

Chapter 6

The Observation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the observational technique as a scientific method that includes a broad spectrum of techniques, which could be classified in several ways. On the basis of the observation concept, its characteristics, advantages, and inconveniences are described. A quick run-through of the deployment of observation in other social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology is made, noticing to what extent market research has leveraged the latest advances in these areas, most specifically in psychology. It analyzes how to run the sampling in observation and also presents the registry and coding process. After the description and classification of the different observation types, a special mention is made to ethical aspects. Throughout this chapter the authors expose real research cases in which observation has been applied.

INTRODUCTION

Many years of research in retail, a lot of it in the field of fashion has transformed observation into an ongoing task, not exclusively when I research but also when I go for a walk or shopping on commercial streets or shopping centers. I experienced observation as an inherent task of my own being, observation has become a scientific process inside social science.

Along the chapter several examples of former studies conducted will be exposed, but I would like to start this initial reflection with what I have learned from one of them. In the fashion industry is usual that large chain stores, which are also in

charge of design and development of patterns for their fashion collections, even though later on the production will be outsourced, send their own observers to different countries to their own stores their competitors as well. This work helps them to have dynamic collections (adapted to what they had seen at the establishments when buyers were shopping) in such a way that a large proportion of season's clothes will not be available at the beginning of it, but will be designed with the information of the observers.

The objective that I seek along this text is to inform about the great potential of observation, how to work with it and all typologies that covers, as well. In such a way that an observer who begins

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his career or has not used observation considers the possibility of using it for market research purposes. I will neither put behind its application on other social sciences nor the ethical aspects that our field arises.

When observation is considered as a market research technique for the first time someone can simply have an idea about what might it be. Some authors on their very first approach make a comparison between a reliable observer and a well-known detective from literature. Nevertheless, along this chapter it will be shown that observation is a scientific nature technique and with a wide range of possibilities. It will be illustrated with real cases, some of them from the author of this chapter.

Even though observation is initially understood as an inherent activity and day-to-day action of men, social science had become it into a scientific method, following a systematic process and seeking validity and reliability of the obtained data.

BACKGROUND

Concept of Observation

Observation encompasses a set of techniques that can be classified in many forms. It is possible to find several meanings when it comes to define it. In a recent article, the title is very descriptive about what the technique implies “Observation is a method for studying the reality” (Campos y Covarrubias & Lule, 2012, pp. 46), it points out how “observation by itself represent one of the most systematized and logic forms for visual record and it is also verifiable of what is pretended to know, consists in using the senses either to describe, analyze or explain from a valid and reliable scientific point of view a subject, fact or phenomenon based on a participatory or non-participatory, structured or unstructured form; in this manner raises the need that the observer have skills that allows him to develop this process

successfully”. The concepts of participatory and non-participatory/structured and unstructured will be described further on and also will be detailed information with all the available techniques for observation included those where the observer have devices more sophisticated.

Observation is more complex and manifold than it seems and is important to point out that in spite of the truism of its terminology (observation is to observe everyday events) exists in its process a systematization and a scientific nature.

It is important to indicate what describes Mario Bunge (Bunge, 2007) pointing out that observation is a basic empirical process of science. Nevertheless, for natural science any observed data will be understood as true and consistent; on the contrary for social science the data might be subjective. After keeping this in mind, it is important for research market to apply the greater stringency when observation is employed.

María Teresa Anguera, psychologist (do not forget the importance that Psychology had and has in the developing of qualitative techniques of market research) and expertise on observation indicates how:

The observational methodology in natural and common contexts is a scientific process that allows to study the occurrence of perceptible behavior, in such a way that appropriately registers and quantifies it, thus involving sequentiality, association and covariation. Observation in natural contexts assumes developing a procedure that highlights the occurrence of everyday behavior, and the relationship analysis between them. These connections can be identified objectively parting from a suitable data analysis process according to their observational design, combining qualitative and quantitative prospects. (Anguera, 2010, p. 122)

From this author I would highlight the importance of the registry and coding of the observed. All this described process opens the door to conduct a data analysis with a quantitative approach.

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