

Marketing Research

Chapter 10

Observation

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

1. Discuss the role of observation as a marketing research method
2. Describe the use of direct observation and contrived observation
3. Identify ethical issues in observation studies
4. Explain the observation of physical objects and message content
5. Describe major types of mechanical observation
6. Summarize techniques for measuring physiological reactions

Scientific Observation Is Systematic

“You see, but you
do not observe.”

Sherlock Holmes

Observation in Marketing Research

- Observation
 - The systematic process of recording the behavioral patterns of people, objects, and occurrences as they are witnessed.

Observation in Marketing Research

- Observation is a tool for scientific inquiry when it:
 - Serves a formulated research purpose.
 - Is planned and recorded systematically.
 - Is related to general propositions rather than simply reflecting a set of interesting curiosities.
 - Is subjected to checks or controls on validity and reliability.

What Can Be Observed?

- Physical actions
 - The movement pattern of shoppers in a store
- Verbal behavior
 - Statements made by airline travelers waiting in line
- Expressive behavior
 - Facial expressions, tone of voice, and other forms of body language

What Can Be Observed? (cont'd)

- Spatial relations and locations
 - How close visitors at an art museum stand to paintings
- Temporal patterns
 - How long fast-food customers wait for their order to be served
- Verbal and pictorial records
 - Bar codes on product packages

EXHIBIT 10.1 What Can Be Observed

Phenomenon	Example
Physical action	A shopper's movement pattern in a store
Verbal behavior	Statements made by airline travelers while waiting in line
Expressive behavior	Facial expressions, tones of voices, and other forms of body language
Spatial relations and locations	How close visitors at an art museum stand to paintings
Temporal patterns	How long fast-food customers wait for their orders to be served
Physical objects	What brand-name items are stored in consumers' pantries
Verbal and pictorial records	Bar codes on product packages

What Cannot Be Observed?

- Limitations of Observations in General
 - Observation can describe the event that occurred but cannot explain why the event occurred.
 - Observation over long periods is expensive or even impossible.

Observation of Human Behavior

- Limitations
 - Cognitive phenomena cannot be observed
 - Interpretation of data may be a problem
 - Not all activity can be recorded
 - Only short periods can be observed
 - Observer bias possible
 - Possible invasion of privacy

The Nature of Observation Studies

- Visible Observation
 - Observation in which the observer's presence is known to the subject.
- Hidden Observation
 - Observation in which the subject is unaware that observation is taking place.

The Nature of Observation Studies (cont'd)

- Advantages of Observation over Surveying
 - Data are free from distortions, inaccuracies, or other response biases.
 - Data are recorded when actual and nonverbal behavior takes place.

EXHIBIT 10.2

Nonverbal Communication: Status and Power Gestures

Behavior	Between People of Equal Status		Between People of Unequal Status		Between Men and Women	
	Intimate	Nonintimate	Used by Superior	Used by Subordinate	Used by Men	Used by Women
Posture	Relaxed	Tense (less relaxed)	Relaxed	Tense	Relaxed	Tense
Personal space	Closeness	Distance	Closeness (optional)	Distance	Closeness	Distance
Touching	Touch	Don't touch	Touch (optional)	Don't touch	Touch	Don't touch
Eye gaze	Establish	Avoid	Stare, ignore	Avert eyes, watch	Stare, ignore	Avert eyes
Demeanor	Informal	Circumspect	Informal	Circumspect	Informal	Circumspect
Emotional expression	Show	Hide	Hide	Show	Hide	Show
Facial expression	Smile	Don't smile	Don't smile	Smile	Don't smile	Smile

Source: Nancy M. Henley, *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), p. 181.

Observation of Human Behavior

- Benefits
 - Communication with respondent is not necessary
 - Data not distorted by self-report bias (e.g.; without social desirability)
 - No need to rely on respondents' memory
 - Nonverbal behavior data may be obtained

Observation of Human Behavior (cont'd)

- Benefits
 - Certain data may be obtained more quickly
 - Environmental conditions may be recorded
 - May be combined with survey to provide supplemental evidence

Observation of Human Behavior

- Complementary Evidence
 - Observation provides an additional source of information that helps explain other research findings.

Observation of Human Behavior (cont'd)

- Direct Observation
 - A straightforward attempt to observe and record what naturally occurs; the investigator does not create an artificial situation.
- Response Latency
 - The amount of time it takes to make a choice between two alternatives; used as a measure of the strength of preference.

Errors Associated With Direct Observation

- Observer Bias
 - A distortion of measurement resulting from the cognitive behavior or actions of a witnessing observer.
 - Recording events subjectively
 - Recording events inaccurately
 - Interpreting observation data incorrectly

Scientifically Contrived Observation

- Contrived Observation
 - Observation in which the investigator creates an artificial environment in order to test a hypothesis.
 - Environment may increase the frequency of certain behavior patterns to be observed.

Ethical Issues in the Observation of Humans

- Issues
 - Respondent's right to privacy
 - Contrived observation as entrapment
- Researchers feel comfortable collecting observational data if:
 - The observed behavior is commonly performed in public where others can observe the behavior.
 - The behavior is performed in a setting that assures the anonymity of the person being observed.
 - The observed person has agreed to be observed.

Observation (cont'd)

- Observation of Physical Objects
 - Physical-trace evidence
 - Wear and tear of a book indicates how often it has been read.
- Content Analysis
 - The systematic observation and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.
 - Obtaining data by observing and analyzing the content of advertisements, letters, articles, etc.
 - Deals with the study of the message itself.
 - Measures the extent of emphasis or omission.

Mechanical Observation

- Television Monitoring
 - Computerized mechanical observation used to obtain television ratings.
- Monitoring Website Traffic
 - Hits and page views
 - Unique visitors
 - Click-through rate (CTR)
 - Proportion of people exposed to an Internet ad who actually click on its hyperlink to enter the website; click-through rates are generally very low.

Mechanical Observation (cont'd)

- Scanner-Based Research
 - Scanner-based consumer panel
 - A type of consumer panel in which participants' purchasing habits are recorded with a laser scanner rather than a purchase diary.
 - At-home scanning systems
 - Systems that allow consumer panelists to perform their own scanning after taking home products, using handheld wands that read UPC symbols.

Measuring Physiological Reactions

- Eye-Tracking Monitor
 - Records how the subject actually reads or views an advertisement.
 - Measures unconscious eye movements.

Measuring Physiological Reactions

- Pupilometer
 - Observes and records changes in the diameter of the subject's pupils.

Measuring Physiological Reactions

- Psychogalvanometer
 - Measures galvanic skin response—involuntary changes in the electrical resistance of the skin.
 - Assumes that physiological changes accompany emotional reactions.

Measuring Physiological Reactions (cont'd)

- Voice Pitch Analysis
 - Measures emotional reactions through physiological changes in a person's voice.

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Key Terms and Concepts

- observation
- visible observation
- hidden observation
- direct observation
- response latency
- observer bias
- contrived observation
- content analysis
- television monitoring
- click-through rate
- scanner-based consumer panel
- at-home scanning system
- eye-tracking monitor
- pupilometer
- psychogalvanometer
- voice pitch analysis

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Thank you