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Descriptions and Examples of Four Research Methods

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Abstract

For this second assignment, four articles were summarized and a total of four research methods were identified and described. The research methods were Survey Research, Longitudinal Study, Case Study, and Focus Study.

One example of survey research was a (2006) study lead by Taylor, Franke and Bang in which research was conducted to study various companies' reasons for and attitude toward using billboards for advertising. A review was conducted of current literature that suggested the advantages and disadvantages of advertising through billboards, as well as, the factors that contribute to an effective billboard campaign. The advantages range from placements to frequency to visual impact. Some of the disadvantages included limited space and short exposure time. Two factors were determined to be influential on billboard advertising: gravity, or the approximate distance from the business, and selective perception, the amount of exposure, attention and retention from the consumer. From this review, the team of Taylor, Franke and Bang formulated several hypotheses and research questions which their survey research hoped to answer. Are gravity related factors more important than selective perception factors in the decision to use billboards? Or, visa versa? (Taylor, Franke & Bang, 2006) The group also hoped to answer the questions: Do the reasons for using billboards vary due to various factors? Which factors make billboard advertising successful? And, what factors help to retain a billboard advertiser and a continued customer.

In order to find these answers, the researchers developed a survey various companies regarding their billboard usage. According to Wimmer and Dominick, not only is survey research the most frequently used method, it is also an excellent source of data collection. When developing a questionnaire one should always be aware of the physical design of the questionnaire, in addition to the approach used in the questions themselves. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) In this case survey research was the way to go since it provided a way to "describe the current conditions or attitudes" and "can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings." (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 179)

A questionnaire was sent to a sample group of 1,315 billboard-using companies. These companies were selected from a grouping of 5,000 companies from around the country. The list acquired from the Outdoor Advertising Association of America. The questionnaire was pre-tested in order to check for its accuracy and quality, after which the survey was distributed and a return of 348 usable responses were returned. The survey was sent to a wide variety of business in various fields including travel, entertainment and the service industry. The results were determined from the 30.4% response rate to the survey. In response to their original hypotheses and research questions, Taylor, Franke and Bang found that visibility and media efficiency ranked higher to the surveyed companies than did gravity, all factors were equally important for continuing to use billboards, and name identification, location and readability are all factors associated with successful billboard advertising.

In addition to survey research, longitudinal studies provide researchers with another way to study. Longitudinal studies, according to Dominick and Wimmer, (2006) have a history of positive effects on research studies that relate to behavioral studies. One specific type of longitudinal study is the panel study. Panel studies take measurements from the same sample group at different point in time. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 218) In an effort to track changes in behavior, longitudinal studies can use questionnaires, phone interviews, and Internet web panel discussions. According to the duo, longitudinal studies help to depict a shift in attitudes and patterns in behaviors of the participant. This proved to be the best choice of study for Harrison and Hefner in their quest to find the effects of Media Exposure on Preadolescent Girls.

Harrison and Hefner attempted to find the relationship between media exposure and pre-adolescent girl's body images. In their literature research, the duo found that there was an

increased drive for thinness in young females, what they call “Thin-Ideal Internalization.” This is where an individual accepts society standard for attractiveness and their own, sets that standard as their own personal goal and attempts to achieve such goal. (Harrison & Hefner, 2006, p. 154)

The study conducted consisted of a sample of second, third and fourth grade girls, and living in three middle class communities from the Midwest. Another goal of the study was to incorporate diversity throughout the sample group, for a total of 257 participants from all types of ethnic backgrounds. Parental consent was obtained, as well as, assent forms from each youngster. Trained professionals administered different versions of questionnaires to small groups of 2 to 5 girls, who had no visual contact with each other. According to the article, 2 waves of data collection occurred over a 1 year period in order to identify a pattern in behavior in the areas of body ideals, disordered eating, media exposure, and demographics. After the year of research was completed, Harrison and Hefner determined that television viewing predicts disordered eating, but it does not have any influence on their current body image. (Harrison & Hefner, 2006)

Another type of research is a case study as seen in the research done by David A. Call (2005.) This case study looks to determine how meteorological and non-meteorological factors affect how society views a snowstorm. Many factors contribute to the impact of a snowstorm. Meteorological variations influence how a storm affects each of these cities. Most importantly, a storm’s intensity can practically shutdown a city. The storms timing is almost just as important; time of year, day of the week and even time of day has an effect on how the storm affects society. Another factor that “can create a major snow event out of minor snowstorms” (Call, 2005, p. 1787) is Governmental Response. The local government’s ability to arrange for snow

removal has a major impact on society. Competent and reliable workers, proper equipment and adequate planning influence the way people view a snowstorm. Whether the public heeds the warnings of the media is just one more factor in Call's case study.

Call (2005) attempts to find his answers by using a case study. His case study involved an analysis of four major upstate New York cities: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany. The research, spanning the years 1888 through 2003, looked at the 10 largest storms and selected storms from those ranking 11 through 20. A total of 59 snowstorms were selected, in total, for this case study. The order for the storms was determined by total snow accumulation. A number of data sources were studied for each snow storm. Call explored newspaper articles for each storm from two days before until the end of the coverage and studied the local budgets and expense reports for each city. Additionally, interviews were conducted with local meteorologists to learn about the media's influence on these snow events.

All of Call research methods are accordance of what Wimmer and Dominic (2006) determine to be a case study. A case study should not only use multiple sources of evidence, it also attempts to explain some phenomenon. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) A case study can examine single or multiple cases but focuses on a specific event or phenomenon. In an attempt to explain why this particular event has occurred, Call goes into great detail on his case study citing specific examples like the Blizzard of 1996 in Syracuse and St. Patrick's Day storm in 1936. In Call's case study, he attempts to use a method of data collection, which Wimmer and Dominic call "explanation building" which means to attempt to explain the cause of the phenomenon. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 140)

Still one more type of research is the Focus Study, like that of Ferney and Marshall. Focus Groups, usually conducted in groups of 6 to 12 people are a strategy designed to help to

understand and interpret the participant's attitudes and behaviors. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 128) Like other forms of research, focus groups start with defining the problem and then selecting a sample. In preparing the focus group material, the research must pay close attention to the creation of the focus group questions. Wimmer & Dominick (2006) suggest the following characteristics of good focus group questions: sound conversational and flow easy, use the vocabulary of the participants, ask only one topic at a time and ask short and clear questions.

This particular focus group consisted of a total of 40 adults, with eight groups of 3 to 8 participants. Groups convened for about one to one and half hours. The focus groups were audio taped and then transcribed and coded. Men and women ages 18-65, with all body types, were recruited through a community based Internet Service Provider. Each participant was screened through a telephone interview, was given information regarding the background of the research study and then was given directions on how to log on to the test website. Participants then took part in the focus group, which was led by the same facilitator. After filling out a self-questionnaire, the participants responded to a number of open-ended type questions reacting to their experience using the sample website. Participants were kept comfortable during the process and were compensated with complimentary movie passes.

Ferney and Marshall's focus group was held in an attempt to determine whether or not websites that focus on physical activity interventions can help improve the health of the adult participants. The article states the benefits of online intervention as opposed to face-to-face or print including the flexibility of online access, immediate feedback, convenience and motivation. After the focus groups were conducted the transcripts were coded according to four major themes that emerged repeatedly throughout the groups. Mostly participants were concerned with the overall design of the site, citing ease of use as being key to user enjoyment. Another aspect

that the participants found beneficial was the interactive aspects of the site. The participants would like to see more of these types of activities, in addition to content related to local community events. Lastly, the focus group participants hoped to see practical and useful content that used various types of multimedia.

References

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