

# **Are “Paradigms Lost” in Marketing?**

**Some Twenty Years Later...:**

## **A Content Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

It has been more than twenty years since Deshpande (1983) wrote his “Paradigms Lost” article. My objective in this paper is an attempt to provide a more statistical account of the article’s claim that quantitative research dominates the marketing literature, but after some twenty years later. A content analysis of the three leading journals in marketing (JM, JMR and JCR) was done for three years (2002 to 2004). The findings do provide “snapshot” evidence of the dominance of the quantitative paradigm. However, though purely qualitative studies are still minimal, their integration with quantitative studies maybe catching pace.

## Extended Abstract

In the fall of 1983, Rohit Deshpande wrote an article in the *Journal of Marketing* entitled “Paradigms lost: On Theory and Method in Research in Marketing.” The article presented a discussion of the dominance of the positivist or quantitative paradigm over the much neglected qualitative one in marketing. Our objective in this paper is an attempt to provide a more statistical account of the article’s claim that quantitative research dominates the marketing literature, but after some twenty years later.

The quantitative-qualitative debate is a lengthy one that dates “back to the late nineteenth century and the development of an interpretive approach to social inquiry, which was a reaction to positivism” (Smith and Heshusius, 1986, p. 4). Several researchers point out the need for and importance of qualitative research which would help provide a better understanding of the complex nature of the social world we live in (Cronbach 1975; Hirschman 1986). Others disagree and state that such qualitative research is purely subjective (Smith and Heshusius 1986) and some go as far as claiming that “it doesn’t constitute market research” and that “two people doing the same qualitative study can obtain totally different results” (Achenbaum 2001, p. 14).

On comparing the two methodologies, some say that they can be considered as mutually exclusive (Tauber 1987) and each method has its own set of different evaluation criteria (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Brodbeck (1968, p. 573) states that “the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy is spurious,” and Seymour (1989) argues that consumer research should not be an “either/or” case when it comes to the type of methodology used but rather it should be able to encompass and build a more comprehensive understanding of the consumer. He further recommends staying away from being too focused on the method and the “technique-driven-and lose track of the real purpose in generating information” (p. 27). Likewise, Kassanjian (1989) offers a similar view as he says that “the appropriate question is whether or not it is good science, rather than what kind of science it is,” and “is it making a contribution to knowledge?” (p. 126).

In the “Paradigms Lost” article, the focus of our paper here, Deshpande argues that the marketing literature has been dominated by one paradigm and that is the logical empiricism/positivism or the quantitative paradigm. He offers a discussion on the dominance of the quantitative paradigm over the often abandoned qualitative one which may be responsible for the low development of theory construction in marketing research. He suggests attaining a balance between the two paradigms and calls for more triangulation of methods and using each method more appropriately. This would be in an attempt to reduce the current bias that exists especially when addressing the issues of theory discovery versus theory verification.

In this study we used a content analysis procedure to investigate our research question of whether quantitative methods research does dominate the marketing literature even after twenty years of the “Paradigms Lost” article. We reviewed all the articles for the top three marketing journals (Hult, Neese, and Bashaw 1997), namely: the *Journal of Marketing* (JM), the *Journal of Marketing Research* (JMR), and the *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR) from the years 2002 to 2004. We chose the past three years to reflect a “snapshot” of the recent trend. We basically classified each article on whether it was a quantitative study, a qualitative one or both based strictly on the research methodology

used. Thus articles that do not include any methodology used were considered not applicable.

We analyzed a total of 394 articles (109 in JM, 115 in JMR and 170 in JCR). Almost half (47.2%) of all the articles published were of the quantitative methodology. Purely qualitative articles made up a mere 7.1% and articles containing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies made up 32.7%. Articles that were considered not applicable made up the remaining 12.9%.

When looking at the journals more specifically, we found that JCR had the highest percentage of purely quantitative articles (65.3%) and at the same time it had the highest percentage of qualitative articles (13.5%). JMR had the lowest percentage of qualitative articles with only *one* article in the three years investigated! And JM also had a very low percentage of qualitative articles (3.7%). However, both JMR and JM had the highest percentage of articles with both methodologies used. Based on this analysis, it may be feasible perhaps to say that a researcher looking to publish a purely qualitative study maybe far better off shooting for JCR than JMR or even JM.

