



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Journal of Business Research



## Learning consumer behavior using marketing anthropology methods

Drew Martin <sup>a,\*</sup>, Arch Woodside <sup>b</sup>

College of Business and Economics (COBE), University of Hawai'i at Hilo, 200 W. Kāwili Street, Hilo, HI 96720-4091, United States  
 Curtin University, School of Marketing, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA 6845, Australia

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 1 September 2016  
 Received in revised form 1 October 2016  
 Accepted 1 October 2016  
 Available online xxxx

## Keywords:

Anthropology  
 Consumer  
 Direct observation  
 In-situ  
 Participatory action research

## ABSTRACT

This *Journal of Business Research* special section includes ten articles selected from papers presented during the 2016 Global Marketing Conference held July 21–24. The conference theme was “Bridging Asia and the World: Global Platform for Interface between Marketing and Management.” This special edition presents marketing research and perspectives via anthropology methodologies. This special edition answers calls for research that puts focal participants to exchanges and processes back into data collection (e.g., Denzin, 2001).

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Inc.

## 1. Introduction

Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber spent two years living among the Arapaho Indians and studying their material and social values using the cultural relativism paradigm. Embedding himself in the Arapaho culture, Kroeber learned the language and customs, offering insights not accessible to average observer. Examining moccasins, Kroeber remarks, “[t]his strongly-marked decorative character of Arapaho art, however, is accompanied by a realistic tendency of such development as at first acquaintance would not be suspected by a civilized person” (Kroeber, 1901, p. 309). He notes that combinations of symbols serve as written records or stories about personal experiences, maps, or myths. Kroeber’s experience suggests that the key to understanding human behavior is field work and emersion into the group of interest. A one-shot data point probably misses the mark both regarding the informants’ values and feelings as well as how the researcher interprets the behavior.

This special edition offers an example of how marketing researchers use anthropology data collection methods. Like Kroeber, these researchers seek a deeper understanding of human behavior. Field observations, unstructured long interviews, studying cultural folk tales, examining consumer artifacts, and digging through secondary data provide new insights on how and why people behave. Longitudinal studies also demonstrate transformative behavior. The evidence supports the

proposition that consumer behavior is like a finely cut diamond and the popular consumer behavior research methodologies provide a view of only one facet. Using different methodologies tile the diamond in different directions and reveal other equally important aspects of consumer behavior.

To better understand consumer behavior, Marketing Anthropology Research (MAR) offers a unique vantage point for contributing to the discipline of marketing research. MAR embraces adherence to several central propositions including the following viewpoints. Advances in theory in the field of marketing research require accurate and deep explication of naturally occurring thinking, assessments, communications, and behavior of consumers (see Woodside & Martin, 2015). MAR recognizes the severe limits in asking questions and encourages advancement of methods beyond scaled response metrics. MAR researchers are historically and locally situated within the phenomena studied. They recognize that research methods are not neutral in their effects on theory creation and testing. Consumer research joins the research and researched (see Denzin, 2001). Rather than adopting a net effects standard on the influence of individual independent variables, MAR researchers more often embrace a gestalt recipe perspective – both in crafting and in testing theory. MAR researchers are bricoleur, piecing together data from multiple sources.

## 2. Background

The literature identifies at least five branches of MAR: Interpretive Consumer Culture Theory Field studies, unobstrusive field experiments, participant observation research, participatory action research, and in-

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [drmartin@hawaii.edu](mailto:drmartin@hawaii.edu) (D. Martin), [arch.woodside@curtin.edu.au](mailto:arch.woodside@curtin.edu.au) (A. Woodside).

situ long interviews. Interpretive Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) research recognizes consumer culture derives from a social arrangement between lived culture and social resources. CCT examines issues relating to relationships among consumers' individual and collective identities in areas including product symbolism, rituals, and consumer product/brand stories (e.g., Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

Unobtrusive field experiences are a second branch of MAR. This branch posits that controlled experiments and actual behavior often differ significantly (Levitt, List, & Reiley, 2010). Field studies collect data in-situ that examines people as while they are in the act of being consumers to better understand their decision-making processes and motivations (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Lee & Ariely, 2006).

