



Using mixed methods designs in the *Journal of Business Research*, 1990–2010[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine the uses of mixed method research designs published in the *Journal of Business Research*. This study involves a content analysis of 2072 articles published between 1990 and 2010 in the *Journal of Business Research*. Seventeen mixed method studies implemented data collection procedures sequentially (68%), six implemented them concurrently (24%), and two combined both sequential and concurrent procedures (8%). On the whole, priority skews more toward quantitative strands with ten articles prioritizing quantitative data (40%), three articles prioritizing qualitative data (12%), and twelve articles prioritizing both equally (48%). Business scholars recognize the benefit of mixing qualitative and quantitative research; however, as a discipline, we are not demonstrating knowledge of the mixed method literature or procedures; none of the articles recognized or mentioned knowledge of mixed method procedures or cited mixed method research. This study provides guidance for researchers in identifying design types appropriate for various research objectives as well as the models of different design types appearing in the *Journal of Business Research*.

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1. Introduction

For decades, scholars in the social sciences have made use of mixed method research—that is, combining both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. However, despite the call for its use in business research (Currall & Towler, 2003; Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Woodside, 2004, 2010), discussion about this distinct methodological approach by business scholars is scarce. While the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data is not new to business scholars, the use of mixed methods principles and design types is. Mixed methods researchers have suggested a need for understanding these principles and distinguishing between studies that utilize the two types of data without serious integration and studies that “mix” the data sets effectively (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). That is to say, a study that includes both data types without integration is merely a collection of methods. Strong mixed methods studies, however, address the decision of how to integrate the data as well as timing and priority (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Thus, there is a need for guidance in conducting mixed method research and for assessing the rigor of data collection and analysis of both data types in business research. This study highlights these issues, regarding the tenets of mixed methods research and the use of mixed methods design types.

The mixing of research methods has been given many names including multiple methods, blended research, multimethod, triangulated

studies, and mixed research. In business, “multimethod” and “mixed method” research are the most commonly used labels. In the Handbook of Mixed Methods research, distinctions are made between these two terms (Morse, 2003). That is, multimethod research involves multiple types of qualitative inquiry (e.g. interviews and observations) or multiple types of quantitative inquiry (e.g. surveys and experiments) and (2) mixed methods which involve the mixing of the two types of data. Mixed methods research has become the most popular term for mixing qualitative and quantitative data in a single study (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) and the definition below, based on an analysis of definitions used by leaders in the field of mixed methods research, is used henceforth.

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson et al., 2007, pp. 123).

To be clear, this study specifically investigates the use of both qualitative and quantitative components in a single study or project, (i.e. mixed methods) and not multiple methods that can include two different quantitative component types or two different qualitative component types.

In addition to definitional issues, scholars expressed concern in the 1980s about the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data without articulating defensible reasons for doing so (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), resulting in the development of a number of rationales for combining data collection methods and research questions particular to different mixed method research designs. Bryman (2006) identifies 16

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rationales for conducting mixed method research, to which Harrison and Reilly (2011) add the appropriate mixed method design type for each rationale (see Table 1). Table 1 displays the use of different design types and descriptions of each design type and prescribed recommendations for employing each type are outlined in more detail in the findings section.

The existing marketing and management literature has taken the beginning steps towards understanding this methodological approach by first discussing the philosophical assumptions of such research (Bahl & Milne, 2006; Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher, & Pérez-Prado, 2003), and identifying trends as far as the numbers of studies employing the approach (e.g. Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006). Bahl and Milne (2006) highlight the philosophical assumptions that guide qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research approaches. That is, traditional assumptions guiding post-positivist research mandate an objective view of reality, in which research is aimed to measure or explain, creating knowledge that is generalizable across different people, time, and place. Traditional assumptions guiding interpretive research assume the existence of socially-constructed, multiple realities and focus on understanding behavior rather than predicting it. Paradigmatically, mixed method research is linked to pragmatism as a system of philosophy (see Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004 for a full description). The logic of pragmatic inquiry includes the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's results) (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007). Further, the basic pragmatic maxim translated to mixed methods research is to choose the mixture of methods and procedures that work best for answering research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Hanson and Grimmer (2007) and Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela (2006) consider the use of mixed methods research by business scholars, in terms of sheer number of studies. Molina-Azorin (2011) adds to the methodological conversation by discussing prevalence rate and characteristics of mixed methods management research. What remains unclear is the use of mixed method designs by business scholars; that is, what types of mixed methods designs are being used and how are they being used in business research? Harrison and

