

Ethnography and insight research paper

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



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The basic objective of ethnographic research according to Whitehead (4) is to learn more about specialized cultural systems. There are several approaches to this research, all of which fall into two categories: secondary and primary approached to ethnographic data collection and analysis. For the former, ethnographers rely on existing data regarding a particular topic of cultural significance (Whitehead 3). In the case of primary data collection and analysis, ethnographers rely on fieldwork for their research. Under this approach, ethnographers can use observation as a means of gathering information on their specific topic of concern. According to Whitehead (11), observation can either be with or without the participation of the ethnographer.

For purposes of this paper, focus shall be on the second type of observation: without ethnographer participation. This means that as much as I will be doing my research into the estate sale, I shall not be participating in it either by making purchases or by helping in event organization and management.

Estate Sale: William and Kay Steensma of East Lansing

I learnt about the above-mentioned estate sale through a friend whom I contacted in response to this class assignment. I specified that I wanted her to give me information on any upcoming or ongoing yard sales or estate sales near the East Lansing area. As it turned, the estate of William and Kay Steensma was being sold at their garage in the East Lansing suburbs starting on 5th October, 2012 at 8: 00 AM and ending the following day in the early evening. The property is located at 5210 Greenfield Parkway, East Lansing, Michigan, near the Frandor Shopping Center. Even though I got this information from a friend, there were several signs located strategically near the site of the sale to direct interested people.

Overview

The garage sale was itself relatively pompous and essentially had the markings of a high-end event targeting people wishing to own classic antiques and collectables. There were in excess of 50 people at the start of the sale in the early morning hours beginning at 9: 00 AM on the first day, 5th October. It seemed to me that the estate was being sold by the family of the deceased with the aid of a professional auctions and estate sales company, whose identity I was not able to verify from the site of the sale. The owners of the estate had several high-end antiques and merchandise that resembled classic works of art, and the announcements made by the hosts, most of them were family heirlooms passed down through successive generations.

At first glance, most of the people who had arrived at the site of the sale while it was being commissioned were interested in the antique heirlooms. They were aware, either from express advertisements or past experience, that the opening of the sale included the initial sale of the antique collectables and homeware. These customers knew their way around the sale and were not particularly keen on all the information being delivered by the hosts regarding the sale program and expected schedule of events. There could be several reasons as to why this was the case. Perhaps they only wanted the low-priced trinkets and were not particularly interested in the other more expensive and grander items whose sale was to follow later on.

Insights

Customers:

As indicated earlier, the customers present at the beginning of the sale were keen on owning the antiques and collectables on sale as the sale was being commissioned. They were essentially not interested in the rigid schedule being provided by the event organizers and were keener on acquiring the main objects of their desire. One thing I noted regarding this idiosyncrasy is that these customers must have had prior experience with such an event. In fact, I can conjecture that they were commercial customers keen on hoarding the antique trinkets with the hope of pawning them off later at a profit. Perhaps some of them were truly interested in keeping items with sentimental value for themselves and had no commercial interest

whatsoever. Nevertheless, they were all much more interested with the initial sales items than the entire sale.

As the sale continued, into the afternoon and even the following day, I noted that the available customers had their friends and/or family with them discussing options. This especially became pronounced while the sale got into its heavier merchandise phase: when the hosts were offering such items as furniture and tools for sale. Customers at this stage seemed to rely more on the people accompanying them than customers at the beginning of the sale.

Sellers:

The hosts of the events generally wanted to make money with the sale and were particularly keen on their accounting. They had relatively sophisticated computer-based tools of sales and accounting, including scanners and detectors.

Despite the above fact, some of the hosts and sellers seemed quite keen on creating new social contacts with the present customers. This was evident in the former's varied attempts at making conversation with the latter and showing them around.

Work Cited

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