

Chapter 2

Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Researcher and Informant Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to extend current knowledge relating to the role of reflexivity as an innovative research method. The authors consider the significance and importance of reflexivity within market research and aim to emphasise the advantages and contexts in which it should be applied. The intention of reflexivity within market research is to extract and accumulate richer, authentic, and more emotive data from research participants. The authors outline the significance of considering researcher reflexivity within qualitative research but then extend the concept by suggesting that we should in fact evoke informant self-reflexivity as a means to accumulating a richer description (Geertz, 1973) and interpretation of the phenomena under investigation. The authors then discuss the importance of co-researcher reflexivity where the researcher and the study participants co-create knowledge, as they collectively and actively engage in the research process with an equal interest. The findings offer significant insights into the significance of researcher, informant, and co-researcher reflexivity and argue that the use of researcher and informant self-reflexivity contributes to producing multiple voices, as well as data triangulation within market research.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly writings relating to reflexivity have a long history spanning at least a century (Finlay, 2002). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994)

writings such as “*Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer, 1986), *The Anthropology of Experience* (Turner and Bruner, 1986), *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) and *Works and Lives* (Geertz, 1988) have

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made research and writing more reflexive” (p.10). Emirbayer and Desmond, (2012) affirm the significance and unique importance of critical and reflexive thought within qualitative research (p.574-599) and assert its value within the interpretive research process. Within this context, we discuss why reflexivity is so significant within the interpretive paradigm, and how we can take the methodological concept further? Rather than focusing on researcher reflexivity alone as many other scholars have done in the past, why not take this concept as far as we can and apply it holistically to the researcher and the study participants? And then analyse the extent and nature of the data set that is accumulated by applying researcher and informant reflexivity?

The suggestion that qualitative research should be undertaken as a reflexive practice by qualitative researchers is not a new or novel practice by any means, as it has been considered within other disciplines such as philosophy; anthropology; history; sociology and psychology (Foucault, 1970; Latour, 1988; Heidegger, 1966; Ashmore, 1989; Clifford and Marcus 1986). However, Finlay (2002) does suggest that the focus within the field has moved from “introspection towards critical realist and subjectivist accounts and more recently towards highlighting the socio-political, post-modern context through deconstructing the research encounter” (p.210). Within the interpretive paradigm of consumer research, there is a strong argument for paying greater attention to researcher reflexivity and even evoking informant self-reflexivity. The view being that reflexivity can encourage richer, emotive and more accurate data, with limited influencing factors such as researcher bias etc. Reflexivity emerges as an important and integral part of qualitative research (Sherry and Schouten, 2002) and few qualitative researchers “give reflexive accounts of data analysis or discuss how reflexivity can be operationalised” (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.414). It would be enlightening for more qualitative researchers to produce

reflexive accounts as this will help in bringing new insights to the discipline of marketing and consumer research.

This chapter shares some insights to this practice, and demonstrates how factors such as researcher reflexivity, evoking informant reflexivity and co-research can be a valuable contribution to the qualitative research process by producing authentic voices (Takhar and Chitakunye, 2012). When we say authentic voices we are largely referring to the voices of the research participants and ensuring that their true emotions and opinions are conveyed within a naturalistic environment in which they feel comfortable. Mason (1996) suggests that we as researchers should “understand the research process and the relative positions of researcher and researched within it” (p.165). We share this view as it is crucial that the researcher build a trusting relationship with the research participants with the view to evoking honest answers. . Whilst researchers should be reflexive about every decision they take (Mason, 1996, p.164), it is also imperative that the informant should also adopt a reflexive perspective with the view that this will result in richer, emotive and more authentic data (Takhar and Chitakunye, 2012). This enables the researcher to understand and interpret the data more accurately. After all, reflexivity is an inescapable characteristic of social reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, if it is an inevitable element of our social reality, then it is a characteristic that will be easier to draw out when building a reflexive naturalistic research environment.

WHAT IS REFLEXIVITY?

In order to understand how to apply and integrate reflexivity in research, it is firstly crucial that we define the term reflexivity. In defining the term reflexivity, it is important to point out that the terms reflective and reflexive are both widely used

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