
Research Methodology

Shone (2015) found the definition of research methodology to be a systematic and unbiased way of solving a problem through generating verifiable data. However, this is through a positivist perspective. A constructivism perspective would define research methodology by involving epistemology stating that it studies the nature of knowledge, what it is that we know and how we know what we know (Kretchmar 2017). This research is designed to discover the generational differences in response to Social Networking Sites (SNS) relationship marketing. This determines what marketing methods are ideal for various generation groups.

This topic was chosen to uncover the impact that SNS have on creating and maintaining customer relationships. The research is then evaluated to see the various generational differences with the online environment.

Ontological position

An Ontological position, that is the way in which reality is determined, can be viewed as opposite ends of a continuum, with objectivism at one end and constructionism at the other. An objectivist approach derives from the method that scientists study the way atoms/elements behave by valuing objectivity and identifying characteristics of the social world which can be identified and recorded (Matthews and Ross 2014). However, a constructivist approach focuses on the meanings attributed and the understanding of the social world (Matthews and Ross 2014). In order to establish what the facts are with “brand relationship marketing” this dissertation evaluates why people have their own opinions on brand relationship marketing by using the realist approach. The realist approach illuminates theories underneath research which allows the researcher to evaluate complex social situations (Hewitt, Sims and Harris 2012). Realism starts from a position similar to positivism in acknowledging there is a social reality external to the researcher however it goes further than this by suggesting the social reality is underpinned by invisible but powerful structures or mechanisms (Matthews and Ross 2014). This approach is used for the research as it accepts there can be more than one perspective and interpretation of a situation (Walliman 2011).

Epistemological approach

Once the ontological position has been discovered how the research is conducted can then be decided. Epistemology reviews the theory of knowledge which presents a view and a justification for what can be regarded as knowledge (Matthews and Ross 2014). Critical Realism can be seen as a reconciliatory approach which notices the natural order in terms of events but claims the order can not be detected through simply observing the pattern (Walliman 2011). The underlying order can be discovered through Interpretivism to work with information within the social world and to then understand it, avoid distorting it and to use as building blocks for theorising (Goldkuhl 2012). An inductive approach correlates with Interpretivism and can be used to take information and work with the data in the initial stages of analysis (Matthews and Ross 2014). An inductive approach enables an analysis of how brands establish their relationships through Facebook. As opposed to a deductive approach, whereby a hypothesis would have been tested, this research is looking to assess current opinion and create theory on

the basis of the findings. This approach was appropriate for the research as it allowed methodological flexibility since it is not guided by just qualitative methodologies such as the grounded theory (Liu 2016); but recognises a pluralism of approaches which allows the research to assess both opinions and statistical, quantitative, figures to evaluate the conclusion of the data gathered.

Research approach

As explained, methodological pluralism was used to accumulate knowledge about different generations and their perspective on relationship marketing. A Mixed Methods approach leverages the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative research which integrates both approaches within a holistic methodological approach (Matthews and Ross 2014). By using the mixed method approach it allows the information to be collaborative and enhances the validity (Polit and Beck 2012). This links back to the realism approach where the research reviews more than one perspective while looking at the data collected.

Quantitative research uses a rigorous and controlled design to evaluate facts with precise measurement which can be used to gather unanswered research questions (Rutberg and Bouikidis 2018). Qualitative data however, measures the context within the facts which provides richness that is not achieved with quantitative measures (Shone 2015). Using a cross-sectional design (Bryman & Bell 2007, data was gathered through secondary data from an extensive Literature Review that was created based on Relationship Marketing for different generations. There are various types of research design (Bryman and Bell (2007), however cross-sectional design was used to collect data as secondary information was gathered from the literature review then a survey was conducted to review similarities between both items of research. This approach was taken as it allows a comparison between people of different ages and their individual opinions (Matthews and Ross 2014).

This information was taken from a variety of text books academic journals to learn more about the context. The data was split into two segments focussing on Social Networking Sites and Consumer Brand Friendships to then go into more depth about various generations and their current differences. The Literature Review was the base of the research the information gathered helped to design the survey question. Both Quantitative and Qualitative data are used to conduct the research.

Survey

A survey was undertaken as it views comprehensively and in detail types of data (Denscombe 2007). A survey was created on Bristol Online Survey. This included fifteen questions based on the Likert-type scale and three open ended questions to gather opinions on Brand Relationships. Likert-scales are beneficial as it allows the researcher to see large sample sizes which increases the validity of the findings (Hartley 2013). However, Hartley (2013) also found that it was common for questions in the scale to be 'negatively worded' which could alter the respondent's answers. By using Likert-scale questions, a positive, negative or neutral perspective was gathered. The advantages of using the survey is that is a flexible tool allowing one to receive replies without having to talk to every respondent (Walliman 2011). It was used for this research as it was a cheap and quick way to administer a large group of people in a short amount of time. It was crucial that the survey was short and simple so that it was easy to

follow and the participants did not get confused by complex questions. A disadvantage of using the survey was not everyone is able to access the internet to complete it and they take time and skill to develop (Walliman 2011).

The survey was written out with clear questions to ensure that the participants knew what was asked of them. It was also important that the survey was anonymous so that the participants felt comfortable answering honestly to prevent any biased opinions.

Research strategies

Data collection techniques are key components used within studies to categorise research methods (Chu and Ke 2017). Comparative research was used to analyse the various age groups that responded to the survey as it allows the study of two or more age groups. Analogy can be used to identify similarities which can predict results (Walliman 2011). This is beneficial for the research as it can look into detail at the micro environment of the community chosen (Walliman 2011).

Sampling

Bryman and Bell (2007) defined sampling as the fragment of the population that is selected for the research process. Convenience sampling also known as Haphazard Sampling was used to ask individuals who were easily accessible, met certain practical criteria and were available at any given time to participate within the study (Etikan et al 2016). This method was used as it worked well for the limited amount of time the survey was published. However, the downside of convenience sampling is that convenience itself offers nothing by the way of justification for the inclusion of people in the sample (Denscombe 2007). The nebulousness of the participants can result in unreliable data.

Once the survey was placed online a snowballing sampling then began as more people started to share the questionnaire with other people within the Highlands and Islands. Snowballing is effective as it makes use of referral networks of the initially selected respondents (Cooper and Schindler 2006). The advantage of this is that the accumulation of numbers is quick as it uses the multiplier effect where one person is nominating two or more others to complete the survey (Denscombe 2007).

A non-probability sampling is considered to be a range of techniques where the probability of selection is not known, this approach has been used as it is convenient and cost effective (Roux 2011).

Limitations

Limitations occurred based on the research gathered. A limitation was the result of using a survey as the lack of control the researcher has over the experimental condition creates a restriction (Weinclaw 2017). Response bias can also be a limitation as the participants could have answered the questions falsely. Another limitation is the sample size only includes the Highlands and Islands so this will not be a representative sample. This sample size does not gather the country as a whole and only looks into a small part of the UK. As convenience sampling was used this adds another limitation as the participants were not experts on the

survey topic so might not have understood what the questions were asking them.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was approved before the survey was conducted in November 2018. An Internet Mediated Research (IMR) was undertaken and the UHI Research Ethics Framework was read thoroughly. Throughout the study information briefs were given to the participants through a research participant information sheet and the whole process was anonymous. All participants volunteered to participate in the survey and were informed that their information was for research purposes to complete a dissertation.