

Triangulation

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Understanding The Quantitative/ Qualitative Divide

- Quantitative and qualitative research traditions represent a fundamental debate in the production of knowledge.
- The terms ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’, particularly in relation to methodology, however, can be confusing, divisive and limiting.

The quantitative tradition

Paradigm/assumptions: positivism, empiricism

Methodology: scientific method, hypothesis driven, deductive, reliable, valid, reproducible, objective, generalizable

Methods: large scale, surveys, random control trials

Data type: generally quantitative

Analysis: statistics

The qualitative tradition

Paradigm/assumptions: subjectivism, interpretivism, constructivism

Methodology: ethnomethodology, phenomenology, ethnography, action research, inductive, subjective, idiographic, intuitive

Methods: small scale, interviewing, observation, document analysis

Data type: generally qualitative

Analysis: thematic exploration

The Quantitative Tradition

- The quantitative tradition is based on a belief that the study of society is no different than the scientific study of any other element of our world.
- It premises scientific method, hypothesis testing, deductive logic, objectivity and quantification.

Hypothetico-deductive Method

- Involves hypothesis testing through collection and analysis of quantitative data gathered through experimental design or survey research.

Experimentation

- Experiments explore cause and effect by manipulating independent variables to see if there is a corresponding effect on a dependent variable.
- Pure experimentation requires controlled environments and randomly assigned control groups (not always possible in social science experiments often conducted in the field rather than a lab).

Studying A Population

- Exploring a population involves building an understanding of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) related to a particular topic or issue.
- Two broad methodological strategies are to:
 1. explore existing data
 2. generate primary data – primarily through survey research.

The Qualitative Tradition

- The qualitative tradition critiques quantitative assumptions and premises inductive logic, subjectivity, multiple truths, the political nature of research, and the value of depth over quantity.
- Qualitative research strategies for achieving credibility include thoroughness, i.e. saturation, crystallization, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, broad representation and peer review, and confirmation, i.e. triangulation, member checking, and full explication of method.

Ethnography

- Exploring a cultural group by:
 - discovering
 - understanding
 - describing
 - and interpreting a way of life from the point of view of its participants.
- Ethnography is reliant on prolonged engagement, persistent observation and analysis that demands a high level of reflexivity.

Ethnography

- Because ethnographic studies involve ‘immersion’ ethnographers need to carefully manage their own subjectivities and thoughtfully negotiate their relationship with the ‘researched’.

Phenomenology

- Exploring phenomena involves generating descriptions of lived phenomena as they present themselves in direct experience.
- Descriptions emerge through a dialogic process, and are synthesized to offer a range of distinct possibilities for the experience of a particular phenomenon.

Phenomenology

- While phenomenology offers a way to study phenomena, something often neglected in the social science literature on phenomenology is that it can be thick, divergent, and not 'methods'-oriented.

Ethnomethodology

- Ethnomethodology explores the methods individuals use to make sense of their social world and accomplish their daily actions.
- Ethnomethodologists search for the collaborative and constantly emerging nature of interaction through exploration of breaching experiments, building of shared interpretations and interpretative miscues.

Ethnomethodology

- Ethnomethodology:
 - recognizes the interpretative work of the individual
 - offers a method for exploring 'how' questions
 - allows comparisons of divergent cultural norms
 - and allows exploration of specific forms of interaction.
- However, it can be critiqued for not addressing 'significant' questions, and being too focused on verbal aspects of communication.

Feminist Approaches

- While not a distinct methodology, feminist research is premised on the belief that traditional ‘rules’ of research are imbued with unacknowledged and unaddressed male bias.
- Feminist researchers argue that research should be committed to:
 - the empowerment of women
 - overcoming inequity
 - diverse representation of humanity
 - empowerment of marginalized voices
 - lessening the distinction between researcher and researched
 - searching for multiple, subjective and partial truths.

Triangulation: Mixed Methodology

- “Mixed” studies traverse traditional divides and can help you capitalize on the best of both traditions while overcoming their shortcomings.
- “Mixed” approaches can be premised in the quantitative tradition with acceptance of qualitative data; the qualitative tradition with acceptance of quantitative data; or be driven by the questions themselves.

Cont.

- Challenges associated with mixed approaches include:
 - needing to be familiar with and skilled in two traditions
 - being mindful of overambitious design
 - and not having the necessary time, resources, or supervisory support for a multi-mixed method approach.

Reference

- Zina O'Leary (2009) *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*. London:
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