In terms of the types of methodologies used, experiments showed up as the highest percentage of methodology used, accounting for 41.4% of all the journal articles. Surveys, interviews and secondary data analysis were all almost similar in the percentage used (15-17%). To be more specific, quantitative articles were dominated by experiments and qualitative articles were dominated by interviews. Furthermore, in terms of the journals, JM was dominated by surveys, JMR was dominated by secondary data analysis and JCR was dominated by experiments. These particular findings provide further evidence of the dominance of the quantitative methodologies in marketing journals and perhaps indicate the preferences of certain methodologies over others.

In conclusion, based on our limited study, we have attempted to provide some preliminary evidence of the dominance of the quantitative paradigm over the much neglected qualitative paradigm in the marketing literature, even after more than twenty years of the “Paradigms Lost” article. However, the clear sign of studies including both methodologies provides growing evidence that even though purely qualitative studies are still minimal, there integration with quantitative studies maybe catching pace.

## **Introduction**

In the fall of 1983, Rohit Deshpande wrote an article in the Journal of Marketing entitled “Paradigms lost: On Theory and Method in Research in Marketing.” The article presents a discussion of the dominance of the positivist or quantitative paradigm over the much neglected qualitative one in marketing and calls for more triangulation of methods and using each method more appropriately to reduce the current bias that exists.

Our objective in this paper is an attempt to provide a more statistical account of the article’s claim that quantitative research dominates the marketing literature, but after some twenty years later, through a process of content analysis. In this process we analyzed all articles from the top three marketing journals during the past three years from 2002 to 2004.

We first begin with some background on the quantitative-qualitative debate, followed by an overview of the “Paradigms Lost” article. We then present our methodology and findings concluding with a discussion and limitations section.

### **The Quantitative-Qualitative Debate<sup>1</sup>**

The quantitative-qualitative debate is a lengthy one that dates back to the late nineteenth century with the growth of the interpretive approach (qualitative approach) to social inquiry which was considered a reaction to the positivist approach (Giddens, 1976; Hughes, 1958; Outhwaite, 1975, 1983; Polkinghorne, 1983; Smith 1983a, 1983b).

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<sup>1</sup> We just attempt to present here a brief overview of some of the arguments made on the debate issue just to serve as some background which should by no means be considered an exhaustive one.

One of the arguments made for the need for qualitative research was that made by Cronbach (1975) who argues that statistical research (or quantitative research) does not provide the whole picture by missing on many of the interaction effects that occur in the social setting. He calls for eliminating the “null hypothesis” since it doesn’t take account of effects that may just be statistically non significant, yet greatly important. Qualitative research however provides a better understanding of the complexity of the social world as he mentions.

Hirschman (1986) also addresses the importance of understanding and accepting the humanistic approach to inquiry, where the researcher immerses himself/herself within the system instead of standing away from it. Thus the researcher develops an understanding through “direct personal experience, rather than by the manipulation of experimental variables” (p. 238) as is done in quantitative research.

On the other hand, Smith and Heshusius (1986) state that qualitative research can only provide an interpretation of the interpretations of others and “all that can be done is to match descriptions, choosing to honor some as valid because they ‘make sense,’ given one’s interests and purposes. There is no rule book of procedures to follow” (p.9) as there seems to be in quantitative research.

Likewise Achenbaum (2001) cautions on the improper use of qualitative research going as far as claiming that “it doesn’t constitute market research” (p. 14). This is since, as he says, that qualitative research uses inadequate samples, inconsistent questioning methods and very subjective analysis. He goes on to say that qualitative research seems to be too biased towards what the researcher wants to get from it and states that “two people doing the same qualitative study can obtain totally different results” (p. 14).

On the subject of the qualitative-quantitative debate, some scholars were questioning the merit of actually comparing the two or even spending the time on arguing over it, whilst others disagreed.

Tauber (1987) argues that the two methodologies cannot be used to get the same information and that using one method will not provide the results that can replicated and tested using the other method as both the methodologies may be considered mutually exclusive that “stand on their own” (p. 7). The differences between the two methodologies can also be viewed in terms of the different criteria used to evaluate each research study. This is since as Lincoln and Guba (1985) mention, a researcher using the humanistic approach would test his/her research through its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability whereas a positivist researcher would use internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Thus you cannot compare one methodology with the criteria of the other.

On the merits of the debate itself, Brodbeck (1968) states that “the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy is spurious,” and that “although quantification has considerable merit, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for science” (p. 573-574). As for the issue of closing the debate itself, Smith and Heshusius (1986) greatly disagree voicing concerns that the “unjustified claims of compatibility and cooperation” between the two approaches to inquiry “is the wrong move at the wrong time” (p. 11).

