



Evaluating the impact of Arnould and Wallendorf's (1994) market-oriented ethnography

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the significance and research impact of Arnould and Wallendorf's (1994), "Market-Oriented Ethnography: Interpretation Building and Marketing Strategy Formulation" (A&W). A&W provides a comprehensive theoretical aspect of market-oriented ethnography which is useful to marketing practitioners in formulating marketing strategy. A citation analysis is conducted to assess the scholarly impact of A&W. In the 13 year period (1996–2009), A&W receives 204 citations in Google Scholar and 86 citations in Scopus. In total 43 journals include citations to A&W. The findings show that the cited authors are referencing the work of A&W mainly in two aspects: (1) using an ethnographic approach as an exemplar qualitative methodology; and (2) using an etic/emic perspective to provide deeper insights in a cultural context. Evidence in this report supports the assertion that A&W is a seminal contribution to advancing alternative research methods in marketing in general that go beyond the continuing dominant logic of empirical positivism.

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1. Introduction

The positivist paradigm, a quantitatively oriented approach that follows a linear deductive path, is dominant in marketing research. The growing emphasis in the subjectivity of perception and the constructed nature in marketing research, is transforming the marketing phenomenon to be more a socially constructed enterprise (Hirschman, 1986). Hunt (1990, p. 8) agrees with this changing phenomenon and asserts that "marketing research seems implicitly to assume a realist perspective." Consequently, this leads to the emergence of the interpretive paradigm into the marketing research.

The present paper discusses Arnould and Wallendorf's (1994) contribution as an interpretive paradigm. A&W emphasizes how ethnography, an interpretive paradigm, plays a crucial role in studying consumption behaviour ultimately which can lead to an efficient marketing strategy. A&W is a profoundly important scholarly work because the article lays out a comprehensive theoretical aspect of market-oriented ethnography for marketing researchers and practitioners. In addition, A&W provides implication details of market-oriented ethnography for marketing practitioners.

The overall objective of this paper is to probe the significance of A&W in terms of its impact on research in marketing. According to Armstrong (2003), a journal article is significant if its research impact satisfies four criteria: replication, validity, usefulness, and surprise (which apply in some situations). A&W meets the criteria of replication and validity as many researchers are citing the paper in both theoretical and methodological aspects. In terms of usefulness, A&W clearly depicts how the use

of ethnography methods are applicable in evaluating consumers' consumption and usage in terms of market segmentation and targeting; product and service positioning; and product, service and brand management.

A systematic citation analysis of A&W from Scopus is conducted to achieve the paper's objective. As Woodside (2009, p.1) suggests, the "number of citations of an author's journal articles, books, and other publications by other authors is a measure of impact of an author's work." Although the number of citations can be useful in evaluating the impact of a journal paper, this does not necessarily substantiate that the particular journal paper is valuable. According to Armstrong and Green (2007), a research journal article is only valuable when it provides evidence-based knowledge to its readers.

This paper is organized as follows. First, this article discusses A&W in depth and describes its specific research context. Next, the present article includes a discussion of the significance and research impact of the paper by using its number of citations as a criterion. Finally, the article discusses conclusions and limitations.

2. Arnould and Wallendorf's market-oriented ethnography

Market-oriented ethnography is "an ethnographic focus on the behaviour of people constituting a market for a product or a service" (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p 484). Ethnography originates from the disciplinary area of anthropology and subsequently it branches into sociology. Ethnography aims to enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the social world of people being studied through immersion in their community (emic) to yield detailed thick description of people, their culture and beliefs (etic). The pervasive

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adoption of ethnography in the marketing research resulted from its four strong traits:

- Ethnography gives primacy to systematic data collection and recording of human action in natural settings;
- Ethnography increases the likelihood of spontaneously encountering important moments in the ordinary events of consumers' daily lives and of experiencing revelatory incidents as it is associated with participant observation;
- Ethnography enables credibility as it produces interpretations of behaviours that the persons studied and the intended audience;
- Ethnography enables dependability as it involves incorporating multiple sources of data to generate varying perspectives in the behaviours and context of interests. The sources of data encompass observational data, verbal data, video tapes and photographs (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p.485).

Typically, conducting an ethnographic study includes two steps: data collection and data analysis. Data collection for an ethnographical study can be categorised into emic (insider view) and etic (outsider view, which in this case it refers to the ethnographer). The ethnographer can observe informants' actual behaviours in real time within their natural settings through participant observation, non-participant observation or mechanical observation. Such data collection is known to be an etic data collection as the ethnographers serve as "the measuring instrument; personally experienced knowledge serves as scientific data" (Hirschman, 1986, p. 238). Whereas, an emic data collection is one in which the ethnographers record informants' natural-occurred behaviours and conversation in their field notes. The interaction of etic (observational data) and emic (verbal reports) views can offer deeper insights to the phenomenon that is to be studied. Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), p. 490) assert that the role of verbal reports is to "supplement observational data in ethnographic interpretation, providing emic, culturally particular understands to interpretation".

