

## Essentials of Marketing Research

Pearson Education

Naresh Malhotra, John Hall, Mike Shaw, Peter Oppenheim (2004)

The Essentials version of the Malhotra, Hall, Shaw and Oppenheim marketing research text provides the reader with an up-to-date and broad understanding of the components of marketing research. Though being an essentials version, it attempts to take the reader beyond the established and key elements of marketing research. It demonstrates some effort at conveying, though briefly, some of the more recent developments in marketing research. This text also continues the tradition of the full version of Malhotra's book of providing the reader with a range of learning tools – summary tables, flowcharts, definitions.

### Structure and Pedagogical Features

The text comprises four parts, covering a six step research process. Part 1 covers the first two steps of the research process, problem definition and the development of an approach to the problem. Part 2 is concerned with step 3 of the process, research design formulation, covering the major ways of collecting data. Part 3 continues with step 3, discussing data collection issues, namely questionnaire design and sampling, before going on to step 4, fieldwork issues. Part 4 then covers the final two steps in the research process, data preparation and analysis and reporting of results. Dividing six steps between four parts is at times a little confusing and untidy, particularly in terms of step 3 stretching across one and a half parts (Part 2 and 3). Condensing the full version into an essential book has added to this confusion through the merging of data preparation (part of step 5) into the chapter on fieldwork (step 4 of the research process). As in the full version, data preparation should be part of the chapters dealing with data analysis. Though the research process is cyclical and the steps intertwined, dividing the research steps cleanly between the parts and, indeed between the chapters, would eliminate some confusion and help the introductory research student to have a clearer understanding of the research process.

The layout of the book is appealing. Effective use is made of headings and subheadings, the latter providing a useful summary, for the student, of major issues in each topic. Each chapter has a number of examples and there is a variety that is likely to appeal to students. The examples cover Australia, New Zealand and Asia, making them relevant, adding interest and demonstrating how research can be used in the real world. Numerous tables throughout the book help to summarise and consolidate key points. Much use is also made of flowcharts. Though these are a beneficial tool for students to gain insight into the various decisions and processes that make up the stages of marketing research, the number of flowcharts tends to get a little tedious. Definitions of key terms are provided in the margins and also provided in the Glossary.

Each chapter commences with its objectives, providing a useful device for students' learning, and concludes with a brief summary and a number of review Questions and Problems. The Questions cover theoretical concepts, allowing a revision of basic content. The Problems present simple applications of the learning from the chapter, in many instances encouraging the student to explore their environment for relevant examples. To supplement this, two comprehensive cases per part are provided at the end of the book to solidify students' understanding and to learn about research in more real-life situations. A range of supplements, PowerPoint slides, Instructor's Manual and Testbank, are available for instructors either on CD or through the supporting website.

### Content

No matter how appealing and impressive a book may appear, content is the key issue. How does this book perform in this area? In comparison to other essential marketing research texts, it is very comparable, probably slightly above average. As in most research texts, this

Essentials version begins with an introduction to the market research industry and the types of problems a market researcher may investigate, before introducing the market research process. A constructive discussion of the first two steps of the research process follows. There are a number of valuable inclusions in this first part. Though more emphasis throughout the book is placed on how to do research, this section provides some valuable information for the user or commissioner of research, in particular comprehensive details of what a research brief and a research proposal should contain. Since these two documents play essential roles in a research project, an understanding of them is vital for students, particularly since many in the future are likely to be in the position of requesting some research. The discussion of the role of theory and models in developing ideas and structure of a research approach is another plus. Though relatively brief, this section helps to highlight how the theories from other areas of marketing, for example consumer behaviour, are pertinent to marketing research. A number of examples are provided illustrating how knowledge of this theory can be translated into research questions.

Part 2 provides an efficient description of the various ways of designing research. The discussion in Chapter 3 provides a broad listing of the numerous ways of gathering secondary data, including the role of the Internet. However, the strength of this chapter lies in the comprehensive listing and brief description of the ever expanding sources of syndicated data. This is not often covered in detail in texts, though there are a couple of exceptions. It is also refreshing to see some mention of the growing areas of single-source data and computer mapping that would enable some classroom discussion on the usefulness of combining information from different sources and its role in marketing research.

