Preface

Qualitative research has a relatively long history, spanning at least a century, and is known as being interpretive. As a method, interpretivism has existed for quite some time and dates back to the work of Dilthey (1911-1977). In fact, Dilthey suggested that human discourse and action could not be analyzed with the methods of natural and physical science, and this was the defining conceptual perspective. However, though Dilthey acknowledged interpretivism, the marketing and behavioural areas did not recognize interpretivism until the 1980s, when there was growing dissatisfaction with the more traditional models of consumer behavior (Marsden & Littler, 1998). The interpretive perspective is concerned with understanding consumer behavior at the individual level within the realm of consumers’ subjective consciousnesses and meaning systems, variously referred to as “consumer logics of meaning, mind-sets, and belief systems” (Marsden & Littler, 1998, p. 5). Within the interpretivist paradigm, it is believed that due to the human’s ability to adapt, the best approach to understanding is through the use of the human instrument (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) (e.g. respondent and the researcher). The idea of privileging the researcher over the respondent is rejected within the interpretivist paradigm. The researcher and the respondent both bring something distinctive and valuable to the research that is being conducted, and this is a significant part of the research process. A variety of options exist for the individual researcher regarding how to handle the diversity of research approaches, and every approach to consumer research may have something to offer (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Interpretive approaches are seen as generating their own unique forms of knowledge (Thompson, 1991). However, the output of the knowledge will depend on an individual’s interpretations and the particular context in which research takes place.

The interpretivist approach focuses on an emergent process (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and is therefore characterized by a constantly evolving research design, as qualitative researchers seek to describe multiple perceived realities that cannot be known because they are time- and context-specific. Interpretive approaches focus on generating their own unique forms of knowledge (Thompson, 1991); however, there are numerous factors that will implicate the knowledge that is generated, such as the context, the informant’s interpretation of the research being undertaken, as well as the researchers’ interpretations of what is being said and how. Moreover, researchers possess their own perspectives and value systems on the phenomenon being studied; these perspectives are an indispensable contribution to the research process.

The interpretivist view challenges the established paradigms and traditional positivist philosophies of science, which presume the social sciences stick to a single scientific method for the rationalization of their knowledge claims (Goulding, 1999). Instead, the interpretivist view believes that objects should be studied in their own natural environments because that is the only way that a true interpretation and understanding of their objects can be found, hence the reason interpretive research is often referred to as
being “naturalistic.” The qualitative approach seeks to capture the explicit and implicit theories (ideas) a
group of consumers have about their own consumption behaviour. It takes these theories at face value and
adopts the attitude that consumers have, that these theories are naturally right (Calder & Tybout, 1989).

Interpretive researchers acknowledge that there are many ways of seeking knowledge about consumers,
industries, and organizations, and that each form of knowledge is valuable (e.g. ethnography, netnog-
raphy, observations, introspection, videography, informant diaries, etc.). More recently, researcher and
informant reflexivity have become a signal topic in contemporary discussions of qualitative research.
This book seeks to adopt a 360-degree holistic approach to qualitative research that considers traditional
qualitative research methods, such as grounded theory, researcher reflexivity, etc., but also builds on
these methods through the use of more innovative research methods, such as videography, social media
blogs, netnography, etc. More importantly, as qualitative researchers, we recognize the importance of
adopting a multi-method research design as a means to accumulating richer data and to achieve data
validity, reliability, and triangulation. Moreover, as academics working in academic institutions, we
have recognized a broad gap in that student knowledge in final year undergraduate dissertation students,
Master’s students, and PhD students lacks qualitative research skills and knowledge that is required for
the completion of a basic dissertation. It is imperative that they are provided with the relevant guidance
and resources to accumulate such knowledge, especially Master’s and PhD students, as they cannot
contribute to academic knowledge without the effective research skills that are required. Therefore, we
hope that this book will be a useful and innovative guide for them that will equip them with the relevant
knowledge as well as point them towards reading resources that will help them further. However, we also
believe that this book will be an indispensable guide for early career researchers undertaking research
for their publications and who wish to learn about new qualitative research methods.