Even less obtrusive is participant observation research. This third MAR branch views the researcher(s) as watching and interpreting consumer behavior. Observation research assumes that people would act differently if they realized that someone was studying their behavior. Data rely on etic interpretations of consumer behavior (Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Bowen, 2002).

Participatory action research (PAR) represents the fourth MAR branch. PAR assumes that consumer involvement in the research process helps to improve their overall welfare. This approach assumes that the study group's active participation increases trust and improves information quality (see Whyte, 1989). Social change issues such as purchasing affordable health insurance offer fertile ground for using PAR in consumer research (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008).

In-situ long interviews represents MAR's fifth research branch. Respondents sharing narratives of their experiences provide rich data because the information is most accessible if collected as stored in the mind (see Schank, 2000). Unstructured or semi-structured long interviews (McCracken, 1988) help to release information that is often stored unconsciously (Zaltman, 2003). These thick descriptions provide deep insights on actual thinking, evaluations, and behavior of consumers (Martin, 2010; Woodside, 2010).

### 3. Contributions to this special edition

The conference theme emphasizes Asia's emerging role in global commerce. This conference track attracted research covering a broad range of topics, geography, and methodological approaches. Despite these differences, overlapping behavioral patterns emerge from the complete set of submission and subset of manuscripts published in this special edition.

#### 3.1. Collectivist counter-intuitivism

Compelling evidence supports the proposition that people catalog and retrieve memories as stories (Levy, 1981; Shank, 1999). Combining long interviews with folk tale elicitation, Merchant, Rose, Martin, Choi, and Gour explore the symbolic meaning of money. Their cross-cultural study surfaces deep-seated symbolic motivations of Korean and Indian consumers. Triangulation of emic and etic interview interpretations with folk tale analyses identifies similar based Maslow needs (e.g., security); however, the two samples diverge for higher order needs. While Indian informants endorse saving for future generations, Korean informants feel rewarding themselves in the present is necessary to enjoy their lives.

Typically, luxury product research focuses on trying to understand motives for buying the high-end items (e.g., Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). What do people do when they cannot afford the desired luxury goods? While buying counterfeit products may satisfy some people, not everyone derives satisfaction from a knockoff (see Nia & Lynne Zaichkowsky, 2000). Kim and Kwon study a group people engaging in Korea's emerging leather crafting culture. The authors embed themselves in a handbag crafting club and even partake in handbag construction. Interviews and observations find that participants

start their new hobby trying to emulate the designer handbags and evolve into designers of their own unique hand-crafted bags as their skills progress.

Do consumer relationships with nature affect their consumption behavior? Kunchambo, Lee, and Govan spend hours in a national park observing and talking to nature enthusiasts. They posit that nature becomes part of a person's extended self when they spend a lot of time outdoors, extending the theory of extended self to intangible objects in nature. Further, this emotional link affects their consumption behavior. Results validate Jakovcivic et al.'s (2014) conclusion that responsible consumption behavior motives are intrinsically driven. The evidence suggests that stronger connections lead to more responsible consumption behavior.

Using online social media platforms, people have the ability to promote themselves or create and manage a human brand image. The human brand becomes a multi-dimensional classification combing what the individual shares and how community members perceive and comment on the postings, suggesting a dynamic co-creation process. Centeno and Wang collect data from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to examine this co-creation process for four celebrities using netnography (Kozinets, 2015). Results show a stakeholder ecology developing a celebrity identity co-creation.

#### 3.2. Importance of public face

The selfie phenomenon is global, but is the actual behavior uniform? Comparing selfie photos posted by Chinese and UK consumers, Ma, Yang, and Wilson find clear differences. Extending Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory, the selfie is a tool of impression management used differently by these two cultures. Chinese selfies show a more controlled self-presentation. Images more likely are altered with Photoshop and the person's face tends to be the primary focus of the picture, plausibly attempting to boost self-esteem. UK selfies tend to show one-half or the entire body of the photo takers, allowing the viewer to see the location. Further, the UK photos are about one-half as likely to show evidence of picture manipulation using computer software.

