

Conducting and Assessing Qualitative Research: An Overview

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What is qualitative research?

- Focused on qualities rather than quantities
- Often designed to generate deep understanding of meanings, processes, and/or reasoning
- Data collection and data analysis

Planning (and evaluating) qualitative research

- Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research methods
 - Depth versus breadth
 - Generalizability

Outline

- **Four methods of data collection:**

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Ethnography
- Content analysis

- **Two approaches to analysis:**

- Coding
- Memos

For each method:

- *What is it?*
- *When/why use it?*
- *How do you collect the data?*
- *How do you analyze the data?*
- *Factors to consider in planning (or evaluating) a research project*
- *Examples*

Interviews

Interviews

- A researcher seeks knowledge from the respondent's point of view.
- Key points of variation
 - Level of structure (structured, semi-structured, or unstructured)
 - Interviewer's role (level of collaboration/participation) and status
 - Number (and/or length) of interviews

References: Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006)

Why use interviews?

- In-depth understanding of meanings, processes, and/or reasoning
- When the researcher has a focused topic
- When the topic is not tied to a particular setting
- To gain access to “hidden” or “subjugated” knowledge from marginalized respondents

Collecting interview data

- In-person, phone, or Skype interviews
- Audio and/or video recording
- Interviewing techniques
 - Building rapport
 - Active listening
 - Markers
 - Probing
- Field notes

Analyzing interview data

- Transcribing
- Coding
- Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS)

References: Saldaña (2016)

Planning (and evaluating) interview research

- Respondent recruitment and selection
- The quality of the interview guide
- The impact of the interviewer on research findings
- Development and application of codes
- The search for the negative case

5-minute exercise

How would you investigate your research topic using in-depth interviews? How structured would your interviews be, and why?

Focus groups

Focus groups

- Multiple respondents are interviewed together
- “Group dynamic” is important
- Interviewer’s role during the focus group: moderator
- Key points of variation:
 - Group composition: Heterogeneous or homogeneous
 - Level of moderation and structure provided

Why use a focus group?

- Collect data from multiple participants at once (efficient)
- For exploratory work when researchers may not know what is most important to respondents
- When studying issues that are largely taken for granted by research participants
- When working with hard to reach, difficult, stigmatized and/or marginalized populations that may feel unsafe participating in research

Collecting focus group data

- Arranging a focus group
- Audio and/or video recording
- Notetaking during the focus group

Analyzing focus group data

- Transcribing and coding
- Can be analyzed at the level of individual group members or the level of the group (“group narrative”)

Planning (and evaluating) focus group research

- How respondents were recruited and/or selected
- Comparability across focus groups

5-minute exercise

How would you investigate your research topic using focus groups? How would you recruit participants, and how would you structure your focus groups?

Observation and Ethnography

Observation and ethnography

- Observing, describing, and interpreting everyday life, behavior, and culture.
- Ethnography often incorporates several methods and data types along with observation.
- Key points of variation:
 - Researcher's role (from participatory to non-participatory)

Why use ethnographic methods?

- To gain understanding of what people actually do in everyday life
- When interactions within a particular context are important

Collecting ethnographic data

- Jottings in the field
- Audio and/or video recording
- Writing field notes

Analyzing ethnographic data

- Coding
- Memos

Planning (and evaluating) ethnographic research

- Amount of time in the field
- Gaining access
- Rapport (and becoming taken for granted)
- Rigorous methods of recording

5-minute exercise

How would you investigate your research topic using observation? Where could you observe?

Content analysis

Content Analysis

- Systematic analysis of “texts” or “artifacts,” including documents, newspapers, photographs, television, websites, and more
- Can be either (or both) qualitative and quantitative

Why use content analysis?

- Unobtrusive
 - Data already exist in the world, independent of the research
 - Data are not influenced by researcher interaction
- Allows us to go beyond the subject perceptions of individuals
- Understanding culture and socialization
- Examining historical phenomena for which other methods are not possible

Collecting data for content analysis

- Archival research
- Databases of documents (e.g. newspaper articles)
- Taking photographs
- Collecting documents from organizations
- Web-based research

Analyzing data

- Coding
- Memos

- Qualitative and quantitative
 - Developing a codebook
 - Intercoder reliability

Planning (and evaluating) content analysis research

- Selection of sources, sampling, and generalizability
- Coding procedures and consistency

5-minute exercise

How would you investigate your research topic using content analysis? What “texts” could you use? How could you analyze them?

Combining multiple methods

Using multiple methods

- Multi-method qualitative research
- Mixed-methods research combining qualitative and quantitative research
- Sequential combinations
- Triangulation

Conclusions

References & Resources

General references and resources

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