Qualitative Research Methods of the Social Sciences Applied to Communication

A Guide

Javier Díaz Noci

PhD Seminar – AF1
Universitat Pompeu Fabra
2016-2017
November 08, 2016
Contents

1. Latest trends in (online) journalism research 5
2. Theoretical Interpretative Framework 7
3. Qualitative Research Methods of the Social Sciences 11
   Applied to Communication
4. Main Techniques of the Qualitative Methods 13
5. ...and finally: Writing the Paper 29
1. Informational Conception: Journalism as an Instrument
2. Mediatization
   a. Journalism as an Institution
   b. Society articulated with the Media
   c. Journalism as Discourse
      i. Rhetorics & Technology
      ii. Narrativity
3. The main problems:
   a. In which way news and information are gathered, produced and disseminated?
      Factors of Production
      Journalism as Social Construction
      Journalism as a Job
      Ideological Values
      Media Cultures
      Reality-Constructing Activity
   b. How is it changing?
      Cooperation – Groups – Communities
      Speed – Connectivity - Flexibility
      Innovation
      Adaptation
      Transformation
   c. Convergence – Globalization
      Decentralization
      Non linearity
      Property and Alliances
      Network Journalism
      Multinodal Structures
      Social Interaction
      Comparative Studies
      Media Policy
      News Flow
4. Some bibliographical recommendations:
   d. What’s trending in Media, Cultural and Communication Studies <http://explore.tandfonline.com/page/ah/media-trending/media-studies-trending>

Further Reading

| Hanitzsch, T.; Esser, F. Challenges and Perspectives of Comparative Communication Inquiry. Handbook of Comparative Communication Research [01_trends_comparative_communication_research.pdf]|
Two main questions:
1. Why do we use theories?

“[Theory] is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypotheses. Researchers increasingly use a theoretical lens or perspective in qualitative research, and advocacy perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change.”

It is an inductive logic:

Creswell, J. H.  
*Research design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.*  
Los Angeles etc.: Sage, 2009
Theories, Methods or Approaches?

Three theoretical suggestions:

1. Grounded Theory
   “Grounded theory methods are suitable for studying individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes”.
   
   Creswell, J. H.
   Research design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.
   Los Angeles etc.: Sage, 2009

   Glasser and Strauss
   To generate (inductive) theories
   Related to social questions
   Based on a systematic analysis of data
   Simultaneous data collection and analysis
   Open at first, then Axial and Selective-Theoretical
   Iterative design and theoretical sampling
   Until theoretical saturation
   Comparative system
   Categories from Empirical Data
   Until finding the central category (or categories)

2. Action-Network Research
   “It leads to better research because the practical and theoretical outcomes of the research process are grounded in the perspective and interests of those immediately concerned, and not filtered through an outside researcher’s preconceptions and interests”.
   
   Reason, P.; Bradbury, H.
   Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice.
   London etc.: Sage, 2001: 4

   Community-based, Collaborative
   Participants help to design research
   To produce practical knowledge
   Democratise the Research process
   Emphasis on Taking Action

3. Mixed Methods
   Quantitative and Qualitative Paradigms
   Complex Research Questions
   A Sequence of Methods
Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation

Some help to decide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 4 Key elements to look for in research papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grounded theory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the research question indicate that a theory is needed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the study designed to support iterative data collection and analysis in a context of theoretical sampling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the discussion explain how the theory responds to the original research question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed methods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the research question appropriate for mixed methods or would a single method suffice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the relation among the methods clear in terms of their sequence, priority, and integration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the discussion relate the findings to a complex understanding of a multifaceted phenomenon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the research question arise from a situated problem that is best understood through a collaborative research partnership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are the research agenda and activities shared by researchers and partners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do the results meet the partners’ needs in a collaborative and equitable manner? Is the identified problem acted on in a substantive way?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Indicators of quality control

Accurate **description** of the problem.
Construction of the corpus (**relevance**).
Indication of the methods (**transparency**).
1. Credibility
   Through persistent observation, triangulation of methods and control of the operations, both gathering and observation.

