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REASSESSING POLICY-RELEVANT EMPIRICAL MARKETING RESEARCH THROUGH METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines 's discussion of methodological pluralism in policy-relevant empirical marketing research. The article argues that integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches enhances the rigor, credibility, and practical relevance of marketing studies, particularly in addressing complex consumer, organizational, and policy issues. Drawing on broader mixed-methods scholarship, the commentary highlights how methodological pluralism strengthens empirical inquiry through triangulation, cross-validation, and contextual depth, enabling researchers and practitioners to generate more comprehensive and evidence-based insights. The discussion emphasizes the practical value of combining surveys, experiments, case studies, ethnographic methods, and secondary data analysis to improve strategic decision-making and policy development. At the same time, the commentary critically evaluates the operational and epistemological challenges associated with pluralistic research designs, including difficulties in methodological integration, interpretive inconsistencies, resource demands, and limitations in generalizability. It also addresses concerns related to researcher bias, ethical considerations, and the need for transparency in integrating diverse forms of evidence. From a practitioner's perspective, the analysis underscores that methodological pluralism is not merely an academic preference but a practical necessity for understanding contemporary marketing environments characterized by behavioral complexity and institutional interdependence. The commentary concludes that while methodological pluralism significantly enhances the quality and applicability of marketing research, future scholarship should focus on developing clearer, more accessible, and ethically grounded frameworks for implementing mixed-method approaches in policy-oriented research contexts.

KEYWORDS: Methodological Pluralism, Mixed-Methods Research, Empirical Marketing Research, Policy-Oriented Marketing, Evidence-Based Decision-Making.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary marketing environments, empirical research increasingly informs not only organizational strategies but also public policy decisions that shape consumer welfare, market regulation, and ethical business conduct. As marketing problems become more complex and multidimensional, reliance on a single methodological approach often proves insufficient for capturing the interplay between consumer behavior, institutional dynamics, and socio-economic contexts. This growing complexity has intensified scholarly discussions regarding the need for methodological pluralism in policy-relevant marketing research. Baumgartner et al.'s article, *The Critical Role of Methodological Pluralism for Policy-Relevant Empirical Marketing Research*, presents a compelling argument for integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to strengthen the rigor, relevance, and applicability of empirical marketing studies. The authors contend that methodological pluralism enhances the credibility of findings through triangulation, cross-validation, and contextual depth, thereby improving the usefulness of research for practitioners and policymakers alike. This commentary critically examines Baumgartner et al.'s discussion of methodological pluralism and evaluates its implications for policy-oriented marketing research. While the article effectively demonstrates the value of integrating diverse research methods, this commentary argues that greater attention must also be given to the practical and epistemological challenges associated with pluralistic research designs, including methodological integration, resource demands, interpretive tensions, and limitations in generalizability. From a practitioner's perspective, the article offers important insights into how methodological diversity can strengthen evidence-based decision-making while also revealing the operational complexities involved in implementing such approaches in real-world contexts.

2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM

A major contribution of Baumgartner et al.'s article lies in its recognition that marketing phenomena are inherently multifaceted and therefore require multiple forms of evidence to achieve comprehensive understanding. The authors challenge the traditional dominance of singular methodological paradigms by emphasizing that both qualitative and quantitative approaches contribute unique strengths to empirical inquiry. Quantitative

methods provide measurable and generalizable findings, whereas qualitative approaches offer contextual richness and interpretive depth. This perspective aligns with broader methodological scholarship advocating triangulation and mixed-methods research as mechanisms for improving validity and interpretive accuracy. Bryman (2006) noted that integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches allows researchers to examine social phenomena from complementary perspectives, thereby enhancing both explanatory power and practical relevance. Similarly, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that mixed-methods research represents a pragmatic paradigm capable of addressing research questions that cannot be sufficiently answered through a single methodological lens. Baumgartner et al.'s emphasis on methodological pluralism is particularly relevant in policy-oriented marketing research, where decision-makers require evidence that extends beyond statistical significance to include contextual understanding, stakeholder perspectives, and behavioral insights. Marketing policies often involve complex interactions between organizations, consumers, and regulatory institutions, making methodological diversity essential for capturing the broader implications of empirical findings.

3. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLICY-RELEVANT MARKETING RESEARCH

One of the article's strongest contributions is its demonstration of how methodological pluralism enhances the practical utility of marketing research. In practice, marketing challenges rarely exist in isolation. Consumer purchasing behavior, market trends, brand perceptions, and policy outcomes are shaped by interconnected economic, cultural, and psychological factors that cannot be adequately explained through a single methodological framework. By advocating the integration of surveys, experiments, case studies, ethnographic observations, and secondary data analysis, Baumgartner et al. illustrate how methodological pluralism strengthens empirical credibility and policy relevance. The convergence of findings from multiple methods enables researchers and practitioners to develop more nuanced interpretations of marketing phenomena while reducing the likelihood of overreliance on a single source of evidence. From a practitioner's standpoint, this multidimensional approach is particularly valuable for strategic and policy decision-making. Research findings supported by both quantitative

metrics and qualitative insights are often more persuasive to stakeholders because they combine measurable outcomes with contextual explanation. For example, survey data may identify shifts in consumer preferences, while qualitative interviews can explain the underlying motivations driving those behavioral changes. Together, these methods provide a more comprehensive basis for policy recommendations and marketing strategies. Another important strength of the article is its emphasis on cross-validation and bias reduction. Methodological pluralism allows researchers to compare findings across different methods, thereby increasing confidence in empirical conclusions. This is especially significant in policy-related research, where inaccurate or incomplete findings may lead to ineffective or unintended policy interventions. By encouraging methodological diversity, Baumgartner et al. promote a more rigorous and evidence-based approach to marketing research that better aligns with the needs of practitioners, policymakers, and organizations.

