There can be different types of Questions from Methods sections.

Here are a few.

A. Research Design

1. Why did you choose a qualitative design over a quantitative or mixed-methods approach?
   A: I chose a qualitative design because my research seeks to understand *how* and *why* Al-Aqilat operated as an epistemic community and influenced state formation. These are questions of meaning, interpretation, and process rather than measurement. Quantitative methods could not capture the nuance of historical archives, and mixed methods would have required data that simply does not exist in measurable form for the 1902–1932 period. A qualitative design allows me to uncover deep patterns, narratives, and mechanisms through thematic interpretation.

2. How does your design align with your research questions and objectives?
   A: My design aligns because my research questions are exploratory and interpretive they ask "in what ways" and "how" Al-Aqilat contributed. Grounded Theory provides a structured pathway to move from data to theory, making it appropriate for generating insights directly from historical evidence. (here you can refer back to your RQs).

3. Could a case study or comparative-historical method have been more suitable? Why or why not?
   A: A case study approach could have been useful if my research aimed to provide a narrow, in-depth exploration of a single organization or episode, but my focus was on broader epistemic patterns across time and space. Similarly, a comparative-historical method would have allowed systematic comparison across multiple cases, but my project was not about comparing Al-Aqilat with other groups; rather, it was about reconstructing their knowledge practices within the specific context of Saudi state formation. Grounded Theory combined with archival analysis was more suitable because it allowed categories to emerge inductively from primary evidence without imposing rigid comparative templates. This ensured that my findings reflected the unique epistemic roles of Al-Aqilat, while still situating them in relation to theories of epistemic communities, historical institutionalism, and social networks. In other words, while case study and comparative-historical approaches could have been alternatives, they would have constrained the interpretive flexibility that my methodology required.

B. Data Collection

4. Why did you rely solely on secondary sources (archives, documents) rather than interviews or oral histories?
   A: The historical context of 1902–1932 makes direct interviews impossible, and oral histories from much later periods could introduce memory distortion. Archival material — British, French, Saudi, and Ottoman — offers direct contemporary accounts. Using secondary historical data ensures authenticity and places my analysis on evidence produced within the lived context.

5. How did you ensure that the archival material you selected was representative and not biased?

   A: I worked with a range of archival collections (British, French, Saudi, and Ottoman) to minimize the risk of one-sided interpretations. By cross-checking narratives from different archives, I was able to triangulate the evidence and identify points of convergence and divergence. For example, when British records depicted Al-Aqilat as primarily traders, French reports sometimes emphasized their role as informants and intermediaries. By comparing these accounts and coding them systematically, I was able to avoid relying on a single state's viewpoint. In addition, I applied clear inclusion criteria: archives had to directly or indirectly mention Al-Aqilat, Alqassim people, their networks, or their political/economic roles between 1902–1932, which ensured relevance and representativeness.

6. What criteria did you use in selecting which archives to code and analyze?
   A: I applied three criteria: (1) relevance to Al-Aqilat's activities, (2) representation across different actors (local, regional, colonial), and (3) ability to triangulate between sources. For example, if French and British records described the same event differently, both were included to allow for comparative interpretation.

7. How did you handle conflicting accounts in different archival sources?
   A: Conflicts were treated as valuable data. Instead of discarding one version, I coded each perspective and analyzed what the differences revealed about political interests, biases, or strategic framing. This approach aligns with historical institutionalism, where multiple narratives themselves form part of institutional dynamics.

C. Data Analysis

8. Why did you choose Grounded Theory (open, axial, and selective coding) instead of, say, Discourse Analysis or Historical Narrative Analysis?
   A: Grounded Theory was chosen because it provides a systematic and transparent way to generate themes from data rather than imposing pre-existing categories. Discourse Analysis could have worked but would limit the focus to language rather than broader socio-political mechanisms. Historical Narrative would risk descriptive

storytelling without analytical depth. GT allowed me to move from raw archival material to conceptual categories systematically.

9. How did NVivo specifically support your coding process? Could the analysis have been done manually?
   A: NVivo ensured rigor, consistency, and transparency by allowing me to store, code, and cross-compare hundreds of pages of archives efficiently. While manual coding is possible, it would increase the risk of oversight and make pattern recognition across multiple archives very difficult. NVivo also enhanced the auditability of my analysis. It saved manual coding time too, which gave me opportunity to invest more time to reflect and review my coding work rigorously.

10. How did you move from codes to categories and then to themes? Can you give an example from your data?
    A: The process followed Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework, adapted within a Grounded Theory approach. First, I generated initial codes inductively from the archival translations. For example, the term "financial support" was coded when Al-Aqilat's provision of loans or material aid was described. These codes were then grouped into higher-order categories, such as "economic contributions." Through iterative comparison, I identified patterns across these categories, which became broader themes for instance, "economic stabilization through financial networks." This theme captured how Al-Aqilat acted not merely as merchants but as financial backers of state-building, which was central to my research problem.