2. Transferability
   Using an intentional sampling system, and proposing a deep description.

3. Dependability
   The research process will be examined.

4. Conformability
   Methods will be discussed and evaluated and results compared.

### Further Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main texts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lingard, L.; Mathieu, A.; Levinson, W. Grounded theory, mixed methods, and action. BMJ 2008;337</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological articles:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, A.; Corbin, J. Grounded Theory Methodology. An Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charmaz, K. The Grounded Theory Method: An Explanation and Interpretation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domingo, D.; Masip, P.; Costera, I. Tracing Digital News Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, M.; Alony, I. Guiding the Use of Grounded Theory in Doctoral Studies – An Example from the Australian Film Industry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3

Qualitative Research Methods
of the Social Sciences
Applied to Communication

1. Why do we use qualitative methods (and Ethnography)?
   - It serves a research goal
   - It is systematic
   - Related to more general theories
   - Controlled with validity and reliability criteria

2. It is applied to social groups:
   - Closed
   - Living together during a long time
   - Confronting situations
   - Behaviors in public events
   - All those that cannot be analyzed using surveys or interviews

3. Benefits and Weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firsthand data</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct witness</td>
<td>Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict and evolution</td>
<td>Generalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive social description</td>
<td>Self prejudices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main problem: Access
Further Readings

Main texts:

- Oller Alonso, M.; Barredo, D. International Comparative Studies: Towards the Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods
- Jackson II, R. L.; Drummond, D. K.; Camara, S. What is Qualitative Research?

Methodological articles:

- Paulussen, S.; Ugille, P. User Generated Content in the Newsroom: Professional and Organisational Constraints on Participatory Journalism
4
Main Techniques of the Qualitative Methods

1. Observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Point of view of the observed</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessing the facts</td>
<td>Self prejudices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>It is not always easy to differentiate facts and interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explorative</td>
<td>Generalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types of observation
- Participant
  - Known as researcher
  - Unknown as researcher
- Non-participant

Observation Techniques
- Plan the observation
- define the problema, scenario, periods
- People – Identify informants
  - Activities
  - Time
  - Space
- How to record
- How to analyze
2. Netnography and Virtual Ethnography

“Online ethnography and digital ethnography are generic terms for doing any sort of ethnographic work using some sort of online or digital method. When you use those terms, it is unclear what you have done in terms of what procedures you used, what the methodology is, such as what ethical guidelines you used for example. The literature base you will cite is also a bit amorphous.”


“Virtual ethnography is the term coined by Christine Hine, and it refers to a method that sees online work as only partial and incomplete. I would expect that if you called your online ethnography a virtual ethnography, then you would adhere fairly closely to the research attitudes and practices, in fact the methodology of combined research philosophy and actions, of Professor Hine as she demonstrated them in her book.”

“Netnography refers to a specific set of online ethnographic procedures characterized by a particular methodology, including an epistemological background, analytic frameworks, and a consistent and evolving set of guidelines for entree, observation, data analysis, ethics, and so on.”


Netnography: Methods

- Online survey methods (using the Web)
  - Good for online communities (patterns and attitudes)
  - Variable and factor correlations
- Interviews and Journals
  - Detailed experiences
  - Gain deepen knowledge
- Social network analysis
  - Structure and patterns of relationships
- Observation (participant/non-participant)
Virtual Ethnography: Methods

1. We can use ethnography to investigate the ways in which use of the Internet becomes socially meaningful.
2. Interactive media such as the Internet can be understood as both culture and cultural artefact.
3. The ethnography of mediated interaction often asks researchers to be mobile both virtually and physically.
4. Instead of going to particular field sites, virtual ethnography follows field connections.
5. Boundaries, especially between the “virtual” and the “real”, are not to be taken-for-granted.
6. Virtual ethnography is a process of intermittent engagement, rather than long term immersion.
7. Virtual ethnography is necessarily partial. Our accounts can be based on strategic relevance to particular research questions rather than faithful representations of objective.
8. Intensive engagement with mediated interaction adds an important reflexive dimension to ethnography.
9. This is ethnography of, in and through the virtual – we learn about the Internet by immersing ourselves in it and conducting our ethnography using it, as well as talking with people about it, watching them use it and seeing it manifest in other social settings.
10. Virtual ethnography is, ultimately, an adaptive ethnography which sets out to suit itself to the conditions in which it finds itself.

Please consider in general:
- Alteration
- Anonimity
- Access
- Archiving

Please consider in practicing Virtual Ethnography:
- The importance of developing appropriate researcher presence
- The limitations of covert ethnography – negotiating consent is about more than just ethical duty
- The importance of participating in and understanding a communication ecology
  Members check
- Limitations: honesty and trustworthiness of online communicators
  Consider content analysis as well

3. Interviews and Life Histories

Benefits and Weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic data</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct interaction</td>
<td>Difficulty of controlling veracity &lt;br&gt;– Need to contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful in several phases of the research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types:
- Structured / Semistructed / Focalized / Open
- Individual / Group
- On a topic / On the people
- Exploratory / descriptive / Interpretative / Prospective / Contrast

