

Integrating qualitative and quantitative theoretical perspectives in applied advertising research

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Abstract

This review synthesizes the qualitative theoretical framework employed in Kennedy and McGarvey (in this issue), and posits a research paradigm to integrate and balance both qualitative and quantitative (“Q–Q”) methods in study design using “parallel perspective analysis” as shown in Table 1. Integrating both research perspectives enabled Kennedy and McGarvey to construct a phenomenological “story” of human movement in pet-related consumption attitudes and behavior during the last century, while maintaining a high level of empirical rigor. The method for quantifying a Q–Q research study can be used to develop future balanced research by scholars and practitioners concerned with capturing contextual phenomena in empirically rigorous consumer research.

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1. Introduction

Employing an innovative approach to quantifying qualitative trend data using theme analysis (Boje, 2001), Kennedy and McGarvey (in this issue) use both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze 1398 print advertisements spanning 70 years. The study applies content analysis to construct a dataset to test hypotheses regarding cultural or social themes and trends captured in print advertising. In accord with Zaltman’s (1997) plea to the scholarly community to employ qualitative and quantitative techniques when developing new concepts or improving existing methods in substantive research areas, Kennedy and McGarvey document the genesis of the current pet industry by capturing attitudes and consumption behaviors over time.

This commentary presents and synthesizes the qualitative theoretical framework that underlines why social science scholars should employ a balanced combination of qualitative

and quantitative methods in consumer or people-based research. Such imperatives aim to provide marketing scholars and practitioners with a viable framework for measuring social phenomena from an historical ethnographic perspective, while maintaining a high level of empirical rigor. Table 1 provides an overview of Kennedy and McGarvey’s research design to facilitate discussion, and to evaluate balanced research on “parallel” dimensions.

2. Grounded theory and ethnomethodology

Kennedy and McGarvey use an ethnographic approach to make sense of the world in context with world events and social structures in times past. They rigorously employ qualitative research methodologies within a grounded theory paradigm – a general methodology where data are gathered and analyzed systematically and where the theory evolves during the research process through a “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 158) – to quantify changes in consumer attitudes toward household pets over time. “In this methodology, theory may be generated initially from the data, or, if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them” (p. 159).

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Table 1
Q–Q parallel perspective analysis in study design (Kennedy & McGarvey)

Research domain	Qualitative perspective	Parallel quantitative perspective
Theory	Grounded theory & theme analysis	Content analysis: print ads (1920–1990) Data ranges: 1920s, 1940s, 1960s, and 1980s $n=1398$ (from four decades of ads)
Method	Ethnomethodology: Coding scheme based on theme-analysis theory to transform qualitative information into quantitative data using both inductive/deductive and emic/etic approaches.	Hypotheses developed <i>a priori</i> , based on previous research and theory. Conducted Linear Trend Modeling (OLS) on “constructed” dataset of binary variables (0, 1).
Validity	Coders possess an “informed perspective” via experiencing print ads as consumers during the data range of study (1920–1990).	Convergent validity established via literature review to establish <i>a priori</i> hypotheses and survey-research findings external to the study.
Reliability	Inter-rater reliabilities range from 89 to 97%. Disagreements resolved by consensus.	All reliabilities above satisfactory empirical cutoff (all above 85%).
Explanation	Grand narrative (Boje, 2001)	Story constructed to explain the trends in consumer behavior with regard to animal companions based on supported hypotheses.

Furthermore, “regardless of level of theory, there is built into this style of extensive interrelated data collection and theoretical analysis an explicit mandate to strive toward verification of its resulting hypothesis,” which is performed “throughout the course of a research project, rather than assuming that verification is possible only through follow-up quantitative research” (p. 161). By adopting a phenomenological perspective on the problem (i.e., grounded theory and theme analysis), Kennedy and McGarvey have successfully transformed qualitative information into quantitative data that can be tested through mathematical trend modeling.

Social phenomenology provides a means through which a formal structure can be conferred upon subjective experiences or objects of awareness that are related through dialog or narrative text (i.e., print advertising over time). Ethnomethodology, the study of how individuals produce social structure out of a web of chaotic experiences, is strongly linked to phenomenology. Ethnomethodologists assume that the world of social behavior is not orderly but chaotic and that individuals negotiate order to make sense of a chaotic mix of behavioral phenomena. Garfinkel (1967) posits that people make sense of actions or remarks in context by indexing these to specific circumstances or to a series of patterns learned to make sense of everyday situations. Individuals construct a taken-for-granted world in this way, which provides a shorthand method for understanding and dealing with the chaos of everyday life.

3. Emic and etic perspectives in theme analysis

The development of the taxonomic system employed to classify print advertising themes consists of emic (insider inductive or grounded) and etic (outsider deductive) theoretical viewpoints in the coding framework and process. For example, the use of coders with an “informed perspective” on the social context surrounding the ads, relative to the times they appeared in print, is an emic approach, whereas the etic approach is exemplified through a review of literature for thematic frameworks that organize human–animal relationships in a consumption context. This approach is compatible with Boje (2001, p. 122) where “theme analysis is a respected and well-established and a widely-

used method of qualitative analysis” that incorporates a mix of deductive and inductive approaches or etic and emic perspectives.

The inductive approach to narrative theme analysis apes its taxonomy from the emic categories in use by people who tell stories. Emic is how insiders sort their stories. And grounded theory, it is said, moves between etic and emic, with an eye on refining their alignment through successive comparison. Theme Analysis, be it deductive, inductive or grounded, divests story of contextual markers in order to make maps (p. 123).

4. Constructing the grand narrative

Narrative provides a mechanism to store cultural memory, rewrite history, or resituate reality for the future. According to Zald (1996), “In recent years, the social sciences have taken a linguistic, literary, and historic turn that inevitably draws on traditions and methods developed in the humanities” (p. 252). Thus, concern with the symbolic aspects of culture and the highly variable interpretation of human events has acted as a catalyst for scholars to reach out to narrative modes of analysis. Polkinghorne (1988) postulates that narrative begins as polyphony, but is restructured and retold in the grand style:

Narrative recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts of the whole. Its particular subject matter is human actions and events that affect human beings, which it configures into wholes according to the roles these actions and events play in bringing about a conclusion (p. 36).

The grand narrative constructed by the authors summarizes the results of Kennedy and McGarvey’s study by showing “the movement of companion animals from outdoor protectors and companions to loved family members sharing all areas of the home with their human family.”

5. Why it is important to integrate Q–Q perspectives in marketing research

Kennedy and McGarvey provide a means to find a common ground, simply by integrating qualitative and quantitative

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