

Chapter 10

How Marketers Conduct Mixed Methods Research: Incorporating the Exploratory Sequential Design with the Hierarchy of Effects Model

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ABSTRACT

The complimentary nature of qualitative and quantitative research methods are examined with respect to a study assessing the market's view of a training and development institute in the Middle East. The qualitative portion consisted of focus groups conducted with seven distinct market segments served by the institute. The results proved insightful with respect to uncovering and understanding differences of opinion among the seven groups; however, taken alone, the qualitative research would have been very misleading with respect to the institute's standing in the Middle East.

INTRODUCTION: MARKETERS' FREQUENT USE OF THE EXPLORATORY SEQUENTIAL DESIGN IN MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

Mixed Methods research has been widely accepted, used and reported in fields such as sociology, education, and health, among others, and has been practiced by marketers for many decades (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998). Even so, most marketers don't use the term "mixed methods" and, in actuality, few mixed methods marketing cases have been published. Consequently, the rich methodology and alternative research designs available in the area of mixed methods have not been as formally adopted by marketers as one might expect—even though qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used by them since the 1950's. Marketers have long realized the advantages of combining quantitative research with qualitative research most often in the form of large sample surveys and focus groups and most often in a QUAL – QUAN sequence.

While one-on-one in-depth interviews are used by marketers when there is a need to study individuals' decision-making processes in depth and for sensitive and personal issues, focus groups have been

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the qualitative method of choice among marketers for many years. One potential contribution to mixed methods research made by marketers is their careful consideration of segmentation in determining the composition of focus groups. An example is available in Table 1. While not generally using this nomenclature, marketers most often tend to use and begin the sequence with the Exploratory Design in their mixed methods studies. Most often this is done to identify important variables and issues which they will then study quantitatively through survey methodology. Thus, the Exploratory Sequential Design would be the mixed method design of choice in most marketing research studies. The focus group discussions enable marketers to develop a better instrument for use in the quantitative phase in that the variables, propositions and issues have been raised which need to be quantified.

Do marketers tend to emphasize the qualitative or quantitative component when conducting exploratory sequential mixed methods research? This is a difficult question to answer as the case discussed in this paper will reveal. The complimentary nature of qualitative and quantitative research methods is examined in this study which was conducted to assess the market’s view of a training and development institute in the Middle East. The qualitative portion consisted of focus groups conducted with seven distinct market segments served by the institute. The results proved insightful with respect to uncovering and understanding differences of opinion among the seven groups; however, taken alone, the qualitative research would have been very misleading with respect to the institute’s standing in the Middle East. Subsequent quantitative research, consisting of surveys of users and non-users of the institute’s programs, provided an insight critical to management that could never have been uncovered via qualitative means. Similarly, the qualitative findings proved to be much more robust and insightful in many matters than the quantitative findings.

Thus, it is impossible to conclude whether the qualitative or quantitative results of the study were more important. While the advantages of mixed-methods research are well known, this study offers a cautionary note regarding the qualitative component. It also offers a model for questionnaire development for use in the quantitative phase which proves useful in verifying or not verifying results from prior qualitative research.

Background of Study

The training and development (T&D) institute being studied has been located in one, small Middle Eastern country for approximately 30 years. Many consider it to be a world-class provider of T&D, offering

Table 1. Important segments to consider for focus group participation

Current User of Institute	Former User of Institute	Never User of Institute
Heavy user	Currently using competitor	Currently using competitor
Moderate user	No longer looking	Never user currently looking
Light user		Never user not looking
User migrating upward		
User migrating downward		
User with no migration either way		

Note: Companies migrating upward are those using increasing spending at the institute. Those migrating downward are decreasing spending at the institute. Those companies with no migration are maintaining the status quo.

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