

QUALITATIVE OBSERVATION APPLIED IN PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY DESIGN

Associate Professor **Adriana MANOLICĂ**
University Alexandru Ioan Cuza of Iasi, Romania
manolica@uaic.ro

Teaching assistant, PhD. **Claudia BOBĂLCĂ**
University Alexandru Ioan Cuza of Iasi, Romania
iuliana.bobalca@uaic.ro

Teaching assistant, PhD. **Oana CIOBANU**
University Alexandru Ioan Cuza of Iasi, Romania
ciobanu.oana@uaic.ro

Abstract:

Observational research gained more importance in the speciality literature lately, as the method allows researchers to understand better the purpose of information in people's life. Many researchers that tested modern data collection techniques returned to observational concept, using it on a large scale as a basic method in influences evaluations on buying decision process.

The research team had to realise a qualitative research pattern to be used in the business environment. The chosen example was arbitrary. The starting point was not real needs and problems of any company.

The purpose of this research is to found the promotional strategy for a furniture cleaning product.

The qualitative study's objectives are: (1) understanding the manner that people clean the furniture in their apartments; (2) identifying motivations for choosing certain furniture cleaning products; (3) identifying the ambient elements associated to furniture cleaning activities.

The research method is the unstructured, undisguised, direct observation, followed by an interview.

Conclusion synthesize the typical elements to be included in the advertising message, following the manner people are cleaning their furniture. Some of these elements refer to: main character is a married woman, 20-30 years old, cleaning the living room furniture; the furniture is decorated; there is an opened TV in the room on a musical channel. The text elements should include expressions such as: "I usually spend 2-3 hours to clean the house on Saturdays", "My daughter also helps me cleaning around the house".

Keywords: Qualitative observation, promotional strategy, advertising elements, cleaning furniture products, participation observation, interview

JEL Classification: M31

INTRODUCTION

Comparing to all the other research methods, observation seems to be the simplest one. Even so, many researchers that had tested modern collecting data techniques have started to reuse the old concept of observation on a large scale as a basis method in influences evaluation of consumers' buying decisions (Fannin, 1988).

Observation is a complex research method as it usually dictates researcher to play a number of roles and use a number of techniques, including the own senses, in order to collect data. One more aspect would be that, leaving aside the involvement level in the studied group, the researcher needs to always remember his/her part in order to remain detached in collecting and analyzing relevant data for the investigated problem. There are two important factors that need special attention: 1 – obtaining group attending access; 2 – leaving the field. Other specific challenges involve professional ethical issues and results validity and trust.

Gorman and Clayton define observation as being represented by those studies involving systematic recording, using senses, of the characteristics and transformations of the studied object (2005, p. 40). Becket and Geer define participation observation as a hidden or obvious activity in which the researcher participates in the daily life of the observed people observing, listening certain aspects, questioning them within a period of time (1970, p. 133).

As a scientific method, observation consists in a systematic recording, using senses, characteristics and transformations of the studied object.

Observation involves recording human behaviour patterns, objects and events of a systematic manner, in order to obtain information about the concerned phenomena. The most

important instrument is the researcher; all the information are gathered, understood, analysed and organized by him/her.

Observation is a recommended research method in one of the following cases:

- the research problem is part of the sensitive social issues category;
- the studied phenomenon may be observed ;
- there is a generous time budget (observational studies usually need more time than other research methods);
- it may represent a beginning level within complex research projects, especially when researchers understand the research problem but cannot underline precise objectives.

The study presented in this article is an example of "qualitative observation" research method used with the purpose to found the marketing strategy.

The decision problem is to found the promotional strategy for a furniture cleaning product. *The research problem* is to identify typical elements to be included in the promotional message, using the manner the present furniture cleaning product is used.

Research objectives deriving from the problems above are:

1. understanding the furniture cleaning manner;
2. identifying the reasons to use furniture cleaning products;
3. identifying the environment elements associated to furniture cleaning products.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in the exploratory qualitative research was the unstructured, undisguised, direct observation, followed by an interview.

The research focused on living room furniture cleaning in order to avoid the intimacy barrier that the observer's presence would lift up in other rooms of a house, such as the bedroom. Removing the intimacy barrier would have supposed big financial stimulus. The premise of this research is that the living room furniture is cleaned the same manner as the bedroom furniture.

Sampling

The sample consisted in 30 people that usually clean the furniture in their own establishment.

Investigated people have been recruited using the snowball method. Each operator recruited 15 people, having the start point people they knew (relatives, colleagues, friends) and further recommendations (contacts) of them.

There was not an established sample structure.

Using the snowball method, the obtained sample had the following structure:

Table no. 1. Sample structure based on age and sex variables

Sex	Age	Bellow 20 years	20-30 years	31-40 years	41-59 years	Over 60 years
Male		0	2	0	0	1
Female		0	16	5	4	2

Motivating participants

In order to accept being recorded with a video camera, each participant received a present consisting in:

- furniture spray;
- duster;
- furniture napkins.

