

Politics, Philosophy and Public Affairs
Thesis Seminars for PPPA students

Introduction to Qualitative Research

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Who am I? :)

- **PhD candidate in Political Studies** (NASP - UniMi)
- **Research interests:** Political parties, intra-party politics, leadership, crises and political scandals
- **Methodology:** Quantitative and computational methods (but I also really like qualitative stuff!)
- **Background:** Sociology, Administrations and Public Policy

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- Introduction to Qualitative Research
- In-depth interviews
- Some advices on how to do interviews
- Ethical Considerations
- Introduction to Mixed Methods
- Q&A session



Introduction to Qualitative Research

- Offers **in-depth** exploration and understanding of phenomena
- Utilizes an **interpretative** approach to uncover meanings and contexts
- Involves different forms of data collection

What really sets qualitative apart from quantitative research?

- Quantitative research relies on standardized data collection methods
- Qualitative research adopts a flexible, **context-sensitive approach** tailored to the research context

Let method be the servant, not the master!

Pillars of Qualitative Analysis

- **Subject:** The individual in their entirety and specificity
- **Objective:** Understanding subjects/interpreting a phenomenon
- **Type of Analysis:** Classifications, "ideal types"
- **Collected Data:** Texts from discursive interviews, ethnographies, official documents
- **Representativeness:** Limited to individual cases



Qualitative research as an archipelago of techniques

Different techniques, according to:

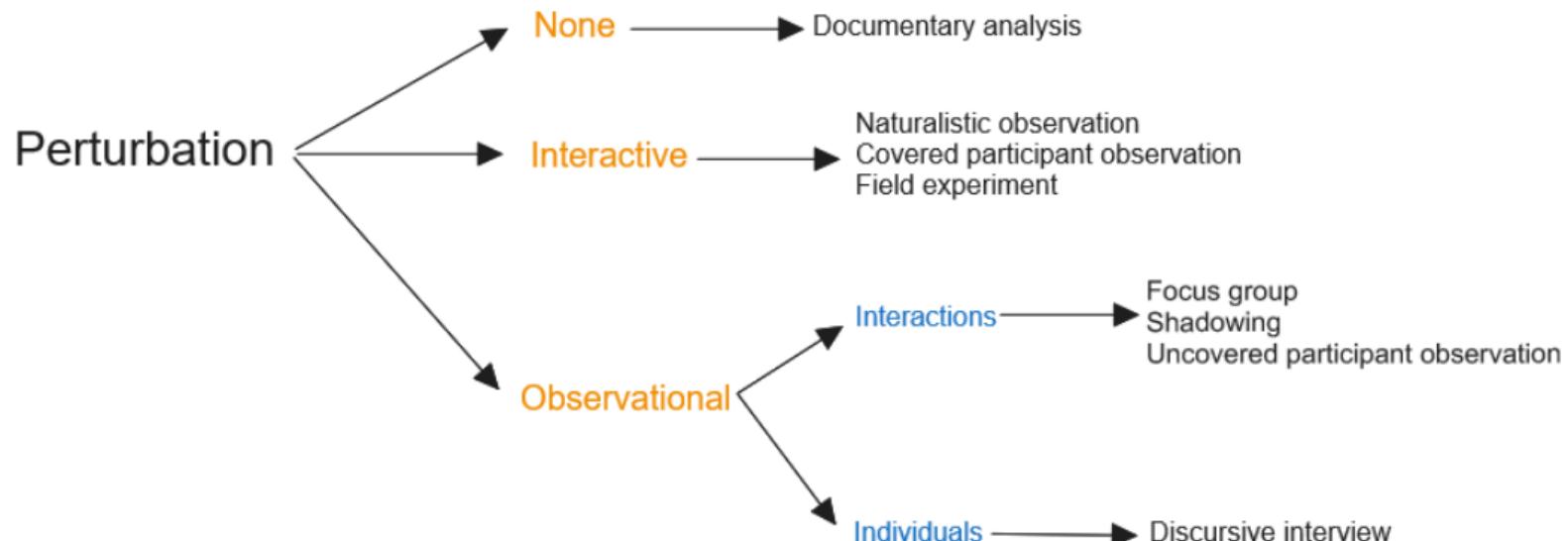
- Observational approach
- Phenomenon under investigation
- Nature of produced empirical documentation



Observational approach

Focus on the agency of the researcher

Is the phenomenon under study "perturbed" by the researcher's actions?



