

Application of Ethnographic Methods in Automotive Consumer Research

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Abstract

China's auto market has changed from a total market to a stock market. The four significant changes in the automotive industry's intelligence, networking, electrification, and sharing have changed the original connotation of automobiles. Under the sector's impact, the automotive industry chain is being restructured, bringing many challenges to car companies regarding product definition, product development, and product marketing. Under such an industry background and trend, car companies have adjusted their competitive strategies in response to challenges, shifting from product-centric to user-centric and paying more attention to the user's consumption experience. Consumer research in the automotive industry is increasingly important.

Keywords

Ethnography; Car Consumption; Car Consumers.

1. Introduction

Automobile consumer research covers the entire life cycle from the concept of automobile products to the pre-market and post-market. The research content includes consumer portraits, consumer demand research, consumer purchase decisions, etc. The research methods involve ample data research, desk Analysis, quantitative research, qualitative research, etc.

Among them, quantitative research mainly refers to the questionnaire interview method, and qualitative research specifically includes work interviews, focus group discussions, in-depth home visits, in-depth interviews with vehicles, and expert interviews. The competition in the automobile industry is very fierce, and automobile products are also rapidly iteratively upgraded. China is in the high-end "third consumption era" and is moving towards the "fourth consumption era." Consumer demands are diversified, personalized, and intelligent. Features. The traditional research methods lack research depth and efficiency, and the research methods for automobile consumers need to be updated and developed urgently. This paper introduces the ethnographic research method into the research of automobile consumers, updates the traditional research method of automobile consumers, and studies the portraits, needs, and characteristics of automobile consumers under the new situation more effectively and deeply.

2. An Overview of Ethnographic Methods and Their Multi-field Research Applications

The ethnographic research method originated from anthropological field investigation. It has become an important research method in continuous practice and development and has been used for reference, integration, and innovation in many disciplines and fields.

2.1. Anthropological Ethnographic Methods

Ethnography has dual connotations of "stylistics" and "methods" and is a unique textual form with a long history and an academic research method closely related to fieldwork in different cultures. Ethnography as a research method mainly includes observation and participation observation method, interview method, genealogy method, life history, subject-object viewpoint method, in-depth description, and analysis method, etc. Generally speaking, ethnography is an explanatory qualitative research method.

Anthropological ethnography has experienced different stages of development, from "casual and spontaneous" to "scientific and normative." Ethnography was the earliest record of foreign cultures by missionaries and explorers in the West. It was random, spontaneous, and amateur. This kind of record and descriptive ethnography was biased towards religion or a particular aspect of the recorder's attention. At the same time, It is not a comprehensive and systematic expression of local culture. With the standardization of anthropology and ethnography as the primary research method of anthropology, ethnography has also become "scientific and normative." An important symbol of scientific ethnography is the famous anthropologist Malinowski's book *Voyagers in the Western Pacific*, in which he chronicles Malinowski's stay in the Trobriand Islands. The results of two years of fieldwork practice, combining the data collected from fieldwork with theoretical research. The renowned anthropologist Malinowski wrote *Voyagers in the Western Pacific*. He chronicled the results of Malinowski's two-year fieldwork practice in the Trobriand Islands. He integrated the data collected by field investigation with theoretical research, which is an important symbol of the scientific development of ethnographic methods. The scientific nature of ethnography refers to the process of field investigation, living and working in common with the research object or group, learning the language used by the research object, participating in the production practice of the research object, and observing the living customs in the place where the research object is located—in-depth explanation of the characteristics of the studied group from the perspective of cultural wholeness.

Because the survey methods of interviews and inquiries are only superficial, the data and information obtained through long-term participation and observation will be broader and more profound. The participatory observation method of ethnography highlights the importance of consumer research.

2.2. Multi-domain Applications of Ethnographic Methods

Ethnographic methods are also applied in continuous practice and development in other disciplines and industries.

In the field of communication, the application of the method of famous organization is mainly used in TV audience research, urban labor research, and research on the identity change of journalists. For example, as a media practitioner for many years, Yang Haiying, based on in-depth and solid ethnographic investigation data, explored the formation of the identity of a professional journalist by sorting out the media's flexible employment system and changing news production methods, increasingly embarrassing living conditions. We are evolving multiple power relations.

In management, the Hawthorne experiment was the initial application of ethnographic methods in the 1920s. Through long-term observations and interviews with workers, it was concluded that "new interpersonal leaders should have the economic needs and the ability to balance formally organized social needs." Subsequently, many management fields, such as organization and management research, organizational culture research, team management research, etc., began to use ethnographic research methods more or less.

In journalism, "news ethnography" was developed in the 1970s. Researchers entered the newsroom to observe news organizations and production processes for a long time and to

explain and analyze news production in depth. News ethnography has become more inclusive with the increased field mobility of news production and the diversification of news production subjects.

In the field of library and information, ethnographic methods were formally applied in the 1990s, including McKechnie's research on the use of libraries by preschool girls, Schultze's research on the work practice of multiple groups of library-related knowledge workers, etc. 1999, "Information" The publication of *Ecologies: Using Technology With Heart* is a milestone in the study of ethnographic methods in anthropology. Ethnographic methods have been applied in many fields, such as cultural research, user research, library service evaluation, and planning in library and information science.

