



## The Study of Thematic Analysis: Case Study of Australia and Thailand 2013

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### Abstract

Thematic analysis is receiving increased attention from academic researchers and public policy-makers. Thematic analysis allows leaders to delve into frameworks which define the motivations of their customers. The objective of these studies is to develop greater appreciation of the motivating factors in decision - making processes. Organizations benefit from an understanding of what factors motivate and deter customers from participation in or consumption of their products/services. This article compares Thai and Australian studies which employ thematic analysis as a means of charting organizational decision making. In the Australian study, the link between participation in the arts with the health of individuals is examined. In the Thai study, corporate taxation, free trade, and transnational corporate economic impacts on sustainability are the focus. The commonality with the two studies is the potential for how producers and consumers might both be educated to have greater appreciation of the impacts of their choices. Employing frameworks of thematic qualitative analysis enhances organizational understanding of consumerism, and helps steer educators toward teaching approaches which can improve classroom performance. Consumers as well as students will provide clues as to successful motivating factors. This then sets up a learning loop which trends toward constant quality improvement.

**Keywords :** thematic analysis

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## Introduction

The Thai economic crisis of 2540 TBE had a dramatic effect upon retail businesses and business strategy across the Kingdom. Attempts to fill voids left by failed Thai enterprises included significant tax incentives for foreign transnational corporations to meet some of the consumer needs. Various economic principles suggest that higher rates of consumption create jobs and boost economies, thereby increasing consumption further and continuing an upward spiral of ongoing economic development. As has been seen in other parts of the world, rapid economic development stemming from the design of larger corporations, be they national or transnational entities, may not increase consumption and jobs to the degree that other jobs and consumption opportunities are lost through business closings or relocations. Among the two studies addressed, the Thai case study focuses on what consumers can tell us about measuring and improving economic expansion, particularly vis-à-vis the introduction of large transnational retailers vs. alternatives closer to home involving smaller retail operations owned by Thai nationals.

The Western Australian study (Davies, 2014) examined consumers and participants engaged in cultural arts opportunities. They were questioned about physical and mental health factors in addition to their subjective feelings about arts engagement. These data were compared to similar factors in the general population as well as the population of those who do not participate at all in cultural arts opportunities. This study's strength was that it produced a framework by which other studies may break factors down on an even finer basis. It also provided a stronger rationale for physician prescription of activities toward greater patient physical and/or mental health.

The qualitative analytic approach of thematic analysis has many benefits over other analytic models, especially when attempting to gauge the vagaries of human emotional factors which are difficult to get at by other means (Miles, 1994). Motivational and risk-aversion factors play into daily consumer decisions on acquisition or rejection of goods and services. It is unrealistic to expect the likes of a researcher or marketer to generate all risk and motivational factors consumers hold relative to their particular goods or service provision. Thematic analysis,



through coding and generation of themes, along with intensive review and reconsideration loops, assists the researcher in understanding those emotional factors which might otherwise go unrecognized (Fereday, 2006). Examining and re-examining the data is an essential element of generating meaning from the codes in an effort to develop coherent themes and sub-themes. These “tactics for generating meaning” include noting patterns and themes, clustering cases, making contrasts and comparisons, partitioning variables, and subsuming particulars (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Thematic analysis can also generate a weighted factor through quantitative analysis of, for example, code and word choice repetition rates. In this vein, properly conducted thematic analysis, though primarily qualitative in nature, lends itself to quantitative analysis to the degree that the researcher designs the study (Saldana, 2009). Selective use of computer software for word count, word search, taxonomic analysis, constant comparison analysis and other analytic purposes can be accomplished via one of many readily available programs, most of which have been extensively reviewed (Weitzman and Miles, 1995).

Through thematic analysis, which generates risk and opportunity factors by developing a better understanding of issues from the perspective of the goods or service recipient, all parties develop an enhanced view of where the most motivating business model or other organizational pathway lays toward improved future successes of all involved parties. It is this holistic and naturalistic tone which defines qualitative research, such as thematic analysis, where insights and recommendations are generated by factors beyond statistical or other quantitative means (Miles, 1994).

## Objective

The aim of this study is to display benefits of how a qualitative analytic approach, in topical areas which necessarily involve human perspective as a contributory factor, and especially those areas where a top-down quantitative analysis has been the common approach, enhances the decision-making capacity of leaders from both private and public sector entities (Bartz, 1994). Development of the Australian framework, which links cultural arts participation with human



health factors, provides the medical community with important insights as to the health, educational and appropriate prescription of patient needs. The implications for clinical practice of this holistic approach to the de-medicalisation of people's lives, gained through the thematic analysis of patient perspective, augments prior understanding of patient engagement, education and self-care potential (Davies, 2014). Although the private sector may be involved, much of what is produced by the study speaks directly to public policy and decision - makers in addition to healthcare providers.

