



Ethnography in Action

A Presentation for
McCann Erickson New York
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[Background]

- An anthropology major long ago
- Experience from then till now
- Now consumer behavior is a focus

[What is Ethnography?]

"When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who 'lives with and lives like' those who are studied, usually for a year or more." -- John Van Maanen, 1996.

[What is Ethnography?]

"Ethnography literally means 'a portrait of a people.' An ethnography is a written description of a particular culture - the customs, beliefs, and behavior - based on information collected through fieldwork." --Marvin Harris and Orna Johnson, 2000.

[What is Ethnography?]

"Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture. The description may be of a small tribal group in an exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia." --David M. Fetterman, 1998.

[What is Ethnography?]

- A social science research method
- Origins lie in anthropology
- A type of qualitative research
- Observation and conversation
- Goes beyond what people say to what they do.

What is Ethnography in Marketing?

- Focuses on closely studying small number of consumers in context.
- Informants with an overview of the community.
- Takes pressure off informants
- Draws conclusions *after* behaviors and attitudes are observed.

Quantitative/Qualitative Research Methods

- Quantitative

- Large sample size
- Standardized data collection

- Qualitative

- Smaller number of respondents
- Somewhat standardized data collection

Both ask respondents to recall or predict their behavior and that of others.

How does Ethnography answer this need?

- A simple notion: life in context.
- Leverages direct observation.
- Unbiased by recall of respondents, observers can record much data.
- Theory driven for purposes of reliability and validity.

[Typical data collected]

- Interviews
- Observations
- Documents, artifacts, relics

[A “Cultural Scene”]

- “What’s going on?”
- Deductive rather than inductive.
- Links details of life to cultural patterns.
- Everything is data.
- Can be a reality check.
- Look at the extremes to understand norm.
- Look for common patterns.

[Ethnography is useful for. . .]

- Target exploratory
- Target segmentation
- Cultural evolution
- Narrow question
- Longitudinal study
- Product design and ideation
- Shopping and retail planning and design

[Start with . . .]

- A business question

[Methodological Principles]

- Naturalism
- Understanding
- Discovery

[The Researcher]

- Results obtained depend on observer.
- “Foreignness”
- Theory driven
- Background information
- Participant or Onlooker?

[Skills: Interviewing]

- Many types of data available in an interview.
- Establish rapport.
- Ask truly open-ended questions.
- Observe and take notes while interviewing.
- Know when to shut up.

[Skills: Fieldnotes]

- Holistic inquiry
- Description
- Triangulation
- Use quotations
- Select and use key informants wisely.
- Be disciplined

[“Thick Description”]

- What was it like to be in the environment?
- Written in narrative form

[Video Ethnography]

- Analyze visual data
- On-going logging
- Iterative editing process

[Analysis and Interpretation]

- Two separate processes
 - Analysis brings order to the data.
 - Data reduction strategies
 - Interpretation attaches meaning to analysis
 - Looks for relationships and linkages

[Final Report]

- Focus is essential.

Tips from Successful Implementations

- Increase familiarity with ethnography.
- Join the community, the cultural scene.
- Don't expect fully formed, brilliant insights.
- Put results in context of a comprehensive overview.
- Seek out anomalies.
- Patience.

Who's using Ethnography?

- Furniture Today
 - Sauter Woodworking
 - Thomasville
- Marketing News
 - Data storage and retrieval products
- Coffee House and Café Express
- Jaguar and Land Rover
- Microsoft
- Canadian beer brand
- Quick serve restaurant chain

[Cautions and Limitations]

- Align with other research.
- Stay focused on same aims.
- Excessive data with no way of organizing it.
- Time requirements.
- Danger of superficiality.
- On-stage effect.

Ethnography: Part Conversation, Part Observation

“Although ethnography is a buzzword in marketing circles, ethnographic research – which can be used to inspire strategic brand design – has made little headway.”

License Magazine
Spring 2006