

The qualitative vs. quantitative conflict is a futile one

WHY MUST RESEARCH and researchers be labeled either quantitative or qualitative?

One research design is a qualitative effort and researcher A is the qualitative researcher to perform it. Another is quantitative in nature and researcher B is the one for that. The researchers never have to meet, collaborate, or even know each other's names.

All they are required to do is understand their portion of the research puzzle and execute it according to specifications. This is probably the most common scenario in research situations, and yet it is one of the most profound mistakes by users of research.

Research is not an either-or proposition. Research is not quantitative or qualitative, but a process from beginning to end. It begins with a marketing issue or problem and ends with a design (quantitative or qualitative) which satisfies the particular research needs.

BOTH QUALITATIVE and quantitative researchers are guilty of neglecting one for the other, for hoping to explain all "truths" by their own methodology. The only truth is that quantitative and qualitative need each

Viewpoint

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other; to understand the merits and working of one is to understand the ramifications of the other.

There are numerous examples of researchers losing sight of their ultimate objective: a total research package for their clients that provides, regardless of method, the answer to their marketing questions. One example is when qualitative researchers fail to understand the value of asking similar types of questions in order to make comparisons. Qualitative researchers often, incorrectly, assume they are comparing like answers to like questions, when the questions they have asked—in their true qualitative, in-depth style—actually are very different questions.

Likewise, quantitative researchers are reluctant to learn by example from

qualitative researchers. For many quantitative researchers, a number is a number—let's not worry about its implications. As a result, there is much lost information. This information may be lost because the researcher discounted subsample sizes of less than 30 due to their "insignificance" or became more concerned about the form of a survey question rather than the substance.

In doing so, this researcher has, at best, executed his or her function on a superficial level. This researcher has forgotten that consumers are complex people. To ignore trends (based on even very low N sizes), as well as the implications of questions as they are written, is to miss the very *raison d'être* for the marketing researcher.

Regardless of research method, there

is one fundamental basis from which all research flows: ask a question and you'll always get an answer. This places a heavy burden on the researcher and requires a conscious effort to ask the right questions, accurately interpret the answers, and read behind the numbers or the comments to really understand what has been said.

CONSUMERS ARE not concerned about whether they fit a mold or can be conveniently labeled as one segment or another. Likewise, consumers do not respond conveniently. Their interpretations and responses to our questions are purely a function of the manner in which the question was asked and their own lifestyle.

Quantitative researchers often fail to remember that their factual data rep-

resent human behavior and emotion, an unquantifiable phenomenon. Qualitative researchers often perceive their in-depth analyses as the end-all, when, in reality, one must ask, "Did I ask what I meant to ask and are responses varying only because of a variation in me, not the respondents?"

As researchers, we are not qualitative or quantitative. We are professionals in our ability to understand human behavior, the proper methods in collecting attitudes towards specific issues, and to correctly interpret these attitudes.

As both qualitative and quantitative researchers, we understand that people will respond to any question they are asked, and that our responsibility is to paint a picture based on a thorough assessment of the human psyche. *MR*