We hope to take our readers from the basics of qualitative research methods to the newer and more
innovative methods that we use today, since the emergence of the Internet and social media tools. We
provide a background to human inquiry and how it has evolved and then focus on the newer innovative
methods that have been discussed. Those who use this book will be encouraged to adopt a multi-method
research design. We also explain and discuss how the use of a multi-method research design contributes
to data validity and triangulation and how this is useful for qualitative researchers.

This core text encompasses an emerging range of qualitative methodologies and educates you to
competently and confidently practice multi-method research design. The aim is that you learn about a
variation of new research methods, how they work together to contribute to data validity, triangulation,
and reliability, and more importantly, how using these methods together and adopting a multi-method
research design will contribute to a richer data set that will inform your study or research extensively.
We have also tried to encourage you to be aware of the significance of researcher reflexivity, but more
importantly, we have focused on our area of expertise, which is the importance of evoking informant
self-reflexivity in a bid to extract richer data. In fact, our research suggests that encouraging informants
to engage through innovative methods such as videographic and photographic diaries encourages them
to engage in the research process and act as co-researchers in specific environments, with the aim be-
ing that informants encouraged to take an active interest in the research by the researcher will provide
richer, accurate, and more emotive data for the researcher, as they feel they have the freedom and power
within the research context. We cover a range of multi-method research designs, such as ethnography,
netnography, visual diaries, and researcher and informant reflexivity. This is the book that you will need
to learn about emerging multi-method research designs and the innovative practices that you could adopt
for your study regardless of how big or small or whether you are an undergraduate student or an early
career researcher embarking on the lifelong path of academia.
Having been exposed to numerous PhD and Master’s students, as well as final year dissertation students, we recognized that none of these students had any real research skills, knowledge, or understanding, nor did they have a suitable reference text that met their qualitative research needs at an advanced level. Besides undertaking interviews, these students were not aware of any of the more innovative research methods, such as netnography, videography, etc. This book is therefore a methodological book that will focus on the use of multi-method qualitative research design. However, unlike many of the current qualitative research books, we will integrate a particular area that we have researched well, which is that of the importance of evoking informant self-reflexivity and extracting richer data from informants through the use of more innovative research designs, such as videography, visual diaries, written diaries, the use of message blogs, and allowing other members to feedback. We wish to teach all students how these emerging research methods can be used in specific environments and how methods can be used together iteratively and incrementally to extract data from informants in specific environments. We propose that this text can serve as a core point of reference and as a source of great support for final year undergraduate students, Master’s students, and PhD students. Additional audiences will also be academics in the early stages of their career, academics studying qualitative research, and those from a sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and communications background.

Moreover, we touch on the importance of co-research (i.e. the informant and researcher taking control of the research environment as an avenue to engage informants). Therefore, we provide a holistic book on qualitative research methods that encourages readers to incorporate both old and new methods as means to data validity and triangulation. Whilst there has been a variation of textbooks on the market, there have been few textbooks aimed at PhD and Master’s students that encourage multi-method research design and informant self-reflexivity. We therefore hope this textbook will be an indispensible resource for all students constructing their research design and undertaking fieldwork.

This book contains 14 chapters written by professional researchers and academics. The chapters in Section 1 provide an overview on qualitative approaches and key factors that need to be considered with the emergence of the Internet and social media.

Researcher reflexivity and researcher introspection have become subjects of increasing importance to qualitative researchers, as the adoption of researcher reflexivity is seen as a means to prevent researcher bias and encourage data validity and in-depth data collection. Chapter 1, “Author/Authority,” focuses on the essential building blocks of this book as it elucidates the philosophical foundations of the interpretivist and positivist paradigms that beget the qualitative and quantitative methodologies, examines the historical beginnings of qualitative research, and focuses on issues of representation, location, and authority in interpretive inquiry. The aim of this chapter is to help situate the author to be more reflexive about his or her research.