The Thai study also has the effect of generating better understanding of consumer impacts upon retail development strategies, thereby helping policy - makers at both the corporate and governmental levels illuminate brighter pathways toward sustainable economic growth. Through consumer-driven qualitative analysis, both private and public sectors develop a better forecasting tool to discern potential positive, negative and unexpected or unintended outcomes. The Thai study examines governmental policies which affect the growth of transnational retail corporations while, at the same time, studies the strategies of transnationals as well as the factors which promote and inhibit their growth

## Methods

The methodology employed in the case studies involved semi - structured interviews with a random sample of target-class individuals. Open ended questions were employed in these lengthy interviews in order to generate additional codes and themes beyond the original concept of the study design (Saldana, 2009).

The Australian case study solicited volunteer adult interviewees from targeted but broad - ranging groups who participate either actively or purely for entertainment in cultural arts offerings. These groups included university students and employees, those who subscribe to cultural arts organizations, targeted email lists and at least one health organization. The invitations were sent by email and posted via paper flyer. People were encouraged to pass the invitation along to friends. A random sample of 33 participants, out of a volunteer pool of 98 respondents, was generated by a computer-driven number sampler. The study enjoyed 100%



participation and the study group represented a close match with the full group with the exception that it skewed slightly more female and slightly more college educated (Davies, 2014). Interviews averaged approximately one hour in length and had many open-ended questions intended to help generate spontaneous and potentially unanticipated responses. The researchers performed frequent, periodic review of the data and the interview transcriptions to test the developing themes and to help in generating additional themes or sub-themes. Computer software was also employed for word search and word count purposes in order that additional patterns might be identified. Prior studies have tended to focus upon specific groups of people, such as incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized subjects (Daly, 1997), so a strong feature of the Australian case study was the broader reach confined only by participation, at some level, in the arts.

The Thai case study used a similar interview process of randomly sampled consumers at consumer retail outlet stores across the Kingdom of Thailand. The focus of the interview involved consumer thoughts on the growth of transnational retail within Thailand, plus consumer views on both the desirability of and their hesitations about the growth of transnational retail in Thailand.

## Results

Although it is beyond the scope of the Australian case study to suggest direct causality between participation in cultural arts and improved personal health, this case study does provide an improvement regarding a stable framework from which more specific studies might be performed. Overall, engagement in the cultural arts were reported to make people feel happiness and enjoyment, provided a sense of satisfaction and generated good memories. It also provided a sense of community involvement and association with others of like mind, generated friendship, boosted self-esteem and improved confidence. Study participants reported feeling more emotionally resilient and less stressed after engaging in an artistic activity whether as a full participant or merely as a member of a viewing audience (Davies, 2014). The link between stress and negative impacts upon physical and mental health is well known, so future studies may be able to quantify specific benefits by use of this framework (Daly, 1997). In the Thai



study, concerns were raised about economic inequalities between national or local organizations vs. the transnational corporations, the latter seen as more able to dominate a market and eliminate local competition. In addition to pure retail competitiveness, respondents spoke of the intrinsic value of work to an individual's well-being and looked upon job shifting from across neighborhoods to centralized locations at malls and other large retail outlets as problematic.

### Summary and Recommendations

While quantitative analysis will steer the researcher toward statistical validation of assumptions, qualitative analysis can produce completely unanticipated insights and outcomes (Kvale, 1995). With the naturalistic focus on learning more about the perspective of the study participant than on some numerically determinable fact, qualitative analysis, and thematic analysis in particular, provides policy-makers, service providers and consumable goods providers with important insights into the emotional and holistic factors behind consumer purchase and engagement habits (Miles, 1994).

The educational arena provides a special circumstance due to the global reach of influence on educational strategies (Locke, 1987). An active teaching process, guided by an understanding of feelings students hold toward both benefits and risk-aversion, will instill greater capacity in the student for critical thinking and for self-sufficiency than the traditional lecture-oriented process.

It is a mistake to view qualitative analysis as an easy approach, or that it can be performed with any level of validity by any other than well trained practitioners. As Michael Quinn Patton put it:

*"Because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique. Because qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the researcher, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst. The human factor is the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis."* (Patton, 1990)



## Conclusion

When dealing with decision-making regarding a consumer group, be they healthcare patients, tax payers, goods and services purchasers, students or some other group, qualitative analysis is a vital analytic and forecasting tool which must be in the toolkit of the policy or decision-maker (Berkowitz, 1996). Knowing how the particular public stakeholders view and feel about a product or process, and gauging the change in these viewpoints and feelings over time, is key to constant improvement of that product or process.

Educational and public policy arenas enjoy just as much evolutionary benefit as the business or service sector when thoughtful policymakers employ qualitative analysis alongside quantitative analysis in the decision-making process (Locke, 1987). Incorporating thematic analysis in the policymaking process affords the governmental sector heightened opportunities to act more responsively, and therefore less reactively, to the inevitably shifting needs of a dynamic society.

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