11. How did you ensure that your themes genuinely emerged from the data and were not imposed by your prior expectations?
    A:

D. Trustworthiness & Validity

12. What measures did you take to ensure the credibility of your findings?
    A: I used triangulation across archives, ensured coding consistency by re-checking earlier coding phases, and maintained a reflexive journal to monitor my assumptions. These steps provided internal credibility and transparency.

13. How do you defend your research against the criticism of subjectivity in qualitative analysis?
    A: Subjectivity is unavoidable but manageable. Instead of denying it, I acknowledged my positionality and applied reflexivity — documenting where my interpretations might have been influenced by prior knowledge. The use of multiple sources and transparent coding mitigated excessive bias.

14. Did you apply any form of triangulation in your methodology?

A: Yes — across sources (British, French, Saudi, ottoman), across perspectives (colonial officials, local merchants, travelers), and across time (different decades within 1902–1932). This strengthened the validity of my findings.

15. How did you ensure reflexivity in your coding and interpretation?
A: I adopted a reflexive stance by consistently questioning how my own positionality and theoretical preferences might shape interpretation. For instance, I kept a coding memo log where I noted why I assigned certain codes, and revisited them after re-reading the data to check for over-interpretation. I also maintained awareness of my theoretical lens epistemic communities, historical institutionalism, and social network theory and ensured that the data spoke first, before aligning with theory. To further strengthen reflexivity, I sought feedback from peers and supervisors, discussing whether my thematic groupings were data-driven or theoretically imposed. This iterative checking helped maintain transparency and balance in interpretation.

E. Limitations

16. What are the key methodological limitations of your study, and how might they have affected your results?
A: First, reliance on archives means I am limited to what was recorded and preserved, which may reflect biases of colonial administrators or elite actors. Second, the absence of primary interviews limits personal perspectives. Third, translation from French and Ottoman Arabic could involve interpretive loss. I acknowledged these openly to maintain transparency.

17. Could the absence of interviews weaken your findings? How do you justify this?
A: Not necessarily, because the study deals with a historical period where direct interviewing is impossible. Archival research remains the most authentic method in this context. What could be considered a limitation is also a necessity.

18. If another researcher coded the same archives, do you think they would reach the same findings? Why or why not?
It depends on their research focus. However, they might not find *identical* results because interpretation in qualitative research is context-sensitive. However, they would likely identify similar categories and themes, since my coding followed systematic procedures and used NVivo to ensure replicability. Divergences would not weaken but enrich the academic debate.

F. Alternative Approaches

19. If you had to redo this research, would you consider a mixed-methods design? How might it strengthen your results?
A: Possibly, yes. A mixed-methods design could combine archival qualitative work with quantitative Social Network Analysis — mapping Al-Aqilat's connections

across trade hubs. However, given the scarcity of consistent numeric data, my chosen approach was the most practical and rigorous.

20. Could Social Network Analysis (quantitative) have complemented your qualitative findings?
    A: Yes, Social Network Analysis (SNA) could have provided a quantitative layer by visualizing and measuring the density, centrality, and strength of ties among Al-Aqilat actors and their transregional networks. For instance, mapping trade connections between Al-Qassim, Damascus, and other places as mentioned, could have illustrated network centrality more systematically. However, the archival data was largely qualitative and narrative-based, with gaps that made reliable quantification difficult. My priority was to reconstruct meaning, roles, and knowledge flows rather than just structural ties. That said, integrating SNA in future work perhaps "through partial datasets" could complement my qualitative findings by offering statistical evidence of network influence alongside interpretive insights

21. Why not use Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA), since your study spans multiple actors and regions?
    A: CHA would have been useful if I wanted to compare Al-Aqilat with another epistemic community in a different region. My focus, however, was depth over breadth. GT allowed me to build grounded explanations specific to Al-Aqilat.

So here are a few that might give you solid understanding of what they can ask. You can also check the methods and our chapter 1 section for your understanding to these answers.

A. **Methodology to Theory**
   22. How does the use of Grounded Theory enhance your ability to operationalize Epistemic Community Theory in your research?
       A: Grounded Theory gave me a bottom-up approach to coding archival data, which helped uncover causal and normative beliefs embedded in correspondence and reports. This allowed me to see how Al-Aqilat's knowledge practices and shared values aligned with the mechanisms Haas describes in epistemic communities. Without GT, I might have forced pre-existing categories onto the data instead of letting themes of knowledge-sharing and diplomacy emerge organically.

   23. In what way does coding archival data help reveal the "causal and normative beliefs" that Haas described in epistemic communities?