In the field of market research, Wang Xingzhou proposed that anthropological research methods can be transplanted and applied in many fields of market research to make up for the shortcomings of traditional market research method systems, including market research on border areas and ethnic minorities, consumer culture research, ethnic market research, community research, group research Customer research, Simple Society exchange and market research. At the same time, he suggested that anthropological research methods can effectively study sensitive issues, behavioral issues, consumer groups with weak expressive ability, developing new products, and facing brand-new research topics. Lin Guimei focuses on "field research points." Based on distinguishing between anthropological field research points and market research "field points," Lin believes it is necessary to conduct targeted research when researching different types of markets, such as traditional wholesale and retail markets. Conduct a comprehensive understanding of the selected research area and perform a complete and thorough market analysis.

Anthropological ethnography as a qualitative research method has been used for reference in many fields, but currently, there are few references to ethnographic methods in user research. Only Zhang Liyuan's "Xianyu APP User Research Based on Ethnographic Methods," Wang Yafang's "Observation Method and Interview Method in User Research," and other articles have some relevant research. Still, there is no relevant research in automobile consumer research. In addition, the reference to ethnographic methods of anthropology in various fields is limited to the "participatory observation method" and "in-depth interview method" at the practical level. Perspectives and analytical techniques such as the "holistic view" have significant reference value. Therefore, based on the research field of automobile consumers, this paper attempts to integrate the methods of anthropology and ethnography into the research of automobile consumers, innovate the research methods of automobile consumers, and improve the research method system of automobile consumers.

3. Application of Anthropological Ethnographic Methods in the Study of Automobile Consumers

To sincerely apply the ethnographic method to automobile consumption research, scholars in this paper discuss the aspects of research methods, overarching perspectives, and analysis methods.

3.1. Cultural Holistic View

The holistic cultural view is an essential point of view in anthropology. Anthropology regards people and the culture and society in which they grow and live as a whole, with its structure and internal connection. The research object is placed in the cultural environment in which the research is carried out. Using the perspective of the holistic view of culture in consumer research in the automotive field, not only the psychology, behavior, and needs of users need to be considered, but also cultural background, living environment, customs, language, religion,

ethics, and values. Careful consideration, including ethnicity and regional differences, has essential research value on the car's overall concept impact. This method is actually "cultural decoding" of users through comprehensive analysis and understanding. Car consumer research involves domestic and foreign markets and has significant geographic and cultural differences in the local Chinese market. When conducting consumer research, it is necessary to add a cultural perspective to the analysis. For example, in the Hakka culture in Guangdong, the history of migration and displacement has shaped the Hakka people. Ethnic values of being pragmatic and avoiding falsehoods, frugality, and hard work. The Hakka people's cultural tradition of diligence and thrift explains the phenomenon that the Hakka people have high incomes but are more willing to buy cars with lower prices. In other words, if you only judge consumption decisions based on income, Silent will not work for Hakka people to buy a car. Therefore, the analysis from the cultural perspective enriches and improves the research on automobile consumers.

3.2. Deep Drawing Method

"Deep description" is interpretive anthropology based on interpretation and understanding established by Geertz, the interpretation of an interpretation. Culture is a system of meaning, symbols are tools for expressing intention, and deep drawing involves two layers of connotation. One is that the researcher should understand the researched's symbols; the other is that the researcher should subjectively interpret and "translate" based on experience.

In the research and analysis of automobile consumers, on the one hand, it is necessary to place oneself in the environment of consumers, to record, describe and, empathize with, understand consumers' concepts, behaviors, car selection, and car use situations from consumers' perspectives. Look at the problem from a stand and carry out a "shallow description." On the other hand, it is necessary to carry out a broader perspective and more profound analysis.

3.3. Panoramic Observation/Participation Observation

The participatory observation method refers to the observation made by the researcher in the process of actually participating in the daily social life of the research object by going deep into the life background of the research object. Researchers become "insiders," join in and create "experiences" with research subjects, establish trusting relationships, and conduct "panoramic observations." This method has been applied to practical research in many industries. For example, in the study of a game product, the researchers spend all day with the players, including eating, entertainment, meeting with friends, etc., to conduct in-depth research. Observations and interviews are integrated into players' lives. In this way, we can understand the life and psychology of the game player population and obtain information that cannot be obtained through questionnaires and general interviews. In the study of automobile consumers, the "immersive observation and interview method" can be used to participate in the car life scenarios with consumers and deeply explore the multi-level needs of consumers through scene regression. By participating in observation and interviews, we can not only explore the pain points of consumers in real-life situations and the needs expressed by consumers through language but also based on establish trust through in-depth observation and interviews to discover users' "unspoken truth," that is, Unspoken, hidden needs, and pain points.

4. Conclusion

The automobile industry, such as new energy, intelligence (connection), new technology, and new industrial chain, faces sweeping and profound changes. On the one hand, as an essential part of the automobile industry, automobile consumption is participating in reconstructing the entire automobile industry. The trend of being king is becoming more and more user-centered, and the importance of automotive consumer research has become increasingly prominent. The

traditional automotive consumer research method system needs to be updated urgently. Based on conventional research, anthropological ethnography's cultural holistic view, deep description method, and participatory observation method can more comprehensively and deeply dig and analyze user needs, empower car consumer research, and help car companies "grasp the industry" in the wave of industry change—jail" consumers.

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