TECH3022-18 Social Media Practice

Lecture Five: Data Collection

1   Introduction

"The essential features of qualitative research are the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories; the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers' reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production; and the variety of approaches" (Flick 2009 p.14).

"Unquestionably, the backbone of qualitative research is extensive collection of data, typically from multiple sources of information" (Creswell 1998 p.19).

2   Holistic Pictures

"The intent of ethnographic research is to obtain a holistic picture of the subject of study with emphasis on portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others. The ethnographic study includes in-depth interviewing and continual ongoing participant observation of a situation and in attempting to capture the whole picture reveals how people describe and structure their world (from Creswell 1994 p.163).

"Ethnographic researchers attempt to develop an understanding of how a culture works" (Bell 2005 p.17).

"Online activities leave a myriad of traces, providing a valuable resource for researchers interested in experiencing emergent social structures and connections" (Hine, 2005, p. 112).

2.1   Natural Settings

"The fields of study are not artificial situations in the laboratory but the practices and interactions of the subjects in everyday life" (Flick 2009 p.15).

"Rather, qualitative research's central criteria depend on whether findings are grounded in empirical material or whether the methods are appropriately selected and applied, as well as the relevance of findings and the reflexivity of proceedings" (Flick 2009 p.15).

"Qualitative research occurs in natural settings, where human behaviour and events occur.

Qualitative research is based on assumptions that are very different from quantitative designs. Theory or hypotheses are not established a priori.

The researcher is the primary instrument in data collection rather than some inanimate mechanism.

The data that emerge from a qualitative study are descriptive. That is, data are reported in words [primarily the participants words] or pictures, rather than in numbers.

"A researcher begins a qualitative study with general questions and refines them as they study proceeds. In addition, the process of qualitative research includes a discussion of the context of the subject or case being studied. Nowhere is the context more apparent that in a qualitative case study, where one describes the setting for the case from the more general description to the specific description" (Creswell 1998 p.78).

2.2   Perceptions & Experiences

The focus of qualitative research is on participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives. The attempt is to understand not one, but multiple realities.

Qualitative research focuses on the process that is occurring as well as the product or outcome. Researchers are particularly interested in understanding how things occur.

"A major task of qualitative research… involves observing and specifying the unique and shared features of these socially organised settings, as well as analysing the implications of institutional structures and processes for people's lives and/or social issues" (Gale Miller inMiller and Dingwall 1997 p.4).

2.3 Tacit Knowledge:

"In a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify. Instead, consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase of the research or be used relatively late in the research process as a basis for comparison with other theories" (Creswell 1994 p.95).

Idiographic interpretation in utilised. In other words, attention is paid to particulars; and data are interpreted in regards to the particulars of a case rather than generalisations.

Qualitative research is an emergent design in its negotiated outcomes. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it's the subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct.

This research tradition relies on the utilisation of tacit knowledge (intuitive and felt knowledge) because often the nuances of the multiple realities can be appreciated most in this way. Therefore, data are not quantifiable in the traditional sense of the word.

2.4 Interior Processes:

Objectivity and truthfulness are critical to both research traditions. However, the criteria for judging a qualitative study differ from quantitative research. First and foremost, the researcher seeks believability based on coherence, insight and instrumental utility and trustworthiness through a process of verification rather than through traditional validity and reliability measures" (Creswell 1994 p.163).

"The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them… The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" Blumer, 1967 quoted in (Flick 2009 p.58).

"Most field researchers use such data as questionnaires, interviews, observations and diaries. They thus attempt 'to get inside the black box' of social institutions to gain access to their interior processes and practices" (David Silverman in Miller and Dingwall 1997 p.15).

3 Gather observational notes by conducting an observation as a participant

- "Meanings
- Practices
- Episodes
- Encounters
- Roles
- Relationships
- Groups
- Organisations
- Lifestyles" (Flick 2009 p.102).