Chapter 2, titled “Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Researcher and Informant Perspective,” should be considered by everyone who is undertaking an interpretive study, as the importance of researcher reflexivity has been well documented by qualitative researchers. This chapter starts by considering the significance and importance of reflexivity within market research and emphasizes the advantages and contexts in which it should be applied. The findings offer significant insights into the significance of researcher, informant, and co-researcher reflexivity, and argue that the use of researcher and informant self-reflexivity contributes to producing multiple voices, as well as data triangulation within market research.

Similar to researcher reflexivity, grounded theory has also been well documented within works relating to market research and qualitative research and has played a significant role within qualitative research. Chapter 3, titled “Grounded Theory and Market Research,” considers the conditions that lead
to the achievement of high-quality qualitative studies adopting methods such as grounded theory. The chapter provides key definitions of grounded theory, assesses the validity of grounded theory, and looks at how to operationalize grounded theory within market research studies. This chapter also emphasizes the importance of the grounded theory approach. Finally, the chapter looks at the key characteristics of grounded theory.

As a result of the emergence of the Internet and social media tools, social scientists and researchers are more focused on evolving traditional market research methods and adopting innovative research methodologies as a means to capture in-depth and more accurate data in an innovative manner. Chapter 4, titled “Innovative Research Methodology,” explains how the knowledge economy is linked to creativity, innovation, and qualitative research. The chapter aims specifically to highlight the need and importance of innovative research methodologies in a knowledge economy. The findings of this chapter offer readers the ability to apply creativity and innovation to identify new and novel ways of undertaking qualitative research, as well as being able to integrate innovative methodologies with more traditional and existing methodologies.

Since the emergence of the Internet, chat rooms, blogs, and now social media tools, netnography has become a topic of increasing importance within qualitative research. Moreover, because of the anonymity associated with virtual environments, informants often feel that they have more freedom to voice their opinions openly without being judged. Chapter 5, titled “Netnography: An Internet-Optimized Ethnographic Research Technique,” further focuses on innovative research methodology and looks at the use of online forums when undertaking marketing research. This chapter seeks to impart understanding of netnography as a qualitative research methodology that uses Internet-optimized ethnographic research techniques to study online communities. It draws attention to how sensitive research topics can be studied within an online forum whilst maintaining the anonymity of the informants.

Observations techniques have been used within traditional qualitative research for many years. However, it is imperative that we understand how these techniques have evolved in recent years, especially with the emergence of more innovative research methods. Chapter 6, titled “The Observation,” discusses the observational technique as a scientific research method. It looks at its characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages, as well as focusing on how it is deployed within other fields, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, with particular focus on how market research has leveraged the latest advances in these areas. Finally, the chapter focuses on ethical considerations that qualitative researchers should consider when undertaking interpretive research.

Multi-method research design is an area of increasing importance to qualitative researchers as we consistently question important issues, such as data validity, quality, triangulation, and depth. Therefore, Section 2 of this book focuses on different factors that contribute multi-method approaches that need to be considered when considering research design.

Chapter 7, titled “Triangulation in Organizational Research: Validating Knowledge in Human Competence at Work,” considers how researchers have long used qualitative and quantitative methods in studying the same phenomenon as means to achieving data triangulation in social research. It also focuses on the positivist view and the post-positivist view of triangulation, as well as the various types of knowledge that have emerged from the usage of triangulation in organizational research.

