

Review:

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Margaret A. Morrison, Eric Haley, Kim Bartel Sheehan & Ronal E. Taylor (2002). Using Qualitative Research in Advertising: Strategies, Techniques, and Applications. London: Sage, 139 pages, ISBN: 0-7619-2383-7, £ 14,99 / EUR 18,00

Shay Sayre (2001). Qualitative Methods for Marketplace Research. London: Sage, 255 pages, ISBN: 0-7619-2270-9, £ 33,00 / EUR 42,41

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Abstract: The review discusses two books, both covering very similar contents and addressing more or less the same audience. The book by SAYRE is about the use of qualitative method in marketplace research in general and is aimed at marketing students and practitioners; the book by MORRISON, HALEY, SHEEHAN and TAYLOR focuses more specifically on one area of marketing, namely advertising research. MORRISON et al. provide the more practical perspective, a fact that is also reflected in the writing style of the book. It is stimulating to read, even for readers familiar with qualitative methods. It provides insights from the perspective of advertising agency planners and demonstrates how qualitative methods are applied in a commercial context. SAYRE, in comparison, provides more details and builds her book around five theoretical perspectives. It is written by an academic for a largely academic audience, containing all the basics that one needs to know when embarking on a qualitative research project. It differs from other qualitative method books in that the various steps along the way are illustrated by examples from the field of marketing. The book will, therefore, resonate well with marketing students. Nonetheless, both books can be recommended as text books for qualitative method courses in marketing—SAYRE's book for marketing students in general, and MORRISON et al.'s book for students specializing in the field of advertising. When used in a course where students conduct a small scale research project on their own, both books need to be supplemented by further readings or teacher input. Specifically, the sections on qualitative data analysis are too thin in MORRISON et al. and too broad in SAYRE in order to be useful to students without further explanation and training. Nonetheless, the two books are the best I have seen so far when it comes to selecting a book to be used in a qualitative method course for marketing students.

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1. Background

A newcomer to qualitative methods and marketplace research would very likely write a different review than I. I come to this task as one who has taught qualitative method courses, marketing courses and a combination of both. Thus, on the downside, I experienced part of the books as somewhat boring as I knew—more or less by heart—what some of the chapters were all about. Nonetheless, on the brighter side, I wish I had had one or both of the books available to me at the time when I was teaching, before the books were published. [1]

I have decided to combine the review of the two books into one review note, as they cover similar contents and are aimed at very similar audiences. The review is also likely to gain from a direct comparison of the two books, as, in this way, the advantages and disadvantages of both books can be seen more easily. [2]

2. Audiences and Contents

Both books have been written for students and practitioners. SAYRE's book addresses the marketing student and practitioner in general; MORRISON et al.'s book focuses more narrowly on students of advertising, advertising agencies and account planners. [3]

SAYRE's book is 255 pages long, and MORRISON et al.'s book only 139 pages. The length of a book may not necessarily say something about the depth at which topics are covered, but in this case, it is true that more details of how to conduct a qualitative study in a marketplace context are offered by SAYRE. SAYRE (2001) is careful in pointing out that her book "is not a 'how-to' on methods" (p.xiii), nonetheless she does provide more than just an overview of how qualitative research is applied in marketing. Her book contains descriptions of the necessary steps to plan a qualitative study and how to collect data. [4]

SAYRE's book is divided into five parts and contains a total of 16 chapters. In part I of the book, SAYRE sets the stage by explaining qualitative research in comparison to quantitative approaches. She makes clear that qualitative research does not contain of just one method, but can be characterized "as a group of distinct methodological traditions" (p.15). Further, she provides a rational why qualitative methods are relevant for marketplace researchers by offering a number of examples. Those familiar with the consumer research literature will recognize the authors she is referring to like Sidney J. LEVY, Russell BELK or Grant McCracken; authors that have been preparing the way for qualitative research in the field of marketing. [5]

Part II of SAYRE's book starts with a discussion on how to select participants, locate an appropriate field and gain access. This is followed by an introduction on how to design a qualitative study and write a proposal. As a further aid to designing a qualitative study, SAYRE describes five research models in part III. Each model offers a different take on how to view a research problem. For example, products and consumers might be understood from a historical point of

view. In such a case, *biographical life history* research may be chosen as model. Or, if the lived experiences of consumers are the center of attention, *phenomenology or grounded theory* might be used. If an entire consumer or company culture is the aim of an exploration, an *ethnographic* approach is likely to be the best choice, according to SAYRE. The fifth model SAYRE presents is *case study* research. This model is used to describe a specific company or consumer situation to those that cannot personally investigate them (either practitioners or students). SAYRE states that the presented five models "are the most commonly invoked for studying the marketplace" (p.65). In fact, she borrows these five models from the educational psychologist CRESWELL (1998), who describes them in his book, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Nonetheless, by using illustrative examples from marketing and consumer research, SAYRE's review of the five research traditions is likely to be more relevant for marketing students than reading CRESWELL's original. [6]