"Given these phases in the design, one uses, either explicitly or implicitly, a set of philosophical assumptions that guide the study. These assumptions speak to our understanding of knowledge: Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied" (Creswell 1998 p.19).

"In a qualitative study, the investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field" (Creswell 1998 p.76).

"Participant observation enables researchers, as far as is possible, to share the same experiences as the subjects, to understand better why they act in the way they do and 'to see things as those involved see things' (Denscombe 1998: 69)" (Bell 2005 p.17).

007

3.1 Gather observational notes by conducting an observation as an observer

In social constructionism "Experiences are structured and understood through concepts and contexts, which are constructed by this subject. Whether the picture that is formed in this way is true or correct cannot be determined. But its quality may be assessed through its viability; that is, the extent to which the picture or model permits the subject to find its way and to act in the world" (Flick 2009 p.71).

"In ethnographic research, prolonged time in the field for the investigator minimises the distance as the investigator's observational role shifts from that of an 'outsider' to that of an 'insider' during his or her stay in the field" (Creswell 1998 p.76).

3.2 Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview and take interview notes

"Knowledge is constructed in processes of social interchange; it is based on the role of language in such relationships; and, above all, it has social functions. The eventualities of the social process involved have an influence on what will survive as a valid or useful explanation" (Flick 2009 p.71).

"For the qualitative researcher, the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation" (Creswell 1994 p.4).

"The qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully these realities and to rely on voices and interpretations of informants" (Creswell 1994 p.6).

"A protocol is also useful in conducting interviews. This protocol would include the following components: (a) a heading, (b) instructions to the interviewer (opening statements), (c) the key research questions to be asked, (d) probes to follow key questions, (e) transition messages for the interviewer, (f) space for recording the interviewer's comments, and (g) space in which the researcher records reflective notes" (Creswell 1994 p.152).

3.3 Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview

"To study these topics, we ask open-ended research questions, wanting to listen to the participants we are studying and shaping the questions after we 'explore', and we refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher with the 'best' questions. Our questions change during the process of research to reflect an in-creased understanding of the problem" (Creswell 1998 p.19).

"In a netnography, focus groups of existing community participants might be valuable for two main reasons. First, online community and culture members can be group interviewed – just as individuals can be interviewed singly. They can be used to learn about norms, conventions, histories, and roles of online community members as they interact online"(Kozinets 2010).

"Conducting an interview through your computer means that your communications are going to be shaped by the medium you use. Studies seeking to understand the subjective impact of Internet connectivity can also collect documents from research participants. These documents often take the form of diaries or journals in which participants record day-to-day or even hour-by-hour events, reflections, or impressions of experiences"(Kozinets 2010).

3.4 Keep a journal during the research study

"The subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process. Researcher's reflections on their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings, and so on, become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation, and are documented in research diaries or context protocols" (Flick 2009 p.16).

"Qualitative research therefore becomes – or is linked still more strongly with – a specific attitude based on the researcher's openness and reflexivity" (Flick 2009 p.20).

"Online communities are widespread phenomena, and their norms and rituals are shaped by the practices of cyberculture and those of the general cultural groups using them"(Kozinets 2010).

3.5 Have an informant keep a journal during the research study

"A 'pure' ethnography would be conducted using data generated via face-to-face interactions and their transcription in field notes, with no data from online interactions. A 'blended' ethnography/netnography would be a combination of approaches, including data gathered in face-to-face as well as online interaction. Blended ethnographies/netnographies could take many forms, using many particular methods and favour different rations of online to face-to-face interaction, data, and analysis"(Kozinets 2010).

"Cultural participants expound and explore. They share their personal histories, spread rumours, and relate anecdotes. Collecting and decoding these free-form, free-wheeling conversations is a way of using archival data sources for netnography. The online interview is a more proactive venture (Kozinets 2010).

"In this combined process of acculturation and data collection, the keeping of fieldnotes can serve the critical function of recording and reflecting the all-important changes that occur outside the realm of the online text"(Kozinets 2010).