While clothing and fashion accessories provide consumer goods allowing buyers to mix and match on a daily basis, elective plastic surgery offers a service designed to alter one's body. Kniazeva and Babicheva search for the perfect face as determined by outdoor advertising for cosmetic surgery centers. Content analysis of these billboards identifies eyes, cheek bones, noses and even the shape of the chin considered ideal facial features in Korean society. According to Jung and Lee (2009), Korean society traditionally conceptualizes female beauty based on facial features rather than the entire body. Results suggest that surgically reshaping the face to social ideals helps the individual conform to society.

Kim and Lee explore the emergence of a dandyism tendency in male fashion consumers. Dandyism refers to fastidious attention to dress and appearance emerging in the late 18th Century (Barbey d'Aureville, 1845/1977). Affluence in Korean society appears to influence male consumers' fashion preferences. Long interviews allowing self-reflection (emic interpretation) and researcher (etic interpretation) of these male consumers offer interesting insights about their motivations to create a public appearance that allows them to stand out from clothing norms, establish their own personal style. Respondents put considerable thought into promoting their appearance with a fashion style reflecting their unique tastes. As researchers consider Korea to be a collectivist culture, this individualistic behavior seems counterintuitive (e.g., Triandis, 1995).

#### 3.3. Views from the outside

Examining destination image, Atadil, Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu, and Kirillova compare German and Russian tourists' images of Antalya, Turkey. The authors use free association and open-ended questions to

generate meme maps (e.g., Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013) by nationality for the destination. Results show different general memes by nationality. Russian and German visitors have different gestalt images of the destination. While the Russian tourists primarily view Antalya as a beach resort (sun, sea, and beach), German visitors also value the culture and friendliness of the locals, suggesting a more holistic view of the destination. These differences suggest that tailoring marketing strategies to address different perceived benefits will more effectively reach the target audiences than a pan regional message. Memetics offers the potential to better understand trip decision making by surfacing unconscious thoughts that visitors have about destinations (Woodside & Martin, 2015).

### 3.4. Pricing strategies

Many fashion consumers grapple with the psychological imbalance between acquiring desired items for lower prices and sustainability concerns. Ko, Seo and Han use PAR (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008) to uncover how consumers balance these competing objectives. Applying Heider's (1958) balance theory helps explain this paradoxical behavior. Focus groups, observations of a subset of these original informants shopping, and long interviews of the shoppers were combined to develop a gestalt image of fashion clothing shopping behavior. Study results support the proposition that consumers continually work to rebalance sustainability and consumption behavior.

Retailers use a variety of pricing strategies to entice consumers to purchase their goods and services. A novel approach puts consumers in the driver's seat by allowing them to pay-what-they-want (PWTW). Stangl, Kastner, and Prayag explore PWTW for services by customer type (potential vs. new vs. repeat). The authors use a natural experiment method (Brüggen, Foubert, & Gremler, 2011) combining secondary and primary data. Results show that repeat customers are willing to pay higher price than new or repeat customers. The evidence suggests that a PWTW strategy works best for repeat customers because they are more knowledgeable about the service.

## 4. Conclusion

This special edition provides important insights about challenges facing marketing researchers. Unlike the natural sciences, human behavior is a fuzzy concept and the laws of nature do not apply. A person could experience a near-identical experience twice (e.g., waiting in-line at the grocery store) and feel very differently about the 10 minutes of waiting. The interpretations also suffer from unconscious bias. "If one concentrates his attention on symbolism, or happens to be temperamentally more interested in it, he is very likely to see it more abundantly..." (Kroeber, 1901, p. 314). The study of human behavior likely will remain an inexact scientific endeavor.

What can be done to improve reliability and validity? Both breadth and depth may make human behavior studies useful. Breadth suggests employing multiple methods to study the same phenomena. If similar results surface using different approaches, the story's reliability improves. Longitudinal studies offer another useful approach. Apter's (2007) reversal theory posits that people's motivational states fluctuate between two opposite states, suggesting that behavior is variable. Study subjects need to be examined over time. Finally, intensive study of a small sample makes generalizations difficult. A combination of intuition and sound theory helps researchers with this concern. Gigerenzer (2007)

suggests that researchers should trust their gut feelings about results. Sufficient background in the phenomena and sound theory offer the foundation to trust the results.

