CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0.   Introduction

Methodology is described as a way to find the most appropriate technique to acquire an in-depth understanding of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative methodology was used in this study due to its exploratory nature. Information was drawn out based on an in-depth interview and informal conversations with a diverse group of Malaysian gays located within the Klang Valley. Drawing from previous research, this study took reference from a variety of attributes to create the structure of the interview. Although this study has a limited scope of the sample size being those from within the Klang Valley, it does provide sufficient information that is reliable for practitioners from the tourism industry. They would be able to generate relevant marketing strategies specifically to target this lucrative market.

3.1.   Benefits of Qualitative Research for this Study

There are, without doubt, many different methods that can be employed when it comes to conducting a qualitative research. This includes conducting various types of interviews, a case study, observation, picture or text analysis and many more. One of the most common but extremely effective choices is conducting an interview whereby the researcher is able to understand the subject closely (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study utilized two strategies namely individual interviews as well as observation at the local gay clubs in Klang Valley.

The benefits of using a qualitative research approach to this study are seen here. Firstly, this method is devoted to understanding and learning the social world from an individual's viewpoint (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Here, the one-on-one interview approach was taken so the respondents' individual point of view can be noted. This enables the study to understand the subject matter in their natural setting, attempting to interpret their wants and needs more clearly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Walle (1997) also stated that when a study is required to analyze various realities, the qualitative research method is looked upon as it can provide useful and sufficient information that is demanded by this type of studies (Walle, 1997). This is again why this study took the qualitative approach as there are many areas that need to be understood with this relatively new market segment in Malaysia. A quantitative approach alone would not have been able to provide an in-depth knowledge and understanding on the subject matter. Walle (1997) also states that these days, this method is most commonly employed when studying the tourism industry and has been met with great success.

When studying the behavior of humans, it is to a certain extent immeasurable. The meaning behind each action and experiences need to be identified. This can only be determined through a semi-structured conversation, market segment observation as well as informal conversations so that the researcher is able to study the natural settings of the subject as well as to some extend blend into their lives (Ballegaard & Chor, 2009).

Another benefit of this methodology is its ability to shed new light on matters that is yet to be resolved. In this case, the gay market segment is understudied and therefore having a more relaxed environment to engage them to open up would prove to be the most effective method. A quantitative approach would thoroughly limit the output and result required to meet the objective of the study. This is further supported by Bruce (2007) who states that when one is exploring the motivation and behavior that are complex or subtle in nature, the most valuable choice would be the qualitative approach (Bruce, 2007, p. 18).

In this study, the interview method was employed. Most respondents were approached via telephone, while others met face-to-face and via Skype. Telephone interview enables the researcher to use human and economic resource efficiently by reducing travel time, thereby widening the range of people reached within a short period of time. It also reduces the disadvantages of making a respondent feel uncomfortable due to the sensitive nature of this topic. It also allows research appropriate relationship to be developed which indirectly makes the respondents comfortable and possible be more frank in their responses (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Meanwhile, doing a face-to-face interview has its advantages whereby the respondent and the interviewer is able to build a professional rapport and at the same time enables the researcher to analyze the respondents' body language so as to handle the session better (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

This method is also said to be well suited when exploring subjective motivations. The idea is to inductively develop theories which can be used to study the travel behaviour of Malaysian gays. A diverse data encompassing preferences and viewpoints as well as thought processes on how they make their decision can be studied. Finally, through the findings, future survey research hypothesis can be framed to fill the gaps that may exist in this study.

3.2. *Data Collection Procedure*

3.2.1. *Pre-planning*

In order to execute the afore-mentioned methodology, a thorough set of pre-planning activity needed to be completed. To begin with, the research objectives and questions were finalized. Following this, a semi-structured interview questions was drawn out, while always having the objectives of the study in mind. From here, a timeline was created to plan the sampling of respondents as well as to conduct the interview in itself. In the coming sections, each of the activities from the timeline is further elaborated.

3.2.2. *Respondents (Sample Size)*

In the qualitative methodology, the question of an ideal number of sample sizes usually arises. A researcher does not dictate the number of respondents required for a study. Instead, the strategies are continued until the data collected reaches a saturated point (Bruce, 2007). For this study, the respondents belonged to the main three ethnicity of Malaysia. The comparison study eventually develops three main profiles. As such, the data collected via interviews and observation was done until no new findings were uncovered. For this, eight Malays, eight Indians and ten Chinese were required for this study with its total being twenty-six when the results attained the saturation point.