On deciding on which methodology to adopt, Patton (1990) supports a “paradigm of choices” that searches for “methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality” (p.39). Along the same lines, Seymour (1989) argues that consumer research should not be an “either/or” case when it comes to the type of

methodology used but rather it should be able to encompass and build a more comprehensive understanding of the consumer. He recommends staying away from being too focused on the method and the “technique-driven-and lose track of the real purpose in generating information” (p. 27)<sup>2</sup>. Kassirjian (1989) offers a similar view as he says that “the appropriate question is whether or not it is good science, rather than what kind of science it is,” and “Is it making a contribution to knowledge?” (p. 126).

With regards to the final issue of triangulation, Deshpande (1983) states the need for triangulation of methods that would provide a suitable combination of both quantitative and qualitative procedures which would be able address the weaknesses of one methodology with the strengths of the other. However, Sale et al. (2002) argue that quantitative and qualitative paradigms do not research the same phenomena and thus “it follows that combining the two methods for cross-validation/triangulation purposes is not a viable option.” (p. 49). They further argue that although the methods are different and may be considered incommensurate, they can still be combined in a complementary manner where each method studies a different phenomenon. They continue saying that their solution of complementarity is different from the notion of using one method’s strengths to outweigh the weaknesses of the other, as it presents an “additive outcome” where both methods can be done together or after each other in one study or more. Sale et al. finally comment on the possibility of even entering into a new paradigm that comes with its own “new ontology, epistemology, and methodology.”

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<sup>2</sup> Seymour (1985) further cautions on the regular use of a certain number of limited techniques, as many researchers do, just because they are more comfortable using, and in doing so they will be missing on the many strengths of the other techniques present.

## **An Overview of “Paradigms Lost”**

In “Paradigms Lost”, Deshpande argues that the marketing literature has been dominated by one paradigm and that is logical empiricism/positivism or the quantitative paradigm. He offers a discussion on the dominance of the quantitative paradigm over the often abandoned qualitative one which is responsible for the low development of theory construction in marketing research. He suggests attaining a balance between the two paradigms and calls for more triangulation of methods and using each method more appropriately. This would be in an attempt to reduce the current bias that exists especially when addressing the issues of theory discovery versus theory verification.

Deshpande begins by addressing the nature of scientific paradigms and he refers to Khun’s definition of a paradigm as a “set of linked assumptions about the world which is shared by a community of scientists investigating that world” (p. 101). A paradigm provides scientists with a focus on the problems that need attention and the methodologies used to address them. He raises the often asked question of “How do we know what we know?” which he answers through the idea of it depending on the philosopher’s school of thought that can be simplified into two primary schools, them being “positivism” and “idealism.” However, these two schools of thought should be viewed, as he says, more as a range on a continuum than as being independent and mutually exclusive.

Positivism is presented as referring to the doctrine that human sense perception resembles the heart of scientific thinking and that “if a phenomenon could not be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted, then it could not exist” (p. 102). On the other hand, idealism is referred to as the notion that the mind (unlike the senses) is the basis of all

knowledge and that nothing exists unless someone perceives it to exist, as it is the individual who created the social world and it didn't preexist.

These schools of thought were made to relate to the paradigm discussion by equating positivism with the quantitative paradigm and idealism with the qualitative paradigm. Deshpande uses a quote from Reichardt and Cook (1979) to describe the two paradigms quoting "the quantitative paradigm is said to have a positivistic, hypothetico-deductive, particularistic, objective, outcome-oriented, and natural science world view. In contrast, the qualitative paradigm is said to subscribe to a phenomenological, inductive, holistic, subjective, process-oriented, and social anthropological world view" (p. 9, 10)<sup>3</sup>. In adopting a position on the type of paradigm used, Deshpande mentions that a researcher would be thought to thus subscribe to the research methods and tools demanded by such a paradigm as it has been shown that there exists a strong link between research paradigms and research methods.

A reference is then made to the panel discussion in the 1982 AMA theory conference in which advocates of both schools of thought were present. It was evident from the discussion that there was no disagreement on logical empiricism being the dominant paradigm in marketing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A table showing the differences between the two paradigms was also presented which was adopted from Reichardt and Cook (1979).