Individual interviews
Preparation of the interview
- Describe the goals
- Sampling and selection of people
  - Best informed, friendly, accessible
- Profiles
- Organize the questions (according to categories)

Formulation of the questionnaire
Performing the interview
- Presentation
- Purpose
- Selection of the interviewee
- Anonymity and Confidentiality
- Permission to record, time, etc.
- Topics
- Questions

Structure of the interview
Introduction
Questions to discover questions (completing the questionnary)
Focalization and deepening
Central versus contextual questions
Closure
Type of questions
Comparative
Questions on the past (memories)
Affective reactions
Cause-effect relations
Complementary information
Conditional
Indagatory
Some strategies
Silence
Elaboration
Assertion and repetition
Recapitulation
Further information
Changing the topic
Post-interview

Life histories (and oral history)
Definitions
Narration of one person’s life (or passages of life) in a serial conversation.
Longitudinal
Conventional: one life = social phenomenon
One or multiple stories
Cross stories
Parallel stories
Benefits and Weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quick method</td>
<td>Different levels of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-expected data</td>
<td>Group effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Different individual habilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rich answers

Social discourse

Preparing the life history interview
  Profile
  Motivation
  Time, place, number of interviews
  Guidelines

Structure
  Introduction
  Invitation to speak freely
  Use of pictures, documents, etc. to trigger the memories
  No need to rush
    From general to specific
    Avoid self-including answering questions
    Avoid yes-no questions
  Closure (consensus)
  Gratification
  One-two hours long

Exemple of transcription record file:
4. Focus groups

Definitions
Socialized (and focused) conversation
Freedom to express thoughts, feelings, mental structures...
Collective dialogue and interaction
Focalization and deepening
Seeking for homogeneity from heterogeneity

Benefits and Weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help for hypothesis</td>
<td>Good informant are scarce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for social behaviors</td>
<td>Information control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for change measurement</td>
<td>Impatience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparing the focus group session:
- Describe the goals
- Sampling and selection of people
- Organize the questions (according to categories)
- Prepare the place and recording system
  - Neutrality,
  - special rooms (with one-side mirrors),
  - same status

Participants
- Sampling and selection of people
  - According to the goals and variables
  - Profiles (stratification)
  - Representative – Non statistical, but meaningful
- 6-8 people
- With no previous relationships
- More people in mind than the necessary

Structure of the focus group session
- Introduction
- Individual presentation
- Ice-breaking question
- Development, according to some guidelines
  - From general to specific
  - Avoid self-including answering questions
  - Avoid yes-no questions
- Closure (consensus)
- Gratification
- One-two hours long

Treating the information
- Segments
- Codification and categorization
- Analysis and description
  - Partial or total transcription
- Report
- Participants’ codification

Further Readings (correspondence with the support stuff)

Main texts:

Beneito-Montagut, R. Ethnography goes online: Towards a User-centred methodology [06_ethnography_online.pdf]
Consensus methods

The panel specialists arrive at conclusions and recommendations through consensus. Specifically appointed for the evaluation.

1. **Delphi**

   Prediction technique (origin Rand Corporation)

   Goal: arriving to an agreement, decreasing dispersion and maintaining dissidence

   Sequential anonymous query

   - Occurrence degree (probability)
   - Importance degree
   - Tendencies
   - Categorized answers, if possible

   Phases

   - Problem
   - Experts recruitment
   - Launching the query

     - From 2 to 4 rounds
     - From 10 to 30 people

   Results

   Answers reconsidered
Benefits and Weaknesses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No physical presence required – participants worldwide</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictive</td>
<td>Well-known participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It avoids leadership effect</td>
<td>Professional interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Lack of answer and abandon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expert Panel

“The main task of an expert panel is usually synthesising a variety of inputs – testimony, research reports, outputs of forecasting methods, etc. – and produce a report that provides a vision and/or recommendations for future possibilities and needs for the topics under analysis.”


When to use an expert panel?
- Studying very specific fields requiring a high level of competence.
- Studying subjects for which other tools are difficult to implement at a reasonable cost
- Carrying out limited-scope evaluations.
- Assisting the evaluators in their conclusions on a subject in complex evaluations
- Providing assistance in the drafting of final conclusions relating to the possible impacts of a programme

Recruiting experts:
- Professional Experience
- Independence
- Ability to work in groups

Taking into account the number of required disciplines
... and a chairman.

Procedures
- First panel sesión
  - The panel’s organisation and the role of each member.
  - The type of investigation, the data collection methodology, and details of each panellist’s task (such as field visits)
  - The intervention work programme, the organisation of future sessions and their contents.