4. CRITICAL EVALUATION AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the substantial contributions of methodological pluralism, several limitations and practical challenges warrant deeper consideration. While Baumgartner et al. acknowledge some of these concerns, the article could further expand its discussion of the operational and epistemological complexities associated with integrating diverse methodologies. One significant challenge involves the integration of findings derived from fundamentally different methodological traditions. Quantitative research typically prioritizes objectivity, measurement, and statistical generalizability, whereas qualitative research emphasizes contextual interpretation, subjectivity, and meaning-making. Reconciling these contrasting assumptions can create difficulties during data analysis and interpretation. In some cases, findings from qualitative and quantitative methods may appear inconsistent or contradictory, requiring researchers to engage in complex interpretive processes to produce coherent conclusions. Furthermore, methodological pluralism can be resource-intensive and difficult to implement in practice. Conducting multiple forms of data collection often requires substantial financial investment, extended timelines, specialized expertise, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Smaller institutions, independent researchers, and practitioners operating within constrained budgets may find it challenging to adopt comprehensive

mixed-method designs despite recognizing their value. As a result, methodological pluralism may inadvertently privilege well-funded research environments while limiting accessibility for less-resourced scholars and organizations. Another limitation concerns the issue of generalizability. Although pluralistic approaches provide richer and more context-sensitive insights, findings generated within specific social, cultural, or organizational contexts may not easily transfer across industries or geographic regions. Policymakers and practitioners therefore face the challenge of determining the extent to which localized findings can inform broader strategic or regulatory decisions. Greater emphasis on transparency regarding contextual limitations and scope conditions would strengthen the practical applicability of pluralistic research outcomes.

Additionally, the assumption that methodological pluralism automatically reduces bias deserves more critical examination. While triangulation can enhance credibility, researchers may still privilege findings that align with their theoretical preferences or institutional expectations. Selective interpretation of conflicting evidence may introduce new forms of bias rather than fully eliminating existing methodological limitations. Consequently, methodological pluralism requires not only methodological diversity but also reflexivity, transparency, and careful integration strategies to ensure balanced interpretation of findings. Ethical considerations also emerge in pluralistic research designs. Combining multiple methods frequently involves collecting diverse forms of participant data, raising concerns regarding informed consent, privacy, and data management. Researchers must therefore establish clear ethical protocols to ensure that methodological complexity does not compromise participant protection or research integrity. These challenges do not diminish the value of methodological pluralism; rather, they underscore the importance of adopting pluralistic approaches with methodological rigor, transparency, and practical awareness. Future scholarship should focus not only on advocating methodological diversity but also on developing clearer frameworks for integrating diverse forms of evidence in ways that remain feasible, coherent, and ethically responsible.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS

From a practitioner's perspective, Baumgartner et al.'s article reinforces the importance of aligning methodological choices with the complexity of contemporary marketing problems. Effective policy-oriented research requires more than methodological

diversity alone; it also demands strategic coordination between researchers, organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders to ensure that findings are both rigorous and actionable.

The article highlights several important implications for practitioners and researchers. First, methodological pluralism strengthens the credibility of empirical findings by allowing evidence to be examined from multiple perspectives. Second, mixed-method approaches enhance contextual understanding by combining measurable outcomes with insights into underlying motivations and behavioral dynamics. Third, successful implementation of methodological pluralism requires careful planning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and adequate resource allocation. For practitioners involved in campaign development, market analysis, or policy advisory roles, the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence can improve the quality of strategic recommendations. Similarly, researchers engaged in policy-relevant studies can benefit from pluralistic approaches that account for behavioral complexity, institutional environments, and stakeholder perspectives. However, the practical effectiveness of these approaches ultimately depends on transparent methodological integration and realistic consideration of operational constraints.

6. CONCLUSION

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Baumgartner et al.'s article makes a significant contribution to discussions on policy-relevant empirical marketing research by emphasizing the critical role of methodological pluralism in enhancing rigor, relevance, and practical applicability. The article successfully demonstrates how integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches can strengthen empirical credibility, improve contextual understanding, and support evidence-based decision-making in both marketing and public policy contexts. At the same time, methodological pluralism presents important challenges related to methodological integration, resource demands, interpretive complexity, and generalizability. These limitations highlight the need for researchers and practitioners to adopt pluralistic approaches with careful planning, reflexivity, and transparency.

Finally, methodological pluralism should not be viewed merely as an academic preference but as a practical necessity for addressing the complexity of contemporary marketing issues. Future research should therefore move beyond advocating methodological diversity in principle and instead focus on developing clearer and more accessible frameworks for integrating diverse forms of evidence. Such efforts would strengthen the capacity of marketing research to inform policy, guide organizational strategy, and contribute meaningfully to evidence-based decision-making in increasingly complex market environments.