For every recommended person, a participant received an extra present: a room deodorant. The extra present was offered after observing the recommended person. Offering the present and announcing the extra recommendation present generated the snowball effect.

The present package was offered after the observation, in order to not influence the behaviour of investigated participants.

The Interview

The interview was operated after the observed participant finished cleaning the furniture. This operating variant was decided after testing two variants: (a) operating the interview during the furniture cleaning; (b) operating the interview after the furniture cleaning.

The second variant had been selected as it was noticed that the observed participant stops the cleaning process in order to answer the questions. This fact distorts the usual, natural behaviour.

The Interview Guide

The interview guide consisted in the following discussion topics:

- demographic data of the observed participant (civil status, number of children, age – using the observation);
- presence of pets or the intention to buy one;
- frequency of cleaning the furniture;
- dust source;
- responsible person to clean the furniture inside the establishment;
- cleaning programme (including dust removal);
- ideas associated to cleaning concept;
- products used in the present to clean the furniture and reasons for the choice;
- favourite odours;
- past methods used to clean the furniture ;
- furniture cleaning movements accustoming;
- test product;
- ideal product to clean the furniture.

Operating

Participants had been contacted by phone and scheduled depending their availability and preferences. Average time for each visit: 30 minutes.

Observation stages:

- observing the subject during cleaning the dust with personal products (10 minutes average);
- observing the participant during cleaning the dust with the test product (5 minutes average);
- interviewing the participant after cleaning the furniture (12 minutes average).

In the end, the operator offered the participant a present and asked for further contacts. The participant is announced he/she may receive an extra present (the room deodorant) for each new generated contact.

RESULTS

A list for each observation had been made. Conclusions are presented in the table below:

Table no. 2. Conclusions of the research

Investigated aspect	Conclusions
The user of furniture cleaning products	Most of the users of furniture cleaning products are women Men help their partners (women) in the process of furniture cleaning Children (little girls) help their parents cleaning the furniture
The frequencies of furniture cleaning process	In most cases, furniture cleaning is made once or twice a week.
Investigated aspect	Conclusions

The program of furniture cleaning process	Most of the persons clean the furniture during the weekend
Time spent with house cleaning	Furniture cleaning is part of a general house cleaning process. This process takes 2-3 hours.
Furniture cleaning movements	Most of the furniture cleaning gestures are linear movements. O possible explanation for the type of movement is given by the participants: "circular movements" cover larger areas, "linear movements" allow "brushing".
The style of applying the substance	We observed a uniform distribution of the methods of applying the cleaning substance: punctual spraying, linear spraying, circular spraying and <u>winding</u> spraying.
Decorative objects for the furniture	The most common objects on the furniture are: flower vases, trinkets, toys, photos. In most of the cases, the observed persons have two or three of objects displayed.
Books displayed on the furniture	Half of the persons use furniture for displaying books.
<u>Religious</u> pictures	The majority of the subjects have religious pictures displayed on their furniture.
Subjects' cleaning outfit	In most of the cases, subjects wear casual clothes while they are cleaning the furniture. There is no clear conclusion regarding the influence of the observer's presence on subjects' outfit.
The furniture cleaning products	The cleaning instrument: Most of the subjects use a single object. "Duster" and "cloth" are the main instruments used for furniture cleaning.
	Product: Most of the subjects use furniture spray. Others do not use a special furniture product.
The main advantages expected from the product	The main advantages expected from the product are: „shine”, „good smell”, “perdurable smell”, „uniformed areas”, „less effort”, „antistatic”, „sweep up the dust”, „low price”.
Favourite smells	Most of the subjects prefer flower smell. Other options are wood, grass.
Investigated aspect	Conclusions
The cause of the dust	We did not identify a special cause of the dust. The dust emanates both from outside and inside the house.
Language elements	Sounds: furniture cleaning is a silent activity.
	Words or expressions: there are no expressions to suggest intense emotions
Sounds elements	In half of the cases, furniture cleaning process needs a sonic environment. The source of the sounds is: the TV, the radio, the computer or the tape recorder. In half of the cases, furniture cleaning in the living room is not accompanied by any type of sounds.
Visual elements	TV: In most of the cases, TV is turned on a music channel. In the other cases, the subjects prefer news channels.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research is to build a promotional strategy for a furniture cleaning product.

We conducted a qualitative research in order to identify the specific elements regarding the use of furniture cleaning products to be incorporated in the advertising message.

The exploratory research only represents the first step of the study and it generates the information used to generate the hypothesis to be tested in quantitative research. Our research presents just the exploratory phase.

