging or developing countries where research heavily focuses on the poverty stricken or the bottom of the pyramid income groups. Similarly in the health world, researchers are often linked to understanding smoking as personal habits and behaviours and not as a result of the socio-economic performance as metric.

Hence both researchers have emphasized on the point of their research limitations with lack of existing literature and smaller sample sizes.

Conclusions and recommendations

Qualitative research is a highly flexible approach to research that can provide researchers with options to explore a topic in complete detail, understand its context and recommend solutions or improvements to any issue at hand. Unlike quantitative research where the instruments of measurement are defined before commencing the research, Qualitative research allows for greater depth of study, data collation and have insights that are core to building a new theory or idea (Choy, 2014 and Hammersley, 2017).

Over the course of many years, both research methods have seen multiple refinements and have developed with research arguments and detailed studies.

The two articles selected for the purpose of this research both adopted a qualitative research approach to address different set of questions and problems presented to the researcher. The research premise of the study carried out to understand the consumer behaviours of the middle of the pyramid income bracket holders is unique in the geographical regions it targeted (the Sub-Saharan African regions). Also the sampling and direct interview techniques with combination of focus groups built specifically for this research provide a comprehensive overview of the questions at hand.

In the second article the authors adopted a purely focus group based approach to discover a number contextual understandings around the smoking habits of people on the lower end of socio-economic performance. Similar to the other article, the study was conducted using a structured set of assumptions that were then further explored and discussed with the focus group arrangement of individuals who were pre-selected based on their fitting in the profile intended by the researchers.

A question that can perhaps be asked of both set of researchers is as to why the quantitative measures were not employed in each research paradigm. The sample sizes are not reflective of the true audience at stake and as argued by Bryman (2007) the strength of qualitative studies is only there if the question at stake is to be explored rather than quantified or measured.

In both research studies this has been negated by the introduction of purely qualitative objectives in some way or form. For example in the study of African middle class, the authors added the element of understanding the impact of social networks within this audience to determine how effective marketing

strategies can be addressed for these people and for the research on the smoking habits, the core focus was to see if a correlation can be explored between the social and economic standing of individuals to their habit of smoking.

In this way the researchers were able to validate their results using qualitative methods and justify conclusions and recommendations with a wide array of information for future researchers as well.

Few ways these studies could have been improved:

- Adoption of pre-set goals and objectives. Both studies lack clear goals and adopt a narrative style to build an argument towards the cause of study. With clearly defined outcomes as goals, it might have been easier to enhance the research quality.
- Adopt a mixed-method approach. Both topics deserved a wider array of data to be analyzed in order to make substantive judgments and recommendations about. The topics and issues discussed are very wide in their nature and without the input of a wide range of statistical data deriving any conclusions does have the implications of creating a gap between theory and reality. This could have been addressed with a mixed-method approach of including quantitative data sets that can be studied separate to the theoretical aspects discussed.
- Adopt a clearer ethical approach to subjects and discussions. This certainly felt lacking in both studies where there is not enough clarity or emphasis provided on the ethical implications of the research either on the subjects or for wider academics. As discussed above, the ethics must have been addressed both from the perspectives of understanding data handling, safeguarding and analysis, but also from the perspective of how and where the data was shared.
- Provide clear recommendations for academic researchers. The studies provide good conclusions and recommendations for the topic discussed, but leave room open for any future developments that can be built on the back of these studies. The researchers have not provided that information in much clarity for the benefit of any future researchers or academics. The research in the African markets diverted more attention to the business outcomes of marketing and promotion and the research of smoking habits only provided links between the smoking habits and social status without recommending any solid aspects of where to take this information forward and what needs to be done to bring about any impact or change in the world of medicine or social policy.

Words: 3,964

Assignment three: Reflective report

This assignment was greatly different to the previous qualitative assignments often provided in the term and in some of the other institutes I have been a part of.

This was a greatly new element for myself to determine the quality and comment on the qualitative research work of others. Not only this assignment provided me to view the academic work from a perspective of two completely different set of studies, but also helped analyze why and how some research qualities is better than that of others.

Essentially I started with the basic reading and comprehension of the two peer-reviewed articles that were selected and then approved by my supervisor. It was interesting to read two pieces of research from different domains of social sciences addressing separate set of questions and trying to build an answer/argument around that.

Usually when you build a qualitative design, the focus is to study more on more your chosen subject matter and present as many valid arguments via literature review and methodology as required to build a comprehensive research piece on a pre-determined topic. But true to its essence of flexibility; this qualitative research assignment developed on its own, owing to the diversity of studies carried out by the articles under examination.

Fundamentally my view of qualitative design for assignments was greatly enriched when I had to understand the multiple approaches, paradigms and design concepts at play in qualitative field of study. For critiquing someone else's work, you need to have developed that understanding of your own that can help you analyze and dissect the information presented in light of the theories you learn overtime.

For example, while describing the research approach undertaken by the study focusing on the developing middle class in Africa, it was difficult to ascertain what approach the researchers used where for once they mentioned purely interviews as the source of data collation and then expanded into saying 3 focus groups were also organized and researchers visited houses of the subjects and accompanied them on shopping trips and joined them in their social circles. Which gives rise to question if the interviews were also conducted as a matter of observational style of research, rather than the engagement required in interviews which is the true essence of qualitative style.

Furthermore one key element I learned was the adoption of qualitative design to address a purely statistical issue at hand. The smoking research study for example was built on the premise that people from lower social economic performance classes are more likely than others to be smokers and be less successful in their ability to quit. In my view this was a purely quantitative question requiring statistical proof. Yet the research design adopted by the researchers was to analyse the core root of that problem by understanding the contextual information around smoking in lower income bracket social classes.

This gives great food for thought for my own research ideas that I am developing for my final thesis.

Where initially my core focus was to research about the business environment in the retail industry for the Oil sector; this assignment has forced me to think and re-align my research design to adopt more of

a generic mixed-method approach rather than purely relying on the statistical evidence provided on the back of numbers from the sector. As an example, one of my research questions was around the conduciveness of investing in a petrol station setup in a specific geographical area. Initially my research design included thinking about all the Profit and Loss ratio and quantifying a single entity say for example the total number of cars in an area linked to the profitability of the local petrol station – but after this assignment I've realized that the specific quantifiable data needs to be validated in light of theoretical framework to understand what might be the preference of people who are filling up in their local petrol stations.

Furthermore, while analyzing the use of existing literature sources in both studies, one key element I picked on was how the studies mostly utilized literature that provided a balanced (supporting and opposing) view on the research hypothesis of the studies. This expanded into a nicely flowing study where multiple arguments were presented from each side of the coin and then they were analyzed with the primary data collected during the course of that study. This is again a key learning I am going to transfer across in my research where a narrative approach suits best to the requirements of the research design and provides a full research context of why the data collected as part of my research either supports or opposes the hypothesis I have developed.

This is again a key learning linked to the overall research approach that I will embed in my work where hypothesis testing is not carried out purely on the basis of quantifiable results (i.e. numbers and statistics) but are also viewed in the light of previous theories and qualitative data collated by similar researchers. This assignment has also provided great understanding, preparation and background to develop on the skills of qualitative learning in order to build a credible piece of resource that is justifiable throughout from its goals, objectives and research methods as well. It was also great to see how different researchers articulate the research designs in a completely different manner.

In conclusion I feel after this assignment I am far more comfortable and have progressed a great deal in development of my understanding of qualitative research and have practical examples, suggestions and plans in place to tackle my own research thesis in light of this learning. It has also provided with a greater flexibility on where and how multiple academic approaches might be relevant and applicable to build a greater degree of authoritative research.

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