

Ethnography for Marketing

Hasanuddin
Research Manager
MarkPlus Research
E-mail: hasanuddin@markplusnco.com

I adapted the above title from the currently hot, and somewhat controversial marketing book according to Indonesian standards, written by Hy Mariampolski – Managing Director of QualiData Research, one of the world’s research agencies that specialize in qualitative research. This is an interesting book, in which Hy Mariampolski conducts a different approach in marketing research: the ethnographic approach. We all know that this form of applied ethnography is a branch of anthropology which is often used in social research to explore the characteristics of the cultures of remote tribes.

There are four commonly used methods. First of them is Data Mining, extracting data from secondary sources such as company database, annual reports, magazines, newspapers, Internet, etc. Second is Survey, third is Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and finally In-Depth Interview, which is similar to, but more in-depth than Survey.

To date, these four methods have satisfied marketers in gauging consumer behavior towards brands. But when faced with the question of whether with these methods marketers gain true answers, the answer’s an obvious No. Under investigation, respondents often tend to give artificial answers or opinions, which are sometimes completely made up. Furthermore, a time limit may prompt the respondents not to give a serious enough response.

Looking at this, Hy Mariampolski proposed an alternative approach utilizing ethnography. With this approach, the research itself is conducted in a more neutral manner. Ethnography itself does not focus on “what people say” but on “what people do” instead. Tactically, data gathering is done by using a few combinations, e.g. observation, diary, videotape, photography, and short notes.

With the ethnographic approach, it is hoped that marketers may gather true information, and thus customer insight, from consumers. Customer insight is what marketers need more compared to mere data or information. Using this approach it is also hoped that marketers could discover the true opinions and true perceptions of consumers and therefore reveal the consumers’ hidden needs unspoken needs.

Thus, to enrich research, there is no harm in marketers trying an unfamiliar research approach with the ethnographic approach and compare the results with the results of a ‘conventional’ research to facilitate better customer insight. Good luck!