

The Art & Science of Interpreting Market Research Evidence

D.V.L. Smith and J.H. Fletcher



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Contents

Foreword	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
1 'New' market research	1
2 Not a science, but a scientific approach	15
3 Data-rich intuitive analysis	27
4 Analysing the right problem	37
5 Understanding the big information picture	49
6 Compensating for imperfect data	61
7 Developing the analysis strategy	83
8 Organizing the qualitative data	91
9 Organizing the quantitative data	105
10 Establishing the interpretation boundary	129
11 Applying the knowledge filters	149
12 Reframing the data	169
13 Integrating the evidence and presenting research as a narrative	179
14 Facilitating informed decision-making	195

15	Developing holistic data analysis	211
16	Guide to the supporting training module	217
Notes		219
References		225
Glossary of holistic analysis terms		229
Index		231

Foreword

It is a great pleasure to write a foreword to this book. I believe that the contents have the potential to lead a major step forward in the way in which managers in organizations use and apply evidence and fact-based knowledge to make decisions.

It is stunning that across wholly diverse industrial sectors – for example, look at market leader characteristics all the way from high technology at Dell Computers to marketing grocery and household products at Tesco stores – we are finally realizing that those who *know* more outperform the rest. Superiority in learning and sustaining that advantage through the constant search for new insights and better understanding of the drivers of customer value in the marketplace has proved to be one of the most critical corporate competencies. Yet, it is a source of competitive advantage we have underestimated so much that we have not even found a name for it.

We do know, however, that enhancing capabilities in learning faster and better than the competition to build sustained competitive advantage through superior knowledge requires far more than acquiring techniques and technology for data collection and analysis. The volume of data that the technology can produce, and the precise measurement that data collection and analysis tools can provide are important resources. However, at best they are part of the total array of clues and insights that build superior understanding of the marketplace. To believe that they are the only ways to generate and test new ways of doing things is as fatuous as pursuing the tired debate about the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research designs. Such introspective obsessions lead us to miss the real point.

That point is the prime goal of: building understanding and insight; sensing and anticipating change; and value innovation for superior performance. Important progress towards meeting this elusive goal can be made by emphasizing the interpretation of the whole array of evidence available, regardless of type, not simply reporting data, and working with decision-makers to develop effective and sustained learning processes. The approach in this book provides a valuable framework for implementing these priorities.

There can never have been a time when the need for evidence-based knowledge as the basis for management decision-making was greater. It is timely for

market research professionals to consider their future in this new scenario and the ways in which they can best add value to decision-making processes.

Professor Nigel F. Piercy
*Warwick Business School
The University of Warwick*

Preface

The last few years have seen the arrival of ‘new’ market research. Gone are the days when market research posed as a quasi-academic activity that only flirted with the business decision-making process. Today, market researchers are much more focused on improving the quality of business decision-making.

This arrival of new market research has presented the industry with an exciting challenge. This is, how best to communicate to its client base (and also to new graduates entering the industry) exactly how new market research operates. This book addresses this issue.

- It provides a comprehensive review of the frameworks that today’s new market researchers use to draw together different types of, often imperfect, qualitative and quantitative data, and explains how they apply this evidence to successful information-based decision-making.

This introduction to how new market researchers now interpret data will be of interest to those fascinated as to why so many of the existing textbooks on market research bear little resemblance to how market research really operates in practice. Specifically, our account will be of particular benefit to:

- University graduates who have recently taken up posts as market research practitioners, either on the client or agency side.
- Users of market research data who need an overview of how modern market research now operates.
- Lecturers on, and students of, market research, who may wish to incorporate our practical insights into their courses.
- Individuals working in central and local government involved in evidence-based decision-making.

In sum, the book is aimed at individuals who want a simple synthesis of the way in which market research analysts are now going beyond their traditional methodological approaches, and are today operating with a more powerful set of data analysis techniques in making sense of customer evidence.

Supporting training module

To help educationalists and trainers who wish to run a module on the data analysis principles raised in this book, we have prepared a ten-unit lecture course that mirrors the content of this book. This is available in the form of a series of Microsoft PowerPoint charts. For details on how to obtain these charts visit Wiley's website: www.wileyurope.com/go/smith. This supporting training module will:

- Help trainers in market research agencies convert the ideas in this book into a training course that could be used to introduce their new graduate trainees to the principles of 'new' market research.
- Assist lecturers on market research courses in colleges and universities to supplement their 'orthodox' teaching on market research with an up-to-date account of how many market research practitioners now operate.

In addition – working in conjunction with the supplementary points we make in the 'Notes' section – the training module will help bring alive, with concrete worked examples, many of the general principles outlined in this book.

Acknowledgements

Deciding on the final shape of a book that provides a fresh look at the data analysis craft necessitated a considerable amount of drafting. We continually had to check whether our synthesis of existing theory and commercial practice was pitched at an appropriate level for our audience: newcomers to market research. This placed considerable pressure on Christine Rooke, who typed this book, and we would like to start this acknowledgement by thanking her for her professionalism and patience in bringing this book together.

We would also like to thank Anne Smith for editing the various drafts, and for helping to make the book, what we believe, is now an accessible and user-friendly introduction to data analysis for those coming from either an arts or science background. Thanks also to Paul Costantoura for his insights on how best to engage the reader.

In preparing the book, it was helpful for the authors to be Directors at Citigate DVL Smith, part of Incepta Marketing Intelligence, the strategic market intelligence group. This meant that in writing this book we were able to draw on the expertise of various colleagues experienced in innovative data analysis. In particular, thanks are due to Andy Dexter for his ideas, and for supplying a number of specific quantitative examples.

Thanks are also due to Gavin Mulholland, who contributed some extremely useful illustrative practical examples, and to Ian Horritt for his helpful observations on various aspects of Internet surveys, and to John Connaughton for his various editorial contributions, designed to help make sure that we struck the appropriate balance between the art and science, and the theory and practice of commercial data analysis. Finally, a big thanks to Jo Smith, for helping us, throughout the whole process, to make difficult decisions about which of our data analysis ideas should go forward into print, and which should, for the time being, remain on the developmental drawing board. So in many ways, this book is a Citigate DVL Smith team initiative. Thanks to you all.