

A META-ANALYSIS DEMYSTIFYING MARKETING- & VIRTUAL COMMUNITY-CENTRIC QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: WHITE PAPERS ON SOCIAL REPRESENTATION THEORY; GROUNDED THEORY; AND CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative study of consumption is a 'hot' research methodology today; particularly as applied to virtual community (VC) environments. Advancements in Web 2.0 technologies, virtual communities, qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, and other innovations may be factors driving the recent popularity for qualitative study among today's marketing academics and practitioners. Yet, exploratory study findings indicated there may be a lack of 'brand' recognition and understanding of, or confusion about, QDA and select applicable marketing theories. This study is a meta-analysis conducted with the intention of demystifying, from an essence perspective, the following theories: Social Representation Theory, Grounded Theory, and Consumer Culture Theory. White papers and empirical examples are provided and information is shared in a 'workshop' type presentation format.

Traditionally, and even nowadays, some marketers emphasize the merits of quantitative study and literally shunned qualitative as "not real research," (Anonymous academic research committee member's comment, 2010). Interestingly, however, nowadays some of the 'quant' researchers have done an about-face. Today, they, along with many new-to-the field researchers, are condoning qualitative study as valid and more deeply insightful (or 'thicker') than quantitative. They now conduct both quantitative and qualitative studies.

What drives the contemporary 'hot' emphases on qualitative study? Perhaps Web 2.0 technologies that enabled the formation of virtual communities (VCs) and endowed them with merits of accessibility, capacity, interactivity, communality and other merits -- and perhaps marketer researchers' growing acquaintance with cost efficient, qualitative analytic software such as CAQDAS, MotiveQuest, Nielsen Buzz Metrics, and others -- have brought netnography and qualitative data analysis (QDA) to today's contemporary forefront and stimulated its fast-growing use status;

as well as to its contemporary currency, relevancy and acceptability status.

In recent years many marketing researchers have begun to realize that deep research insight can be gained when qualitative ethnographic (Belk, 2006) and netnographic research methods are employed. Such methodology and associated data analyses result in 'thicker' or deeper descriptions and research insights regarding the emotional and other subjective sides of individual and communal behavior than does quantitative study -- that, characteristically, is 'thin' or 'surface' in value (Geerts, 1973). Qualitative study takes reasonable, or greater, understanding of qualitative theory and qualitative theory development.

Are general marketing educators' fully acquainted with marketing-relevant, virtual community-centric qualitative research theories? If not, what is the level of acquaintance and knowledge? Many may have some understanding of these concepts however they may also be overloaded with theory jargon (Glaser, 2009). As a member of the academic community, I, myself, was formerly unacquainted with these select theories. And I am not alone in my marketing educator' unfamiliarity with these qualitative research concepts. Pre-pilot study findings gave indication that many of my general marketing colleagues were likewise unacquainted.

Through additional exploratory empirical study, reviews of literature, and Website content analyses, I set out to learn as much as I could about these select theories with the intent to share new-found knowledge. This article shares findings as it relates to research regarding virtual communities, netnography, qualitative data analysis (QDA), and social representation-based, grounded theory-based, and consumer culture theory-based research methodologies.

References available on request