

Chapter 8

Research Intentions are Nothing without Technology: Mixed–Method Web Surveys and the Coberen Wall of Pictures Protocol

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ABSTRACT

The chapter is aimed at showing the Wall of Pictures Web protocol for conducting mixed research in social sciences. There is a rising interest in some alternative research protocols integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, what is missing are concrete illustrations and some methodological guidelines. Thanks to recent Internet survey technologies, we are able to “bridge the quantitative-qualitative divide” and benefit from the blending combination of spontaneous unstructured data, which is later recoded and processed on a large number of cases. Implemented within the Coberen European consumers’ survey, and utilising a combination of multimedia and interactive technological devices, the wall of pictures outcomes has shown some promising perspectives, which are presented and discussed in the chapter.

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INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND: WEB SURVEYS AS A SOLUTION FOR OPTIMISING MIXED METHOD POSSIBILITIES

There is a growing interest in both the academic and business worlds for mixed-method research protocols. Especially for social science questions, these approaches efficiently combine the advantages of qualitative and quantitative techniques (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Among the social sciences, for example, consumer behaviour is a field in which it has lately been admitted that eclectic research methodologies are needed to properly address recent and growing theoretical perspectives, such as experiential aspects of consumption (Brakus et al., 2009) or “consumer culture” phenomena (Dittmar, 2008). *“After a vigorous debate about where we are heading during the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the discussion has lately been less heated. The two predominant paradigms, positivistic and interpretive consumer research exist side by side, each including a number of different approaches for conducting research”* (Ekström, 2003, p. 1). If the development of knowledge about social sciences topics matters for a researcher, it is now quite obvious to advocate methods-pluralism which can be supported by proponents of different research traditions.

Thus, various mixed methods are possible. Qualitative and quantitative protocols may follow each other, or better, take place simultaneously, which—according to some experts—may lead to extracting far more meaningful data (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003). In this regard, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) have isolated six types of mixed methods based on the nature of their implementation (sequential or simultane-

ous), their priority (qualitative, quantitative, or equal) and their level of integration (analysis or interpretation). Our chapter will focus on a class of methods (“simultaneous triangulation”), for which the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches is very strong and appears at the levels of data collection, data analysis, validation, and interpretation of results.

Mixed methods are promising—firstly—because they give more attractiveness to data collection protocols and are able to immerse the respondents more thoroughly into the topic being studied. From this perspective, compared to some pure quantitative studies, they should be able to increase the perceived ease of use and enjoyment of the interviewees (Thompson, Vivien & Raye, 1999). Secondly, thanks to some “triangulation” (Jick, 1979) opportunities, they may produce more valid conclusions. The interpretation of the results may be based both on some numerical objective measurements and on some more subjective observations.

Because of their multimedia and interactive characteristics (Ganassali, 2008; Bouzidi, 2011), Web survey technologies offer new perspectives for developing typical mixed protocols for which interviews can be conducted partly according to some qualitative approaches - for example virtual focus groups (Sweet, 2001) or collective photo albums (Vernette, 2007). Given Internet capabilities, dissemination can clearly be quantitative and may generate a large amount of data on which statistical analyses can be accurately performed. These techniques try to “bridge the quantitative-qualitative divide” (Bolden and Moscarola, 2000), in a way that researchers would benefit from the mixture of spontaneous unstructured data, later recoded and processed on a large number of cases (See Figure 1) (Moscarola, 1993).

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