

FAQ 35: What are some good approaches to analysing qualitative data?

What's the issue?

A vital element in successful qualitative data analysis is to respect the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. The difference is, as Strauss (1987) puts it, not least in how data are treated analytically. In fact, it all depends on the questions researchers define at the start and on the specific methodologies they choose to obtain the desired data. Qualitative methods comprise a wide variety of ways of collecting data, with distinct implications in terms of analysis. Are these data obtained through interviews and focus groups, or are they the result of participant observation? A distinction is usually made between “naturally occurring data”, which correspond to different forms of discourse, texts, and oral expressions that might be observed and registered, and “researcher-provoked data”, comprising different methodologies devised by the researcher to address particular issues (Silverman, 2006). Although this distinction shouldn't be taken too rigidly, it stresses the importance of considering the process through which particular discourses are produced in terms of analysis before what you

A common way to approach qualitative data analysis in this case is the case where the themes have already been decided when designing the study, or if the data are analysed in terms of predefined themes. In other cases the themes are constructed afterwards. If the themes are predefined beforehand (as is the case with grounded theory research), it is usual that

Advanced methods of discourse analysis require further training and are time-demanding, although they have a great potential in the exploring of the cognitive, social, moral, and emotional processes at work in the act of communicating.

Although, in general, interview transcripts constituted the basic materials for the above suggestions of analysis, other textual data – such as field notes, documents, etc. – may be also subjected to the same methodologies.

Other forms of data collecting, such as visual data gathered through video recording or photography, require additional qualitative methodologies of analysis, with particular epistemological implications in terms of the evidence provided.

Pitfalls to avoid

The issue of confidentiality: it is important to respect the privacy of

References and further resources

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