Part IV offers insights into data collection techniques that comprise observation, field interviews, structured interviews and focus groups, and including online data collection and projective techniques. Each technique is illustrated in a separate chapter. The last and fifth part of SAYRE's book covers methods of data analysis and a very short chapter on report writing. [7]

The data analysis chapters cover approaches to analyzing a broad range of data material including visual, material and verbal data, but, as a result, do not provide much more than a list of approaches with a bit of detail. The approaches described are symbolic analysis, structural analysis, constructivism, subjectivism and interpretism. While in the previous chapters the reader receives more detailed information on how to conduct a qualitative market research study, the chapters on data analysis are likely to leave students wondering, "What they are supposed to do with the collected data material?" The same rings true for the chapter on report writing that basically contains three sections. The first informs the reader that s/he needs to consider the audience for which s/he wants to write. In the second section, the reader learns that the qualitative researcher is more of an artist than a writer, acting as an interpreter of consumer culture by translating consumer language into marketing strategy. The third section provides a few examples on how to structure a report. That's it. Considering that a) a lot of analysis in a qualitative study happens while writing, and b) students especially have problems with "data analysis" namely: what to do with data once collected, the last part of SAYRE's book unfortunately just touches the surface. It fulfills her own criteria on what this book isn't about, namely it is not a "how-to" book on methods. This cautionary warning found in a note at the beginning of the book definitely applies to this last part. In comparison to the depth of the chapters on research models and data collection techniques, 16 pages on data analysis—the very essence of what SAYRE describes as being the primary concern in qualitative research—cannot offer more than an overview. [8]

In sum, the contents of SAYRE's book include what most qualitative method books cover. The difference from books written by authors from other fields is that all examples presented in the book come from marketplace studies. This is

definitely a big plus when using the book as text book in a marketing course. I was teaching qualitative methods to marketing students before the books by SAYRE's or MORRISON et al. were available and it is incredibly difficult to convince students that the methods of a non-marketing author are as relevant to marketing as to other fields. Being faced with the many examples provided by SAYRE, I think marketing students will be won over much more easily. [9]

Margaret MORRISON et al., in comparison to SAYRE, set the stage for their book by explaining the history and role of account planning in advertising agencies—a much more specific approach. Like SAYRE, they also begin by describing the qualitative view of the world to the uninitiated. They do not, however, provide an overview of a number of research traditions, focusing on one method instead: the ethnographic approach. Within this emphasis on one particular method, they discuss issues like gaining access, going native and panel research. Three data collection techniques are described: the qualitative interview, projective techniques and online focus groups and interviews. Each of the three chapters on data collection includes a part on data analysis. The book concludes with a chapter on how to write a creative brief (the kind of report/output that needs to be written as an account planner), and a chapter on how to balance ideals with real-world constraints. [10]

In sum, the contents of MORRISON et al.'s work are sufficient to offer an introduction to qualitative methods, but offer less detail than the contents provided by SAYRE. With regard to the audience of the book, this is likely to be a good choice. SAYRE addresses the more academically oriented mind, whereas the book by MORRISON et al. has a more practical focus emphasizing techniques that are of importance in the day-to-day work of planners in advertising agencies. [11]

3. Structure of the Two Books

At the end of each chapter, both books provide a summary, a list of exercises and a list of recommended or related readings. In addition, MORRISON et al. provide a list of key terms followed by a definition. From a teacher's perspective, I found the key terms very useful. They can help students to review major new concepts and serve as an aid to teachers, e.g. to offer a set of key terms at the beginning of a teaching session as an appetizer, and to formulate review questions at the end. [12]

Most of the suggested exercises in both of the books are quite time-consuming and cannot be conducted as in-class exercises. However, some exercises may serve as ideas for student projects, or could become useful in-class when modifying them slightly. Unfortunately, neither of the works indicates whether they have tested the proposed exercises themselves in an actual teaching context. [13]

4. Evaluation and Recommendation for Use as Text Books

Even though SAYRE's book is more thorough, I preferred reading the book by MORRISON et al. For someone who is familiar with qualitative method in general or with qualitative methods in the field of marketing, SAYRE's book is quite boring to read as s/he does not learn anything new. (This, of course, does not apply to students new to qualitative methods!) The only difference from other method books is that all examples are topic (i.e., marketing) specific. In comparison, MORRISON et al.'s book provides some refreshing new insights from the world of a practitioner. It is stimulating to read and some of the analogies presented to explain new concepts are inspiring. For example, if you ever have tried to explain to students what a category is, in the future you may want to use the following example:

"Assume that you encounter a spherical-shaped object of orange-yellow color. You note that it grows on a tree. It has a puckery skin that you can peel off. The inside is softer, more watery than the outside, and it has a pleasing taste. You might label this 'tasty sphere'. Next you notice another spherical-shaped object of about the same size resting under the tree. It has a white, leathery skin that can be removed with great difficulty. In fact, the skin appears to have been sewn on. You remove the skin and find yards and yards of string wrapped around a hard center. The center is black, and when you bite it you discover it is not juicy or soft and has a most unpleasant taste. Is this also an example of taste sphere, or are the differences so great as to demand a new category? That depends on the skill of the researcher. Are oranges and baseballs in the same category? Only if we define the category as 'spherical-shaped objects.' But in this case, shape is not the essence of the category, and we know that because we went beyond surface-level investigation." (MORRISON et al. 2002, pp.20-21). [14]

Although I personally prefer the book by MORRISON et al., I would not recommend it as a main textbook in a qualitative method course geared to *general marketing students*. As described on the back cover of the book, the text was especially written for students and professionals in the field of advertising. It is likely, therefore, to be too specific for marketing students. If used in a method course for advertising students, the book can serve as a stimulating framework. Since the book does not provide very much detail, teachers will have to contribute their own step-by-step instructions on how to actually plan and conduct a qualitative market research study. The suggested exercises may serve as a starting point. [15]

SAYRE's book may work better as a stand-alone main textbook, since it provides more detail (especially up to part IV) in explaining how to plan a qualitative study and how to collect data. The many illustrative examples will help students to translate abstract methodological concepts into practical research activities. As mentioned earlier, the chapters on data analysis are too broad to be of practical use to students. This part either needs to be complemented by supplementary readings, or teachers will need to fill in the missing details. [16]

When using SAYRE's book as main text, the book by MORRISON et al. may serve as an inspiring supplementary reading. This still does not, however, solve the shortcomings with regard to the chapters on data analysis in both books. As with many other books on qualitative methods, both neglect to pay more attention to the black box of how to analyze qualitative data. Based on my experience, it is not sufficient to confront students with data, a few research questions and instructions like:

"To undergo analysis, text must be broken down into manageable units; we call this reduction. Our first task is to read over all collected text to identify discernable patterns as they emerge naturally from it. The classification processes for collected data is often technique specific ..." (SAYRE 2001, pp.212). [17]

This explanation is followed by two further pages providing a bit more theoretical input and examples on how to create categories. Still, this leaves open where to go from there. Breaking down a text into manageable units is only the beginning. How do we proceed from there to the final report? [18]

Apart from books that exclusively focus on data analysis methods and on writing up qualitative research (examples by STRAUSS & CORBIN [1998], MILES & HUBERMAN [1994] or WOLCOTT [2001] come to mind), I have not yet seen a text book on qualitative method that also covers data analysis to the degree that it deserves to be covered. Most authors agree that what you do with qualitative data (in other words, the analysis of the collected material), is the most important part of a qualitative research study. Despite this fact, the 'how to' is often not explained very well. It may go beyond the purpose of books like SAYRE's or Morrison et al.'s to explain qualitative data analysis methods in more detail and indeed beyond the aim of a qualitative method course in marketing. Nonetheless, this lack of methodological clarity may continue to make it difficult to justify qualitative methods to quantitative researchers. [19]

When using the book as a main text in a course that also comprises practical exercises and a student research project, it may be difficult to include all five research traditions described by SAYRE. As a solution, teachers may pick one of the five approaches and streamline the course accordingly. The same applies to the list of data analysis approaches provided by SAYRE. Focusing on one approach may help to provide students with the necessary detail on what to do with qualitative data once collected, in order to get out of the black box. [20]

This said, I could very well imagine using only selected parts of SAYRE's book in a course that provides a mere overview of qualitative method in marketplace research among other topics. Useful in such a context are part I (Approaching qualitative methods, especially chapter 2: Five Models of Qualitative Research) and part III (Choosing a Research Model). Even if not the perfect qualitative method book, it is the best in the area of qualitative marketing research that I have come across so far, particularly because of the many examples and marketing illustrations used throughout. It will definitely ring a bell with marketing students. [21]

The book by MORRISON et al. is also recommendable. It is written in a refreshing style and is not as boring to read as are more academically oriented books. It addresses a smaller audience than the book by SAYRE, but could also be given as a supplementary reading to marketing students who may later want to specialize in the field of advertising. In any case, when used as a textbook in a methods course, it needs to be complemented by more detailed step-by-step instructions provided during the lectures or through additional readings. [22]

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