



Steps in a Thematic Analysis

When you are doing a thematic analysis of the user interviews you've conducted, you should follow the following 6 steps:

1. Familiarization

During the first phase, you start to familiarize yourself with your data. If you have audio recordings, it's often necessary to perform some form of transcription, which will allow you to work with your data. In this phase, you go through all your data from your entire interview and start taking notes, and this is when you start marking preliminary ideas for codes that can describe your content. This phase is all about getting to know your data.

2. Generating Initial Codes

In phase 2, you assign *codes* to your data. A code is a brief description of what is being said in the interview; so, each time you note something interesting in your data, you write down a code. A code is a description, not an interpretation. It's a way to start organizing your data into meaningful groups.

Once you have coded all your data, the next step is to collate all the sections of the interview that fit into each code.

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3. Searching for themes

In phase 3, you start to sort your codes into themes. Whereas codes identify interesting information in your data, themes are broader and involve active interpretation of the codes and the data. You start by looking at your list of codes and their associated extracts and then try to collate the codes into broader themes that say something interesting about your data.

Searching for themes is an iterative process where you move codes back and forth to try forming different themes. Some themes might be subthemes to others. Some codes can become themes themselves if they are interesting, while other codes might seem redundant, and you can place them in a temporary mixed theme.

4. Reviewing Themes

During phase 4, you review and refine the themes that you identified during phase 3. You read through all the extracts related to the codes in order to explore if they support the theme, if there are contradictions and to see if themes overlap. If there are many contradictions within a theme or it becomes too broad, you should consider splitting the theme into separate themes or moving some of the codes/extracts into an existing theme where they fit better.

You keep doing this until you feel that you have a set of themes that are coherent and distinctive; then you go through the same process again in relation to your entire data set.

5. Defining and naming themes

During phase 5, you name and describe each of the themes you identified in the previous steps. Theme names should be descriptive and (if possible) engaging. In your description of the theme, you don't just describe what the theme is about, but you also describe what is interesting about the theme and why it's interesting.

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As you describe the theme, you identify which story the theme tells and how this story relates to other themes as well as to your overall research question.

6. Producing the report

When you write up your results, there should always be enough information about your project and process for the reader to evaluate the quality of your research. Given that, you should write up a clear account of what you have done – both when you carried out the research and for your analysis.

Source:

Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, *Using thematic analysis in psychology*, in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume 3(2), 2006



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