

# Reflective essay: reflexivity and bias in research



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Entry No. 1: January 26, 2015, 8: 15 pm

### *My Role as a Researcher*

I approach the challenge of research in the doctoral level with some degree of apprehension as well as excitement. I have been in the field of business for more or less than a decade now, working in customer service management, so I can appreciate the importance of doing research especially in gauging customer satisfaction and determining how to leverage this to improve the company's competitive advantage. Ensuring customer satisfaction entails several factors. Nowadays, much of the world is hinged on the maximizing technology in order to provide information and choices for customers. Due to the saturation of the Internet nowadays, users are shifting in millions from their laptops to their smartphones. The smartphone is now the site of communication, decision-making, research, shopping, and purchasing.

This has altered the way businesses do things. In a very urgent way, it pressures companies to be responsive to customers' needs in a "real-time" manner. Mobile CRM is a novel way of handling customer relations. Using only their mobile devices like smartphones or tablets, employees can now retrieve customer information and customer accounts remotely. Where previously, they relied on a laptop to do their work, mobile CRM achieves the same results in an efficient and convenient manner.

The question now is how I consider myself or my role as a researcher in the doctorate research I plan to pursue. First, the novelty of mobile CRM and the lack of research in this area is what motivated me to choose this as the

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research topic. My research is about mobile customer relationship management (CRM) and how it influences customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in the context of Samsung in United Arab of Emirates. Second, I have a wealth of experience in customer relations and have been with Samsung for many years.

Hughest and Tight (2013) suggest that a researcher's role in the study requires identifying personal values, biases, and assumptions at the very beginning. In this manner, transparency, which is a crucial element in objectivity, is promoted. Ortlipp (2008) states that keeping a research diary is an excellent method of upholding transparency in research since it details the research process in a way that allows the researcher to reveal the nuances attached to his or her participation.

As a researcher, I have been in customer relations for nearly a decade and I believe that my professional and personal experiences with Samsung will increase my awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to the key issues that my research will attend to. I have experience in implementing mobile CRM and I am fairly knowledgeable with the technology associated with it. This will aid me in recognizing the thoughts, views and experiences of the participants when I interview them. My experiences and worldview will also influence how I interpret and understand the data I collect.

Entry No. 2: April 3, 2015

*Bias - what are mine?*

One of the biggest problems with qualitative research is bias. Much has been said and explained about the extent to which a researcher can influence the outcomes of the study and whether or not some form of control is needed over the qualitative research process, in what is referred to as the “interpretive crisis” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretive research proceeds differently from positivist research because data is analyzed in an inductive manner. In this manner, the researcher proceeds from a set of facts and interprets them to develop a general theory about a particular phenomenon. This opens the researcher to various possibilities of bias.

Unlike the quantitative survey which I am most familiar with, qualitative data collection methods feature the researcher as facilitator. My presence occupies a prominent feature in the conduct of the data collection itself because I am the instrument. Therefore, how I collect the data will impact its quality significantly. For this research, I am considering doing focus group discussions in order to gather the views of users and employees on the impact of mobile CRM. I will be using a semi-structured discussion guide. The focus group is a familiar method used in business research and I am more or less knowledgeable with its general concept. However, I learned to be more conscious of some of the disadvantages of the focus groups. Focus group involves a group of people who are gathered and asked what their attitudes are towards a product or service. It is not merely a simple gathering where answers are drawn from a set of people; in focus groups, discussion is facilitated. The facilitator can steer the group participants and influence them based on what questions he/she poses. There is also interaction, so participants are free to influence others with their opinion. A crucial

limitation of focus group is the quality of the facilitation (Krueger, 1994). Therefore, should I decide to proceed with the focus group as my primary data collection methods, reducing bias should be a priority. Moderator or facilitator bias will be expected if the facilitator is not skilled enough. He or she should be skilled and competent enough to handle participants who tend to “ hijack” the discussion.

I am considering whether I should moderate the focus group or have someone else do it. I have to ensure that my facial expressions, tone, deportment, language style, and gestures do not introduce or facilitate bias. Yet, as Le Gallais (2008) asserts, bias will be present in every researcher since we are influenced by our race, gender, age, and social status. My race for instance, would be a factor in a multi-ethnic focus group. There would be likelihood that I would identify more with Emirati participants than non-Emirati participants and vice versa. Being male, there is also the possibility that in mixed-gender focus groups, my presence would not encourage female participants to share their views. These are things that I need to be specific about when designing the focus group. In order to get quality data, maybe it would be desirable to have all-female, all-male and mixed-group discussions.

Another thing I should be careful about is the content of the discussion guide. A biased or leading question influences the participants' views and does not reflect good research practice. The manner of asking the question can also be biased. Therefore, the instrument must be checked and validated by an expert to ensure that there are no biased questions.

Entry No. 4: December 7, 2016

### *Reflexivity*

As I read on theories and worldviews, I realize the importance of the practice of reflexivity. Reflexivity is concerned with a researcher's self-awareness and consciousness and being able to own a certain perspective. This requires one to undergo questioning one's self about theoretical positions and how one looks at reality. Being reflexive is an examination of what I know and how I acquired this knowledge I have now.

As a qualitative researcher, I need to pay attention to the various socio-political, cultural, and ideological issues surrounding the issue of mobile CRM. For instance, mobile CRM operates under the presumption that the digital world is flat and that users can access technology equally. However, this is not the case. People utilize and appreciate technology based on their social status, age, gender and race. For instance, older customers who are not tech-savvy may not appreciate the delivery of information through mobile phones. Women and men use technology differently and are more likely to have different perceptions about how technology should be used. I recognize how reflexivity is important to me as a doctoral researcher. Being the instrument, I have the power and accountability to interpret the data and to present it to the whole world. I need to ask myself constantly what kind of baggage I carry which will interfere with my interpretation and conduct in the research process. Personal concerns, ideological conflicts, and health issues are some of the factors I can think of right now which might affect my role as researcher.

## References

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