Next panel sessions:
- The work carried out since the previous session
- Findings from investigations which are completed or in process
• Problems encountered
• Progress in editing the various documents, the review process, and quality control over these documents
• The tasks to be achieved before the next session and its envisaged content
• Confidentiality of the panel's debates

And finally, a report

*If desired, the report can be submitted for revision to the members of the panel, prior to public dissemination.*

A hybrid method: Face-to-face workshop

The workshop group is intentionally kept very small in order to promote maximum interaction, and thus is not inclusive of all persons doing key research in this field. However, it is hoped that this face-to-face workshop would build the basis for broader exchange of research approaches and results in a more continuous manner.
Nominal Group Technique

The NGT is a structured method for capturing and aggregating opinions emerging from a group of experts who physically coincide in terms of place and time […] a particular case of FG


When to use a NGT?

- To generate some ideas and be sure that all members participate free from other participants’ influence.
- To identify priorities or select alternatives.
- When the ideas can be controversial or participants are shame

Recruiting the members of the group

Members of a research group or project
...and a facilitator

Procedures

A place for the participants to write
Explain the focus question(s)
Silent brainstorm ideas
A round for sharing ideas
Discussion and Considerations of Alternatives (even voting)
Ranking items (two or more rounds possible)
Final discussion
An (internal) report

Benefits and Weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages equal participation and provides an structured framework</td>
<td>Forces everyone to have a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify issues and opportunities, strategic problems and solutions, and determine research items</td>
<td>Keeping all ideas equally visible is not always easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopting collective decisions</td>
<td>Voting simplifies too much a further development of the ideas (list reduction) and minimizes discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is focused on important topics. It focuses on a single-purpose and single-topic.

Further Readings (correspondence with the support stuff)

Methodological articles:

Landeta, J.; Barrutia, J.; Lertxundi, A. Hybrid Delphi: A methodology to facilitate contribution from experts in professional contexts. [delphi.pdf]

Estabrook, R. E.; Schutt, R. K.; Woodford, M. L. Translating Research into Practice: The participatory expert panel approach [expert_panel.pdf]

Participatory Methods Toolkit. Expert Panel [expert_panel_02.pdf]

Gaining consensus among stakeholders through the Nominal Group Technique [nominal_group_technique.pdf]

Examples:

“Once the researcher has settled on a strategy, chosen a site, selected a sample, and determined the methods to be adopted for collecting data, he or she should discuss how he or she will record, manage, analyze, and interpret the data.”

Source: Marshall, K. Designing Qualitative Research, p. 205

A Map of a Research Project

Preliminary Concerns
- Think about the Orientation
- Triangulation for Validity
- Searching for Patterns (of Thought and Behavior)

Data Collection
- Field Notes
- Memoranda (summaries)
- Interim Reports (preliminary summaries)
- Bibliography
- Text itself:
• Transcription (verbatim?)
• Use the present tense
• Disappear yourself
• Revise and edit the text

Source: Fetterman, D. *Ethnography*, p. 113 ss.

Organize your text

The process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data

Source: Marshall, K. *Designing Qualitative Research*, p. 205

Presentation and Justification

• Topic.
  – How you came to it?
• Interest
  – Personal
  – For the Scholarly Community (link to the State of the Art)
• Justify the approach to the topic based on references, trends, etc.

State of the Art

• Relevant bibliography
  – On the topic (general and specific)
  – On the methods
  – On other aspects:
    • Historical
    • Universe and Samples
    • Case Study.
• Remember to justify it all and link to the topic and approach

Goals

• Enumerate them (even as a list).
• Explain them clearly and link them to the topic and approach
• And to the trends of the state of the art
• Please remember:
  – Goals are not wishful thinking, or personal justification, which can be placed in the preliminary chapters (i.e., in a PhD dissertation that should be placed in the preface, not in the introduction.)

Research Problem and Hypothesis
• The problem is the core part of the research design, especially from an Anglo-Saxon, empirical, data-driven research approach.
• Concepts: It is extremely important to define them using bibliography, not to invent them.
• Hypothesis are few, hierarchized, linked to dependent-independent variables that can be
  – Isolated, define, delimited
  – Measured
• Please remember the type of hypothesis before writing them, and link to the approach and to the goals of your research.

Methodology and Techniques
• Methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed)
• Justification.
• Techniques:
  – Please mention concrete techniques, and be as concrete as possible.

Useful Tools
• Maps
• Flowcharts
• Organization Charts
• Matrices
• Statistics

Source: Fetterman, D. Ethnography, p. 93-112

References
• Bibliography
• Other Materials
• Please use a consistent citation method (recommended: APA Style)