One area in which all research texts need improving, and not just essential versions, is that dealing with qualitative research. There are two issues that require improvement here: the range of techniques and the analysis of qualitative data. All texts are quite efficient at explaining the various traditional qualitative techniques – what they are, how they differ, their advantages and disadvantages etc. They even provide information on how to conduct these techniques, hints for moderators, and characteristics of moderators. This text is no different. Though these traditional methods are the most popular, and therefore the rationale for their inclusion and discussion is apparent, some mention of more recent (and at time, not so recent) developments would be

beneficial. This text, like the full version, partly tries to address this issue with a brief discussion of phenomenology, ethnography and interpretive practice. Some of these practices are being used on a regular basis by practitioners. Therefore, if students are to come out of a course with relevant knowledge, they should at least know of the existence of techniques beyond focus groups and in-depth interviews.

The second area for improvement is the analysis of qualitative data. As Malhotra et al. recognize, "... business users have been increasingly drawn to the virtues of ..qualitative methodologies.." (p.120), however, it is very rare for a marketing research text to discuss *how* this qualitative data can be analysed and presented. This is a difficult area, and it is not expected that a research text, yet alone an essentials version of a text, should cover this in detail. However Proctor (2003) demonstrates that this is possible, with the inclusion of a whole chapter on qualitative analysis. Malhotra et al., in this text, have attempted have to provide some discussion of analysis issues and methods. More, though, could be done, particularly in terms of how to present qualitative results. Much time and emphasis is placed on how to analyse and interpret quantitative data (two chapters in this text) and even the report preparation and presentation chapter concentrates entirely on the presentation of quantitative data with numerous examples of charts and graphs. Some identification of the issues involved with qualitative data presentation beyond "...displaying data in an organized way" and "... qualitative data analysis has an equally important place for market researchers.." (p.120) is necessary in order to present a more balanced approach.

Part 3 covers issues in data collection – questionnaire design, sampling and fieldwork. It has an efficient discussion of what to do, and not do, when constructing a questionnaire and illustrates these points with a number of examples. The chapter on sampling outlines the sampling process and then concentrates on the various sampling methods. There is no discussion of sample size calculations beyond listing qualitative factors that may impact on actual sample size. The omission of any formula in this area is in keeping with the text's aim of being an introductory text that covers the basic issues in research.

As with the previous editions of Malhotra research texts, quantitative analysis is a forte of this edition (Part 4). Not only does it put data analysis strategy in terms of the research process, but it provides the reader with a basic

understanding of when, how and what a variety of tests can provide for market researchers. Within chapter illustrations with associated (SPSS) output tables provide the reader with an opportunity to become familiar with a range of statistical procedures. Added to this are a number of appendices that detail how these tests can be conducted within SPSS. However, it is unknown why Appendix 9A, dealing with some practical data manipulation tools, does not provide more helpful instructions on how to do these manipulations. Fortunately, this is not an issue with the other SPSS appendices. Techniques discussed cover descriptives, t-tests, a range of ANOVA, correlation and regression. This is sufficient for students within a one semester course. However, again it is a pity that no mention is made of techniques beyond these to inform students that analysis in research can be more complex.

Part 4 concludes with a chapter on the communication of research findings. The emphasis is on the written communication of research findings, with explanation of the issues in report preparation and presentation. Little is said about the oral communication of results. This chapter provides the reader with a checklist of what should be contained in a report. As in chapter one, the chapter also touches on some useful information for the user of research by detailing some guidelines for reading and evaluating a research project.

This is a book ideally suited to a one semester, marketing research course, aiming to provide students with an introduction to the basic issues.

#### Reference

Proctor, A., 2003, *Essentials of Marketing Research*, Prentice Hall, United Kingdom.

*Jennifer Harris*

*University of New South Wales*