Reilly (2011) take a step in answering this question by updating the recent trends in the use of mixed methods research and identifying trends in terms of the types of mixed methods designs being employed in marketing research. The present study extends the discussion to the *Journal of Business Research* audience, posing similar questions. What types of mixed method designs appear in the *Journal of Business Research*? How do trends in *JBR* compare to the marketing journals previously examined? How are scholars incorporating mixed methods techniques to achieve business research objectives?

While growing, the relative use of mixed methods research is comparatively scarce in business disciplines. The general absence of mixed method research designs may be due to a number of factors including the historical precedent of favoring quantitative research in business (Hunt, 1994), the general lack of attention to interpretative methods in graduate education and training, and the difficulty in learning both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Another explanation might be the tendency for scholars to be “guilty of the ‘law of the instrument’—one uses the tool one has even if in context the tool’s use is highly inappropriate” (Woodside, 2010, p. 66). Weick (1996) recognizes difficulties in learning to drop one’s tools and pick-up tools more useful to the task-at-hand, such as maintenance of the status quo with regard to methodological preferences in certain disciplines.

In sum, scholars must be able to assess the appropriateness of the different mixed method design choices and anticipate challenges with each choice. The study here addresses this issue by providing an overview of mixed method design types and an examination of how these designs are successfully in-use in the pages of the *Journal of Business Research*. This study provides a guide for future researchers conducting mixed method research.

To provide business scholars a resource for which to guide those interested in mixing qualitative and quantitative data, published business research will be evaluated on four tenets of mixed methods research, particularly addressing the use of two strands of data (i.e., qualitative and quantitative), the timing (i.e., sequential or concurrent), the priority given to each data type, and the integration (or mixing) of the data. In addition, recommendations will be made for researchers interested in employing different mixed method design types.

Table 1
Rationale for mixed methods research and design types.

Rationale ^a	Description ^a	Design Type ^b
Triangulation	Quantitative and qualitative combined to triangulate findings to be mutually corroborated.	Convergent
Offset	Combining strands offsets their weaknesses to draw on the strengths of both.	Convergent
Completeness	Bringing together a more comprehensive account if both quantitative and qualitative research is employed.	Exploratory, Explanatory, or Convergent
Process	Quantitative provides an account of structures in social life but qualitative provides sense of process.	Exploratory or Explanatory
Different Research Questions	Quantitative and qualitative each answers different research questions.	Convergent
Explanation	One is used to help explain findings generated by the other.	Explanatory
Unexpected Results	When one strand generates surprising results that can be understood by employing the other.	Explanatory, or Embedded
Instrument Development	Qualitative is employed to develop questionnaire and scale items.	Exploratory
Sampling	One approach is used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases.	Exploratory or Explanatory
Credibility	Employing both approaches enhances the integrity of findings.	Exploratory, Explanatory, or Convergent
Context	Qualitative providing contextual understanding coupled with either generalizable, externally valid findings or broad relationships among variables uncovered through a survey.	Exploratory or Explanatory
Illustration	Qualitative to illustrate quantitative findings (putting ‘meat on the bones’ of ‘dry’ quantitative findings).	Explanatory
Utility	Among articles with an applied focus, the combining the two approaches will be more useful to practitioners and others.	Exploratory, Explanatory, Convergent, or Embedded
Confirm and Discover	This entails using qualitative data to generate hypotheses and using quantitative research to test them within a single project.	Exploratory
Diversity of View	Combining researchers’ and participants’ perspectives through quantitative and qualitative research respectively, and uncovering relationships between variables through quantitative research while also revealing meanings among research participants through qualitative research.	Convergent or Embedded

^a From Bryman (2006).

^b From Harrison and Reilly (2011).

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