With the emergence of the Internet, we have seen more and more consumers write blogs and participate in online forums, as the anonymity of the virtual environment encourages individuals to express more freely, therefore demonstrating the depth and accuracy of data that is collated within the virtual environment. Since the emergence of the Internet blogs have been increasingly utilized by organiza-
tions and customers alike, they have also been used creating viral marketing campaigns as well as buzz marketing. Chapter 8, titled “Analysing Blogs in Market Research,” looks at the development of blogs or electronic diaries and how the use of these has opened up new possibilities for researchers interested in the use of diaries as a research method. The chapter also looks at the advantages of using blogs in market research and examines how blogs can be used effectively.

Chapter 9, titled “Theoretical and Empirical Analysis on Quantitative and Qualitative Marketing Researches,” focuses on the similarities and differences between quantitative and qualitative marketing research projects and the possibilities of combining them in triangulation. It also discusses issues, such as idea and specificity of quantitative and qualitative marketing research, with regards to the implemented research projects, as well as methodological aspects of quantitative and qualitative marketing research. The chapter also looks at issues that may emerge with regards to data triangulation, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of data triangulation within a specific research project that is undertaken by the author relating to the usability of Websites.

Chapter 10, titled “Qualitative Communication Research Methods and Techniques,” examines the multi-method research design of qualitative communication research methodology associated with a case study from a European country, Greece. The case study adopted focuses on a new card called the European Youth Card (EYCA) and adopted a variation of data-gathering techniques, such as group interviews and focus groups. Finally, the chapter discusses how the multi-method research design that was adopted may be effective when adapted to researcher-customer relationship marketing in order to gather information from and for the company’s consumers.

Chapter 11, titled “Qualitative Response Regression Modeling,” investigates the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative models by providing a clear definition of their individual objectives. It also provides relevant examples for developing, analyzing, and interpreting a probability model of binary response variables using three known approaches: the linear probability model, the logit model, and the probit model.

Chapter 12, titled “Multi-Method Analysis” focuses on the synergy effect obtained by using Multi-Method Analysis (MMA) as a combination of the quantitative (survey research) and qualitative (in-Depth Interviews – IDI) analysis. The chapter refers to a theoretical model that is used within marketing management as an example. The overall aim of the chapter is to present a research project as a whole and illustrate the researcher’s way of thinking from the conceptual model development to quantitative hypothesis testing to qualitative explanation.

Chapter 13, titled “The Second Generation of Laddering Methodology,” investigates a meaning-based qualitative approach that focuses on understanding preferences, motivations, and other general determinants of consumer and organizational choices. This chapter focuses on presenting the original version of the laddering technique and its limitations and then introduces the technique’s second generation.

Finally, Chapter 14, titled “Problem-Based Learning Methodology,” presents a case study of the EcosSportTech project, a cross-faculty project based in Spain. The case study presented adopts a problem-based learning method, which will reinforce the idea of an entrepreneurial university, which can create innovative solutions in order to promote social benefits.

The field of qualitative research has a long history that is characterized by numerous research methods, and over the years, these methods have consistently evolved based on the tools that have become available and the context. This book documents how qualitative research has evolved from more traditional methods and demonstrates how more innovative methods can be adopted by researchers today. However, that does not mean that we should overlook key methods like traditional interviews or triangulation.
We also encourage our readers to consider important constructs, such as researcher reflexivity, and evolve this process by applying it to the informant with the view that they should be given a degree of power and enabled to act as a co-researcher with the view that they will feel more comfortable within the research environment.

This text is aimed at final year dissertation students, postgraduate Master’s students, PhD students, and early career researchers. From our academic experiences, it is evident that students have little or no knowledge of how to undertake research or what any of the key terms mean. Therefore, with this text we aim to provide our audiences with basic knowledge and introduce various research methodologies that may exist and give them examples of how they could perhaps use them within their own research studies. The overarching aim is that this book be used as a core text by dissertation, Master’s, and PhD students, as well those students studying qualitative market research methods. We also wish to clarify that we do not wish to limit our readers to only adopting a qualitative, multi-method research design; we also encourage our readers to adopt a multi-method research design that integrates quantitative research methodology.

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REFERENCES