Akin to other researches done in the likes of one conducted by Hughes' (2002b), this study may not represent the entire gay population in Malaysia as the sample was both convenient and opportunistic. It is acknowledged that acquiring an accurate sample representation is unattainable (Clift & Forrest, Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations, 1999), even more so here, in Malaysia, since homosexuality is not recognized and is prohibited by law. As such, it was complicated to identify and convince them in general as most gays were reluctant to participate in a study of this nature. Hence the approach was done beginning with a network of friends and acquaintances. Upon the experience of their personal interview, respondents were confident to recommend their friends and more contacts were then gathered through this network. A site visit to gay clubs was another means used and here many casual conversations off the record were conducted.

The qualifying criteria behind selecting the respondents included:
- naturally, that they are gay men,
- age group from 20 and above,
- have traveled either within Malaysia or abroad in the last 2 years

3.2.3. In-depth Interview

As afore-mentioned, interviews are a common but powerful way for researches to understand their subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As the respondents were identified for this study, interview appointments were set either by meeting face-to-face, through a telephone interview or via Skype. The data gathered from the interview provides in-depth information which can later be translated into a quantitative survey (Lück, 2004).

A total of 26 respondents, out of 30 identified, agreed to participate in the data collection procedure, and each of them were individually interviewed. While some respondents were comfortable meeting in person, others were unable to, due to their busy schedule or to keep their identity undisclosed (Knox & Burkard, 2009). All respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and that their comments were delivered within context. As such, each of these interviews was audio recorded.

Throughout the interview, semi structured questions were used as it is considered to be more flexible. It allowed for some unstructured questions to follow up the existing pre determined questions based on the respondents remarks. This format of interviewing allows for a more intimate setting for discussion on various personal and sensitive topics which is demanded by this study. Respondents are answering these questions in the presence of the interviewer which allows the opportunity for any clarification, rationalization and further elaboration, if needed. The respondents were asked an array of questions on topics such as their pre-planning activities, travel motivation, spending behavior and many others. The full list of semi-structured questions can be viewed in the appendix.

3.2.4. Data Analysis Technique_NVIVO & SPSS

The data from a qualitative research looks towards discovering the subject through theory building and this is done by analyzing the data collected. A pattern is looked for which enables a researcher to make sense out of the data in hand (Bruce, 2007, pp. 23-24). Upon completing each individual interview in this study, the responses which were audio recorded was later transcribed into Microsoft Word. The figure below shows the sample transcription.
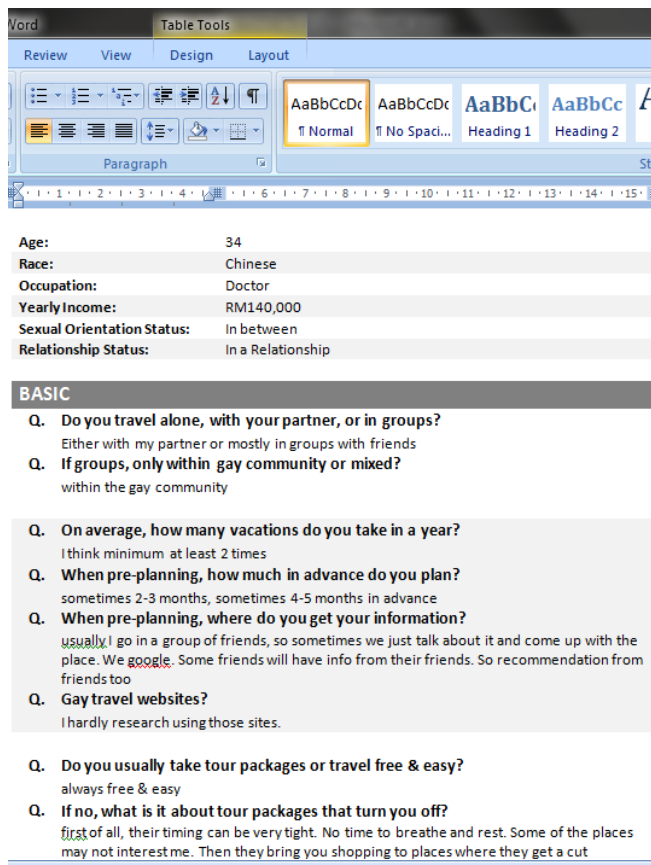
Figure 1: Sample Interview Transcript

A content analysis was then carried out using NVIVO in order to examine the patterns that emerged from the answers provided by the 26 respondents. These patterns were grouped within the dimensions as shown in the following chapter. NVIVO enables for a robust finding as it searches patterns, identifies common themes and ultimately delivers valuable insights. The coding was done with the research objectives in mind. This coupled with the semi-structured interview question; each theme was identified in the form of tree nodes. Every main tree nodes where then sub-coded using the principle of content analysis.

