

Qualitative Analysis

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Overview

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- Homework 3 handed back today
- Homework 4 due next class (optional extension to Monday if anyone needs it)
- Prompt for homework 5 released today (due date extended to last day of class: May 9)
- Review session for Final Exam last day of class: review sheet will be released April 25
- \LaTeX introduction: two sessions April 25 - 11am-12pm and 12pm-1pm (attending one is enough)

Qualitative Analysis: What is it?

Qualitative analysis (QA) refers to several distinctive research techniques, including **comparative case studies**, **participant observation/ethnography**, **intensive (depth) interviewing**, **historical process tracing**, **content analysis**, and **focus groups**.

What unites these approaches is their emphasis on the use of non-quantitative data in their analysis, such as summaries of interviews, descriptions of general observations, etc. However, quantitative approaches may at times make use of quantitative data but do so without the use of inferential statistics.

Basic Features of Qualitative Analysis

- Collection primarily of qualitative rather than quantitative data
- Use of **idiographic** rather than **nomothetic** causal explanation.
- **Reflexive** research design, in which the design develops as the research progresses
- Sensitivity to the **subjective role of the researcher**

Why use Qualitative Analysis?

- To focus on previously unstudied processes and **unanticipated phenomena**
- When paying attention to orientation to **social context**, to the **interconnections** between social phenomena rather than to their discrete features
- When focusing on **human subjectivity**, on the **meanings** that participants attach to events and that people give to their lives
- While the gold standard in scientific research is quantitative research (and experiments in particular), QA techniques often can be used to enrich experiments and surveys
- QA and Quant analysis are complimentary: **triangulation**

Comparative Case Study

- Follows same logic of quantitative hypothesis testing (essentially nomothetic)
- A number of different approaches but two stand out: **method of agreement** (MA) and **method of difference** (MD)
- These are known as "Mill's methods" -John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Comparative Case Study

- MA: If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree, is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon.
- MD: If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance save one in common, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or cause, or a necessary part of the cause, of the phenomenon.
- Video: https://youtu.be/TnbyBo_ofzI?t=210

Example: Method of Agreement

Suppose three countries that have all developed democratic political systems are compared in terms of four socioeconomic variables hypothesized by different theories to influence democratization. If the countries differ in terms of three of the variables but are similar in terms of the fourth, this is evidence that the fourth variable influences democratization.

Example: Method of Agreement

Exhibit 12.10

John Stuart Mill's Method of Agreement (hypothetical cases and variables)

| Variable | Case 1 | Case 2 | Case 3 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Importance of peasant agriculture | Different | Different | Different |
| Expanding industrial base | Different | Same | Same |
| Rising educational levels | Different | Different | Different |
| Expanding middle class | Same | Same | Same |
| Democratization (outcome) | Same | Same | Same |

Example: Method of Difference

In this example, moderate income disparities are taken to be the cause of democratization, since the country that didn't democratize differs in this respect from the country that did democratize. These two countries are similar with respect to other potential influences on democratization.

Example: Method of Difference

Exhibit 12.11

John Stuart Mill's Method of Difference (hypothetical cases and variables)

| Country A (Positive Case) | Country B (Negative Case) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Economic development | Economic development |
| Two-party system begun | Two-party system begun |
| Proportional representation | Proportional representation |
| Moderate income disparities | Extreme income disparities |
| Democratization | No democratization |

Participant Observation

- AKA fieldwork: method in which natural social processes are studied as they happen (in the field rather than in the laboratory) and left relatively undisturbed.
- By observing people and interacting with them in the course of their normal activities, participant observers seek to avoid the artificiality of experimental design and the unnatural structured questioning of survey research

Intensive Interviewing

- Method of finding out about peoples experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Although intensive interviewing can be an important element in a participant observation study, it is often used by itself.
- Unlike the more structured interviewing that may be used in survey research (discussed in Chapter 8), intensive or depth interviewing relies on open-ended questions
- The goal is to develop a comprehensive picture of the interviewees background, attitudes, and actions, in his or her own terms.

Focus Groups

- Focus groups are groups of unrelated individuals (usually 5-10) that are formed by a researcher and then led into group discussion of a topic for 1 to 2 hours.
- Focus groups do not involve representative samples; instead, a few individuals are recruited who have the time to participate, have some knowledge pertinent to the focus group topic, and share key characteristics with the target population.
- Focus groups are used to collect qualitative data, using open-ended questions posed by the researcher (or group leader).

Qualitative vs Quantitative

- Study in depth and detail, without predetermined categories or directions, rather than emphasis on analyses and categories determined in advance
- Conception of the researcher as an instrument, rather than as the designer of objective instruments to measure particular variables
- Sensitivity to context rather than seeking universal generalizations (idiographic vs nomothetic)
- Attention to the impact of the researchers and others values on the course of the analysis rather than presuming the possibility of value-free inquiry
- A goal of rich descriptions of the world rather than measurement of specific variables