<sup>4</sup> Hunt (1991) rejects the view that social science and consumer research are dominated by logical positivism or even logical empiricism (and he disagrees with the notion of equating the words "positivism" with "quantitative" ) as he says that "consumer research has no such paradigm: no paradigm or philosophical 'ism' dominates consumer research" (p. 40). He suggests adopting Lutz (1989) call for critical pluralism through providing an open and tolerant attitude toward new theories and methods and at the same time subjecting all these theories, methods and their claims to critical scrutiny. And in doing so, Hunt aims to provide an optimistic projection towards rapprochement.

Deshpande later discusses the method bias that exists in marketing research. He refers again to Reichardt and Cook in providing perhaps the most important difference between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms which is “on the dimension of verification versus discovery” where “quantitative methods have been developed most directly for the task of verifying or confirming theories and ...qualitative methods were purposely developed for the task of discovering or generating theories” (Reichardt and Cook , 1979, p. 17). However, Deshpande points out that marketing researchers “have been using methods of theory verification almost exclusively even in situations where theory discovery was more appropriate” (p. 106) and this is where the method bias exists and needs to be fixed.

Towards the end of the article, Deshpande gives us his take on the issue, stating that instead of taking sides, it would be more valuable if scholars began understanding that “both paradigms have a place in marketing, provided they are not being made to do each other’s work” (p. 107). He calls for more effort to be made towards the often neglected qualitative paradigm and suggests adopting the triangulation of methods which “would lead to using an appropriate mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods such that the weaknesses of one set of methodologies is compensated for by the strengths of the other and vice versa” (p. 107).

### **Methodology**

In this study we used a content analysis procedure to investigate our research question of whether quantitative methods research does dominate the marketing literature even after twenty years of the “Paradigms Lost” article. On deciding which academic marketing journals to select from the numerous ones out there, we decided to choose the

top three marketing journals based on the ranking provided by Hult, Neese, and Bashaw (1997). Based on this ranking we used the Journal of Marketing (JM), the Journal of Marketing Research (JMR) and the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR).

We reviewed the articles for each journal for the past three years from the year 2002 to the year 2004. We chose the past three years to reflect a snapshot of the recent trend and to provide some evidence after around twenty years of the “Paradigms Lost” article. We basically classified each article on whether it was a quantitative study, a qualitative one or both. We based our classification of the articles strictly on the research methodology used for simplicity purposes and to avoid subjectivity as much as possible. Thus purely conceptual articles that do not include any methodology used were considered not applicable.

An article was classified as a quantitative one if its research methodology used a survey (whether it be through mail, telephone, intercept, online, field etc.), experiment or any other quantitative technique. On the other hand, an article was classified as a qualitative one if its research methodology included any of the following: interviews<sup>5</sup>, focus groups, participant observation, ethnography and any unobtrusive measures etc. Furthermore, an article was classified as one that was both (quantitative and qualitative) if its research methodology included a mix of both these techniques. Articles that used content analysis or secondary data analysis were also classified as having both types of methodologies since they may not be considered purely qualitative or quantitative. Based on Deshpande’s recommendation of adopting triangulation, we also classified any article as using both techniques even if one of the methodologies was minimally used. This

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<sup>5</sup> Interviews classified as qualitative were those that were in depth and more open in nature. Mall intercept survey interviews were not categorized as qualitative.

would include (but not restricted to) using interviews to generate items for a scale, using a focus group to gain insights before designing a survey etc. as has been suggested by Sieber (1973). Articles that were classified as not applicable were those that did not include any research methodology, which include: purely conceptual articles, book reviews, essays and comments etc.

### **Research Findings<sup>6</sup>**

We analyzed a total of 394 articles from the top three marketing journals (109 in JM, 115 in JMR and 170 in JCR) from the years 2002 to 2004. Overall, the quantitative articles made up 47.2% of the total number of articles for all the journals. Pure Qualitative articles made up a mere 7.1% and articles containing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies made up 32.7%. Articles that were considered not applicable made up the remaining 12.9%.

To be more specific, JM had 27.5% quantitative, 3.7% qualitative, 48.6% both and 20.2% not applicable ; JMR had 39.1% quantitative, 0.9% qualitative, 50.4% both, and 9.6% not applicable ; JCR had 65.3% quantitative, 13.5% qualitative, 10.6% both and 10.6% not applicable.