As for the demographic profile of the respondents, the SPSS software was utilized, in order to group them with similar prototype and find meaningful percentages that best describe this group of individuals.

3.2.5. Results

The results from NVIVO are then exported to Microsoft Excel and tables by each category are formed. These tables are then presented in Chapter 4 where the data analysis is explained in detail. The data is in accordance to the most expressed elements and quotes from the audio recordings are included to further support the findings. Each of these categories was divided by ethnicity which is, again, in line with the objective of this study.

3.3. Summary

The qualitative research method was applied to explore the Travel Behavior of Malaysian Gay Travelers. This chapter showed the method used in order to obtain the necessary data. Upon collection of data, it was analyzed using NVIVO and SPSS. An overview of the Methodology used to acquire the data is shown below:

I. Pre-planning

♂ Determine the research objective

♂ Design research & interview questions

II. Interview

♂ Identify 30 Malaysian Gay Travelers

♂ Fix an interview appointment with them

♂ Conduct the interview individually

♂ Audio record the interview

III. Analyzing

♂ Transcribe the interview into MS-word

♂ Perform content analysis using NVIVO 8

♂ Code the findings

♂ Main themes are indentified in the form of tree nodes

♂ Answers are matched and integrated according to each main tree nodes

IV. Result

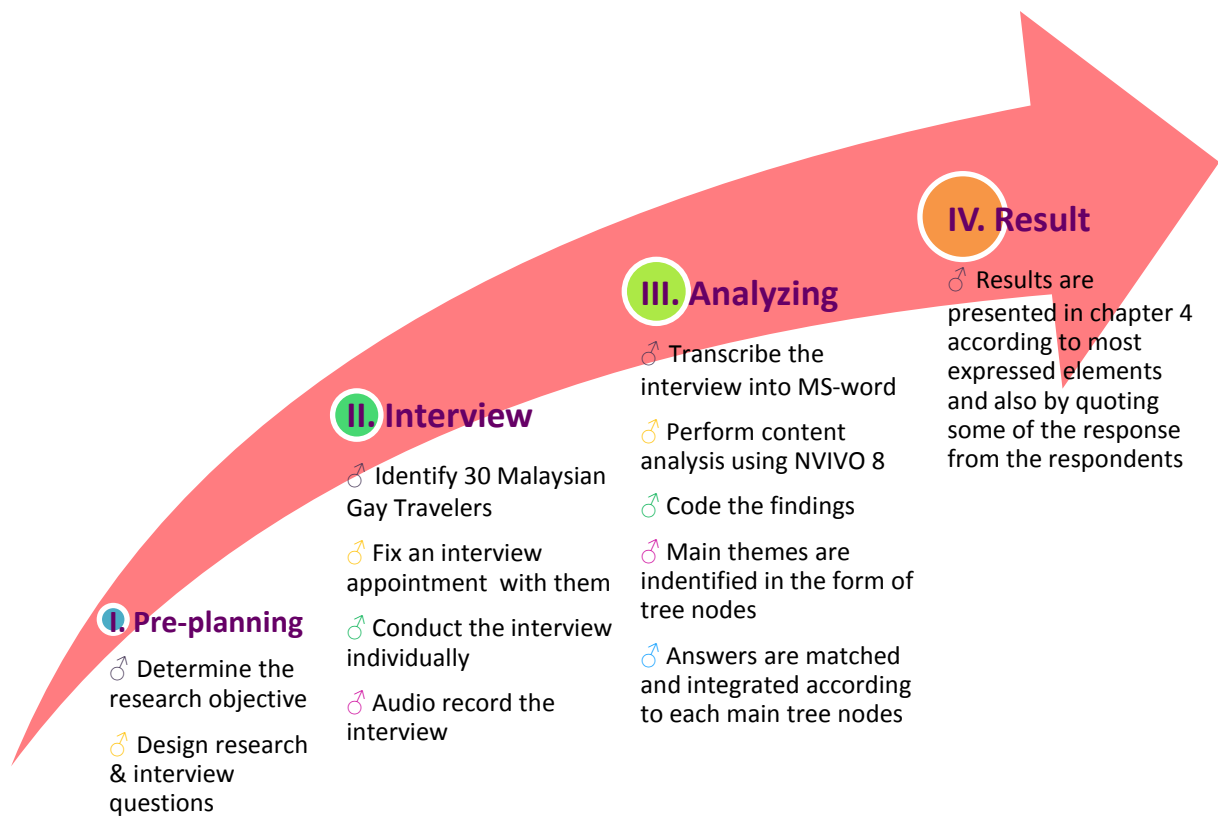♂ Results are presented in chapter 4 according to most expressed elements and also by quoting some of the response from the respondents

Figure 2: Methodology Overview