



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

“Qualitative research is **interdisciplinary, interpretive, political, and theoretical** in nature. Using language to understand concepts based on people’s experience, it attempts to create a sense of the larger realm of human relationships.”

— Bonnie S. Brennan,

Nieman Professor of Journalism,
Diederich College of Communication,
Marquette University

INTERDISCIPLINARY

- Encompasses many areas of study
 - Mass communication qualitative research often borrows from political science, women and gender studies ... and vice versa
- Commonly used in social sciences and market research

THEORETICAL

- Grounded in theory
- Set of principles or an idea about a phenomenon or human behavior guides research
- Uses theory to help explain research subjects
- Examples: Cultural studies, feminist studies/theories, Marxist theories

POLITICAL

- Ideology influences ...
 - how qualitative research is approached
 - what issues are dealt with
 - how those issues are treated in qualitative research
- Example: Ideological beliefs about vaccinations may influence what types of questions are asked.

INTERPRETATIVE

- Quantitative research makes meaning out of numbers and statistical data
- Qualitative research makes meaning out of language
 - Sometimes thought of as subjective
 - Always analytical

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

THE PROCESS

1. Have an idea
2. Develop research question
3. Collect data
4. Analyze data
5. Report findings

1. THE IDEA

- Observations
- Interests
- Current phenomenon or event
- Past phenomenon or event
- Issue you want to solve (market research)

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

- *Not a hypothesis!*
- Ask why
- Like a theory, research questions guide your research
- Specific query to be answered through research and analysis
- Example: *Why are children more interested in eating unhealthy foods than vegetables?*

3. COLLECTING DATA

A. Interviews

B. Focus groups

C. Textual analysis

D. Ethnography

A. INTERVIEWS

- Typically one-on-one conversation
- Can be:
 - Short or in-depth
 - Conducted over multiple sessions or in a single session
 - Conducted in-person, over the phone, via video or instant messaging or email
- Recorded and transcribed

A. INTERVIEWS

- A good interviewer employs sensitivity and skill
- Techniques:
 - Probing questions
 - Follow-up questions
 - Segues
 - Pauses
 - Gives interviewee space to think
 - Listens
 - Avoids leading questions
 - Asks open-ended questions
 - Expounds on closed-ended questions

B. FOCUS GROUP

- A group of 4-10 people come together to discuss a specific topic
- Duration: More than 30 minutes but less than 2 hours
- Moderator asks questions as they relate to topic of interest
 - Questions typically open-ended
 - 10-15 questions prepared
- Can be conducted online or in-person
- Recorded and transcribed

C. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- What's a text?
 - Anything with a message
 - A food wrapper, a book, a newspaper article, or a movie can provide a text for analysis
- Thorough breakdown of the sum of its parts

D. ETHNOGRAPHY

- A descriptive study of people and customs
 - Ethnography is interested in what people do, their rituals, customs, and daily lives
- Embedding yourself in a subject of study by either observing or being a part of it
- Human activity is the focus
- Have you ever people watched?
- Think “Undercover Boss”

QUALITATIVE TOOLS IN AUDIENCE RESEARCH

QUALITATIVE TECHNIQUES IN AUDIENCE RESEARCH

- Filmmakers use **focus groups**, **interviews** in test screenings for movies
- Advertisers use **focus groups** to message test their commercials
- Food companies use **focus groups**, **interviews** in taste tests for products
- Intel (1995) used **ethnographic** research to understand how baby boomers used PCs in their daily lives
- In academia, **ethnography** is often used in understanding media use and fan communities
- **Textual analysis** used to lesser extent in market research
 - Parents Television Council uses textual analysis in reports/blogs about inappropriate content for children
 - TV networks send screeners to media critics who perform versions of textual analysis in their reviews