It is also worth noting that articles using survey or experimental methodologies that included thought listings, explanations or any other type of answers to open ended questions were not classified in the “both” methodologies category of articles since they

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<sup>6</sup> The details of all the articles and our findings are shown in the tables presented at the end of the paper in the appendices section.

were predominantly quantitative and classifying them in the “both” category could somewhat bias the results obtained.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the specific methodologies used in all the journal articles, we found that surveys made up 17.5%, experiments made up 41.4%, interviews<sup>8</sup> made up 15% and secondary data analysis made up 17.8%. Breaking it down by the methodology classification we found that quantitative articles had 80% experiments and 18.9% surveys, qualitative articles had 60.7% interviews and 39.3% ethnographies, and articles with both methodologies had 53.8% secondary data analysis, 45.4% interviews, 26.2% surveys and 11.5% experiments. When breaking the specific methodologies classification down in terms of the journals, we found the following: JM had 41.3% surveys, 13.8% experiments, 24.8% interviews and 21.1% secondary data analysis; JMR had 14.8% surveys, 34.8% experiments, 9.6% interviews and 39.1% secondary data analysis; JCR had 5.9% surveys, 63.5% experiments, 12.4% interviews and 1.2% secondary data analysis.

### **Discussion & Limitations**

As can be seen from our findings, almost half (47.2%) of all the articles published in the top three marketing journals, during the past three years, were of the quantitative methodology. Articles using pure qualitative methodologies made a mere 7.1% as mentioned before which corresponds to almost a seventh of the number of quantitative articles or in other words quantitative studies were almost seven times as much as

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<sup>7</sup> If we were to reclassify these articles and include them in the “both” methodologies category, the results will change to 31.7% of articles classified as quantitative and 48.2% classified as with both methodologies, whilst the qualitative and the not applicable articles staying the same at 7.1% and 12.9% respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews used in ethnographies were classified separately as ethnographies if the study particularly mentioned the word ethnography as its methodology. Articles with ethnographies accounted for 2.8% of the total number of articles in all the journals.

qualitative ones. These findings seem to agree with those of Bonoma (1985)<sup>9</sup> and thus provide us some evidence that in the marketing discipline (based on our limited study) there seems to be a much greater emphasis on quantitative methodologies than on qualitative ones even after twenty years of “Paradigms Lost.” However, it is important to mention that articles using both methodologies made up almost a third (32.7%) which may provide some growing evidence that even though pure qualitative studies are still minimal, their integration with quantitative studies may be catching pace.

When looking at the journals more specifically, we found that JCR had the highest percentage of pure quantitative articles (65.3%) and at the same time it had the highest percentage of qualitative articles (13.5%). JMR had the lowest percentage of qualitative articles with only *one* article in the three years investigated! And JM also had also a very low percentage of qualitative articles (3.7%). However, both JMR and JM had the highest percentage of articles with both methodologies used. Based on this analysis, it may be feasible to say that a researcher looking to publish a pure qualitative study may be far better off shooting for JCR than JMR or even JM.

In terms of the types of methodologies used, experiments showed up as the highest percentage of methodology used, accounting for 41.4% of all the journal articles. Surveys, interviews and secondary data analysis were almost similar in the percentage used. To be more specific, quantitative articles were dominated by experiments and qualitative articles were dominated by interviews. Furthermore, in terms of the journals, JM was dominated by surveys, JMR was dominated by secondary data analysis and JCR

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<sup>9</sup> Bonoma (1985) provides some preliminary evidence of the emphasis of the marketing discipline on quantitative methods. Bonoma reviewed a random sample of ten issues from the years 1977 to 1982 and found that there were “no qualitative studies of any sort,” with all the emphasis on quantitative and objective methodology.

was dominated by experiments. These particular findings provide further evidence of the dominance of the quantitative methodologies in marketing journals and perhaps indicate the preferences of certain methodologies over others.

In spite of all the evidence provided, our study is not without limitations. It is important to mention that the number and type of marketing journals analyzed and the time frame used present significant limitations to our study. Furthermore, our dependence on only one judge (myself) on classifying all the articles may present another limitation which could thus lead to less reliable and less objective results. Future studies could address these limitations and could also help assess the trend over the past twenty years or more.

In conclusion, based on our limited study, we have attempted to provide some preliminary evidence of the dominance of the quantitative paradigm over the much neglected qualitative paradigm in the marketing literature. However, the clear sign of studies including both methodologies provides growing evidence of the adoption of triangulation of methods but yet more is needed. We share our voice here with Deshpande in calling for a real need to provide more qualitative work not just for the sake of it but for helping develop theory construction in marketing and perhaps for getting to the other side of the story. In doing so we also hope that there would be a greater acceptance atmosphere towards qualitative research in the different marketing journals and in some cases perhaps even choosing editors who would represent both paradigms whenever possible.

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