## References

- Amatulli, C., & Guido, G. (2011). Determinants of purchasing intention for fashion luxury goods in the Italian market: A laddering approach. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 15(1), 123–136.
- Apter, M. J. (2007). *Reversal theory: The dynamics of motivation, emotion, and personality* (2nd ed.). Oxford, England: Oneworld.
- Ariely, D., & Simonson, I. (2003). Buying, bidding, playing, or competing? Value assessment and decision dynamics in online auctions. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(1/2), 113–123.
- Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868–882.
- Arsel, Z., & Thompson, C. J. (2011). Demythologizing consumption practices: How consumers protect their field-dependent identity investments from devaluing marketplace myths. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 791–806.
- Barbey d'Aureville, J. (1977). *Du dandysme et de G. Brummell (The author's uvres Complètes, Trans.)*. Paris: Editions d'aujourd'hui (Original work published 1845).
- Belk, R. W., Sherry, J. F., Jr., & Wallendorf, M. (1988). A naturalistic inquiry into buyer and seller behavior at a swap meet. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), 449–470.
- Bowen, D. (2002). Research through participant observation in tourism: A creative solution to the measurement of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction (CS/D) among tourists. *Journal of Travel Research*, 41(1), 4–14.
- Brüggen, E. C., Foubert, B., & Gremler, D. D. (2011). Extreme makeover: Short-and long-term effects of a remodeled servicescape. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(5), 71–87.
- Denzin, N. K. (2001). The seventh moment: Qualitative inquiry and the practices of a more radical consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(2), 324–330.
- Gigerenzer, G. (2007). *Gut feelings: The intelligence of the unconscious*. New York: Penguin.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Jakovcovic, A., Steg, L., Mazzeo, N., Caballero, R., Franco, P., Putrino, N., & Favara, J. (2014). Charges for plastic bags: Motivational and behavioral effects. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 40, 372–380. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2014.09.004>.
- Jung, J., & Lee, Y. J. (2009). Cross-cultural examination of women's fashion and beauty magazine advertisements in the United States and South Korea. *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal*, 27(4), 274–286.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Kroeber, A. L. (1901). Decorative symbolism of the Arapaho. *American Anthropologist*, 3(2), 308–336.
- Lee, L., & Ariely, D. (2006). Shopping goals, goal concreteness, and conditional promotions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(1), 60–70.
- Levitt, S. D., List, J. A., & Reiley, D. H. (2010). What happens in the field stays in the field: Exploring whether professionals play minimax in laboratory experiments. *Econometrica*, 78(4), 1413–1434.
- Levy, S. (1981). Personal narratives: A key to interpreting consumer behavior. *Western Folklore*, 40(1), 94–106.
- Martin, D. (2010). Uncovering unconscious memories and myths for understanding international tourism behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(4), 372–383.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview, Vol. 13*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nia, A., & Lynne Zaichkowsky, J. (2000). Do counterfeits devalue the ownership of luxury brands? *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 9(7), 485–497.
- Ozanne, J. L., & Saatcioglu, B. (2008). Participatory action research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 423–439.
- Romaniuk, J., & Nenycz-Thiel, M. (2013). Behavioral brand loyalty and consumer brand associations. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 67–72.
- Schank, R. (2000). *Tell me a story*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Shank, R. C. (1999). *Dynamic memory revisited*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism & collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview press.
- Vigneron, F., & Johnson, L. W. (1999). A review and a conceptual framework of prestige-seeking consumer behavior. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 1, 1–15.
- Whyte, W. F. (1989). Advancing scientific knowledge through participatory action research. *Sociological Forum*, 4(3), 367–385.
- Woodside, A. G. (2010). *Case study research: Theory, methods, and practice*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Woodside, A. G., & Martin, D. (2015). The tourist gaze 4.0: Introducing the special issue on uncovering non-conscious meanings and motivations in the stories tourists tell of trip and destination experiences. *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology*, 4(1), 1–12.
- Zaltman, G. (2003). *How customers think: Essential insights into the mind of the markets*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.