The Strength of Qualitative Research

- **Context Sensitivity:** Participants can express themselves in their own words, to act in their natural environments
- **Openness and Flexibility:** Meeting the unexpected, producing new concepts
- **Participants' Cooperation:** Relevant to the issue of invisibility
- **Multivocality:** Evoking the emotions of the field



DEFENDING QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH
DESIGN, ANALYSIS, AND TEXTUALIZATION

Mario Cardano



Two "macro-types" of interviews

Structured interviews

- Impersonal data collector
- Directed question-answer
- Closed answers

Qualitative interviews

- In-depth
- Flexible, with an outline
- Aimed at understanding informants' perspectives on their lives
- Experiences expressed in their own words

Interviews and the Research Design

Should interviews be included in your research design?

The point of a qualitative interview is to let the respondent tell their own story/narrative on their own terms.

Interviews can be more useful if:

- Settings and the people are not accessible otherwise (e.g., past events, life histories)
- You are interested in the **narratives** about a specific issue.

Useful Tips for in depth interviews

- Not a questionnaire! Not a survey!
- The guide acts as a prompt, reminding you of necessary topics to cover and questions to ask
- Remind yourself of the key topics to be explored
- Try to always have in mind your outline



Getting People to Talk with You

Set the right tone at the beginning of the interview. Descriptive questions such as:

- "Can you tell me about a typical day in your life?"
- "I am interested in X; could you tell me how you got involved?"
- "I would like to know about dates/people/events/places that are most important to you. Could you start by listing them?"
- "Can you walk me through that experience?"

How to keep the "engagement"

- Ask for clarifications
- Seek more details about feelings, places, and people described by the participant
- Bring back memories
- Engage in "knowing in the making"
- Try to cross-check for inconsistencies or deception

Listening and support techniques

- **Silence:** moments of pause allow individuals to process their thoughts
- **Continuators:** non-verbal signals indicating attention and interest in listening
- **Echo Technique:** repetition of keywords or phrases to confirm understanding and support the speaker
- **Recapitulation**



Ethics of (qualitative) Research

Key principles:

- Minimization of harm
- Respect for autonomy
- Protection of privacy and confidentiality
- Be always careful to research/subject relation
- Ethics in research: Mertonian Norms of Science



Research and the Invasion of Privacy

Researchers must get **informed consent** from subjects

Important aspects of the informed consent:

- two (signed) copies
- who you are, what is your research about
- they can interrupt the interview in any copy
- the records will be destroyed after X years

Always protect and be careful to anonymity and confidentiality

An Introduction to Mixed Methods

- Perhaps "mixed methods" are the best of both worlds...
- Combining quantitative and qualitative elements
- Qualitative - Quantitative design
- Quantitative - Qualitative design



Motivations for Mixed Methods

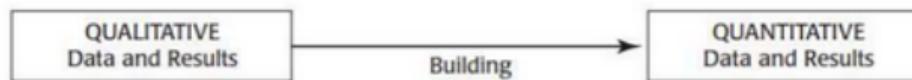
- Qualitative as a follow-up to (e.g. interviews) to quantitative findings
- Exploratory qualitative study (e.g. identify hypotheses) and then quantitative study for empirical testing

Always justify your research design!

Explanatory Mixed Methods Design



Exploratory Mixed Methods Design



Challenges of Mixed Methods

- Mismatching of indicators from qualitative and quantitative components
- Feasibility: more time, work and skills!
- It's difficult to see (and to justify!) how two parts fit into the whole



Use mixed methods only if adds **value** to your research!

Thank You for Your Attention! Any questions?



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