A: Through iterative coding, I identified recurring patterns where Al-Aqilat were not only trading but also advising rulers, financing expeditions, and mediating disputes. These actions reflected causal beliefs about the role of trade in political stability, and normative beliefs about loyalty to King Abdulaziz. The coding process transformed abstract archival descriptions into evidence of shared epistemic commitments.

24. Why is Historical Institutionalism particularly dependent on your use of archival sources rather than interviews or surveys?

A: HI emphasizes path dependency and critical junctures. Archival sources allow me to trace decisions, alliances, and institutional shifts directly in their historical context, which interviews or surveys cannot provide for a period like 1902–1932. This makes archival analysis indispensable for reconstructing how Al-Aqilat contributed to institutional formation during state-building.

B. Methodology to Findings

25. Can you give one example where your choice of open coding led you to a category that directly shaped your findings on Al-Aqilat's role?

A: Yes. One open code I developed was "financial rescue," based on repeated archival evidence of Al-Aqilat providing funds when Abdulaziz's treasury was depleted. This category later became central to my argument that they acted as epistemic stabilizers, offering not only trade networks but also financial lifelines that sustained governance during vulnerable moments.

26. How did the iterative coding process reveal unexpected insights that a more structured content analysis would have missed?

A: Structured content analysis might have kept me locked into preconceived categories like 'trade' or 'migration.' Iterative coding revealed less obvious roles, such as intelligence gathering and secret diplomatic missions, which were not captured under traditional trade categories. These insights significantly deepened my understanding of Al-Aqilat as multi-functional actors.

27. If you had relied on oral histories instead of archives, what differences might you expect in your findings about Al-Aqilat's contributions?

A: Oral histories would likely emphasize memory, identity, and cultural legacy, but risk romanticizing or overlooking less favorable aspects like clandestine diplomacy. Archives, despite their limitations, provide contemporaneous evidence that grounds my findings in verifiable patterns, which oral accounts alone would struggle to achieve.

C. Theory to Findings

28. How did Social Network Theory shape the way you interpreted the Al-Aqilat's connections across Najd, Syria, and Egypt?

A: SNT allowed me to conceptualize Al-Aqilat not simply as merchants but as central nodes in a transnational network. By tracing their ties across Najd, Syria, and we do not certainly have archives referring to Egypt. However, I could show how their brokerage positions enabled both economic exchanges and political intelligence

flows. This interpretation would not have been possible without SNT's lens on network centrality and brokerage.

29. Your findings highlight Al-Aqilat as stabilizers versus Ikhwan as destabilizers. How did your chosen theories allow you to make this distinction?
A: Although my studies do not claim to officially compare Alaqilat with Ikhwan, but still the Epistemic Community Theory highlighted Al-Aqilat's role in diffusing knowledge and aligning policies with long-term stability, while HI contextualized their support within state-building institutions. In contrast, the Ikhwan's actions can be seen as normatively rooted in religious militancy rather than knowledge-sharing. Theories together provided a clear conceptual framework to separate stabilizing from destabilizing forces.

30. Which of your findings most strongly demonstrate the intersection of Epistemic Community Theory with Historical Institutionalism?
A: The best example is Al-Aqilat's role during fiscal crises. Their financial support acted as a knowledge-based intervention, consistent with ECT, but also represented a critical juncture in institutional resilience, consistent with HI. This shows how knowledge and resources combined to shape path-dependent outcomes in state consolidation.

D. Reflexive "Tough" Integrators

31. Critics argue archival analysis privileges elite or foreign voices. How did your methodological framework guard against reproducing this bias when linking your data to Epistemic Community Theory?
A: I acknowledge this limitation, but I mitigated it by triangulating French, British, and local sources and coding across them to detect convergences rather than relying on a single perspective. By focusing on patterns across multiple archives, I minimized the bias of elite or colonial voices and grounded my analysis in cross-validated evidence.

32. Do you think the "mechanisms" you identified (knowledge-sharing, diplomacy, intelligence) are products of your theoretical lens, or are they objectively present in the archives?
A: They are objectively present in the sense that the archives repeatedly record these activities. However, the theoretical lens helped me interpret their significance. For example, without ECT, "advice" might appear as incidental; with ECT, it becomes evidence of epistemic authority. So the mechanisms are real, but theory gives them explanatory coherence.

33. If you had used Actor-Network Theory instead of Social Network Theory, how would your methodological coding and interpretation of Al-Aqilat's role look different?
A: ANT would have expanded my analysis to include non-human actors such as trade routes, camels, or even documents themselves. This might have produced a more symmetrical account of networks. However, my focus was on human epistemic

communities, so SNT was more appropriate for highlighting the brokerage and centrality of Al-Aqilat within political and economic ties.