Data analysis for an ethnographical study specially aims to search for common themes, patterns or ideas, from the perspective of both emic and etic interpretations. The first step for an ethnographic interpretation is to identify disjunctures which "refer to the differences between the perspectives provided by various ethnographic data sources" (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p.494). Subsequently, this is followed by an interpretive process of coding, troping, and representing. Coding enables the ethnographer to understand and identify the co-occurrences such as the informants' shared definitions and meanings in an emic perspective, while developing an etic perspective which is defined as behavioural constellation, an "etic understanding of co-occurring behaviours" (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p. 497). Troping enables the ethnographer to identify symbolic linkages which are associated with culturally significant themes by comparing behaviours of the meanings identified by codes so that they can be categorised into identifiable themes. The last step of the interpretive process is to represent the ethnographer's cultural constructs of the behavioural constellation.

In the context of marketing, market-oriented ethnographers collect and analyze the full set of behaviours as the purchase or the consuming of a particular product is embedded in the behavioural constellation. As such, this constitutes to the three sets of data for a market-oriented ethnography study: (1) informants' behaviours in a behavioural constellation; (2) purchase or consuming units in the sample, and (3) number of ethnographic data collection methods. Similar to the ethnography method, the market-oriented ethnography follows a multi-layered interpretation, that is: identifying disjunctures (by using multi-data sources); locating co-occurrences through coding; identifying symbolic links through troping; and representing the broader cultural themes (refer to Fig. 1). As this multi-layered interpretation engenders a richly textured interpretation, Arnould and Wallendorf

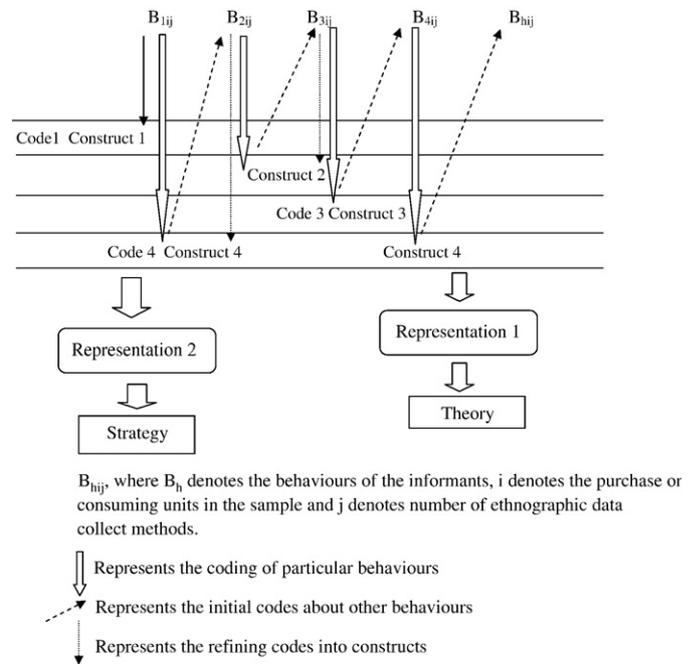


Fig. 1. Coping, troping, representation, and application in marketing-oriented ethnography (Adapted from Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994).

(1994) refer it as "thick description" which they report as informants' stories and case studies.

Market-oriented ethnography is useful to marketing practitioners in formulating marketing strategy because:

1. It enables marketing practitioners to have a thorough understanding of the many unarticulated layers of consumer meaning which are embedded in behavioural constellations;
2. It enables marketing practitioners to re-modify or re-position a specific product or service which is able to deliver resonant meanings across behaviours in a constellation;
3. It provides vivid exemplar of the layers of meaning that organize behavioural constellations to the marketing practitioners;
4. It enables marketing practitioners to sustain their understanding of a market over time since they have become the intimate insider in a consumption context of subculture (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p.499–500).

3. Scopus and Google analysis of Arnould and Wallendorf (1994)

The citation analysis includes performing a Google Scholar and Scopus to search for the number of citations of A&W. Apparently, the study finds a significant difference in the number of citations from these two databases. For Google Scholar, there are 204 citations (refer to Fig. 2) whereas for Scopus there are 86 citations (refer to Fig. 3). One likely reason accounting for the difference is that Google Scholar indexes all categories of scholarly literature including journal papers,

Market-oriented ethnography: interpretation building and marketing strategy formulation

EJ Arnould, M Wallendorf - Journal of Marketing Research, 1994 - jstor.org
 The authors show how ethnography can provide multiple strategically important perspectives on behaviors of interest to marketing researchers. They first discuss the goals and four essential characteristics of ethnographic ...
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Fig. 2. Number of citations in Google scholar.

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