The advertising message includes the following elements:

- The main character is a woman, with the age of 20-30 years, married, wearing casual clothes (jeans and a t-shirt);
- The usual context of the cleaning process is the living room, classic furniture, opened window, objects like vacuum or pug;
- The usual decorative products on the furniture are: trinkets, toys, books and religious pictures;
- The TV is turned on a music channel;
- Most of the furniture cleaning gestures are linear movements (up/down, left/right) but also circular movements (for larger surfaces).

The content of the advertising message will include the following elements:

- The cleaning day (usually on Saturday: "on Saturday I usually clean the house for 2-3 hours");
- The woman is usually helped by her daughter(s): "my daughter also helps me to clean the house".

The results show that most of the users of the furniture cleaning products are women. The men and the female children (less than 21 years) just help the woman (the mother).

In most of the cases, the furniture is cleaned once or twice a week. Saturday is the preferred day for this activity.

Furniture cleaning is a part of general house cleaning process. House cleaning takes mostly 2-3 hours.

Most of the furniture cleaning gestures are linear movements (up/down, left/right). The subjects could not offer a clear explanation for their cleaning movements. O possible explanation for the type of movement is that: "circular movements" cover larger surfaces, "linear movements" allow "brushing".

There is a uniform distribution of the methods of applying the cleaning substance: punctual spraying, linear spraying, circular spraying and [winding](#) spraying. We did not identify a pattern for the style of applying the cleaning substance.

The usual decorative products on the furniture are: trinkets, toys, flower vases, photos. The trinkets are usually white. Half of subjects have books displayed on the furniture shelves. Most of the persons have religious pictures on the furniture.

The cleaning outfit is a casual one (jeans and t-shirts).

Most of the subjects use a main product (active substance sprayed on the furniture) and an auxiliary product (rag, dust cloth, duster, wet wipes).

The most used main product is the furniture spray. The most common auxiliary products are dusters and dust clothes.

The main advantages expected from the dusting products are:

- „shine”,
- „good smell”,
- “perdurable smell ,
- „uniformed areas”,
- „less effort”,
- „ antistatic”,
- „sweep up the dust”,
- „low price”.

The preferred smell for these products is floral scent. Other options are: wood, grass and fruits flavours. The TV, the computer or the radio are usually used for the sound surrounding.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The purpose of the research is an educational one and uses a product chosen by our research team.

The selection of the subjects was not based on a selecting questionnaire. Researcher participation and subjects' recording might influence the usual behaviour of the subjects (the outfit, language, sounds). The observation was reduced only on living room furniture and we assumed that the rest of the furniture is cleaned in the same manner.

The present research can be developed by the following future directions: (a) Correlations between demographic / psychographic subjects features and the objects displayed on the furniture; (b) Correlations between the toys on the furniture and the presence of young people in the family (less than 25 years); (c) Identifying the advantages the subjects desire from a new furniture cleaning product; (d) Investigating the characteristics of the ideal piece of furniture; (e) Observation of the subjects' cleaning behaviour on different groups of consumers, in order to identify specific behavioural elements.

REFERENCES

1. Adler, P. A., & Adler, R (1987). *Membership roles in field research: Vol. 6. Qualitative research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
2. Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (1994). *Observational techniques*. In N. K. Denzin & Y S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 377-392). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
3. Baker, L. (2006). *Observation: a complex research method*. (Ethnological methods), [Library Trends](#): p.171(19).
4. Becker, H. S., & Geer, B. (1970). *Participant observation and interviewing: A comparison*. In W.J. Filstead (Ed.), *Qualitative methodology: Firsthand involvement with the social world* (pp. 133-142). Chicago: Markham.
5. Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). *Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling*. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 10(2), 141-163.
6. Caldwell, K. and Atwal, A. (2005), *Non-participant observation: using video tapes to collect data in nursing research*, [Nurse Researcher](#) 13.2 (Dec 2005): p.42(13)
7. Chatman, E. A. (1992). *The information world of retired women*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
8. Fannin, R. (1988), *Seeing is believing: ethnology, the study through observation of different cultures' behavior, is netting profitable insights for worldly marketers*, [Marketing & Media Decisions](#) 23.n2 (Feb 1988): p.p51(3).
9. Gold, R. L. (1958). *Roles in sociological field observations*. *Social Forces*, 36(3), 217-223.
10. Gorman, G. E., & Clayton, P. (2005). *Qualitative research for the information professional (2nd ed.)*. London: Facet.
11. Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 118(2), 282-292.
12. Pearsall, M. (1970). *Participant observation as rote and method in behavioral research*. In W.J. Filstead (Ed.), *Qualitative methodology: Firsthand involvement with the social world* (pp. 340-352). Chicago: Markham.
13. Polit, D. F., & Hungler, B. P. (1987). *Nursing research: Principles and methods (3rd ed.)*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.
14. Powell, R. R., & Connaway, L. S. (2004). *Basic research methods for librarians (4th ed.)* Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited
15. Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.