"In reflective fieldnotes, netnographers record their own observations regarding subtexts, pretexts, contingencies, conditions and personal emotions occurring during their time online, and relating to their online experiences. Through these written reflections, the netnographer records her journey from outsider to insider, her learning of languages, rituals, and practices, as well as her involvement in a social web of meanings and personalities. These fieldnotes often provide key insights into what the online culture is and what it does"(Kozinets 2010).

4 Collecting Media

"Writers agree that one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers word or pictures, analyses them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell 1998 p.14).

- Collect personal letters from informants.
- Analyse public documents (e.g. official memos, minutes, archival material).
- Examine autobiographies and biographies.
- Examine physical trace evidence (e.g., footprints in the snow).
- Videotape a social situation or and individual/group.
- Have informants take photographs or videotapes.
- Collect sounds (e.g., musical sounds, a child's laughter, car horns honking)." (Creswell 1994 p.149)

"Using the Internet is a process of writing and reading texts and the task of the ethnographer is to understand these principles. Understanding the meaning of texts, however, is far from straightforward. It is difficult to isolate, in any simple sense, a single text for analysis, because of the inter-discursive nature of textual meaning. Every media text is mediated by others, so no text is bounded. The text does not occupy a fixed position, but is always mobilised, placed or articulated with other texts in different ways" (Mackay, 2005, p. 131).

"Reading and understanding texts become active processes of producing reality, which involve not only the author of (in our case social science) texts, but also those for whom they are written and who read them. Transferred to qualitative research, this means that in the production of texts (on a certain subject, an interaction, or an event) the person who reads and interprets the written text is involved in the construction of reality as the person who writes the text" (Flick 2009 p.79).

"Online interaction forces the learning of additional codes and norms, abbreviations, emoticons, sets of keystrokes and other technical skills in order to transfer the emotional information vital to social relations"(Kozinets 2010).

"Whether we are talking about a blog's audience, a social network, or a computer constructed 'race' in a virtual world, the participants in these groups often self-segment by arranging themselves into online groupings sorted by interests, tastes, or pre-existing communities"(Kozinets 2010).

"To maintain the interaction with informants and encourage them to collaborate and share their experience with me, it was necessary to build a certain degree of trust. There is a real challenge in building rapport online" (Orgad, 2005, p. 55).

5   This study will

- Be based on Netnographic/Qualitative Research principles.
- Use mixed modes of constructivist qualitative data collection and interpretation such as participant observation.
- Use reflexive critical methods to contextualise the situatedness of the researcher.
- Use case studies to contrast contextual environments.

Themes will include:

1. What are the concepts of *food and nutritional literacy* held by agents in different [online] communities?

2. What characteristics of *food and nutritional literacy* are relevant to participation and experience in different types of [online] communities?

3. What are the experiences of *food and nutritional literacy* of agents in different types of [online] community?

4. How are the concepts of *food and nutritional literacy* understood by agents in different types of [online] community?

5. How do concepts of *food and nutritional literacy* relate phenomologically to different agents forming a [online] community?

6. What relevance do agents acting in an [online] community ascribe to their own concepts of *food and nutritional literacy*?

7. What can be derived from the conceptual debates between theories of *food and nutritional literacy* and [online] community engagement?

8. Can inferences, hypothesise and models be derived from an evaluation of participation and experience in [online] communities as a phenomenon in *food and nutritional literacy*?

9. To what extent can the discourse of *food and nutritional literacy* be tested and validated, both in principle and in experience in [online] communities?

10. In other words, what do people do with *food and nutritional literacy*? What do they say that they get from discussing food and nutrition, and how does the use of social media change the things that they discuss and practice?

6   Research Questions:

What is the typical unit of analysis used in the design? [Interview, Survey, Journal, participant observation, document tracking, etc. Or, does this mean what is the theoretical model that is used – i.e. interpretive, grounded, conversation, discourse analysis?]

Are there any alternative types of problems often studied by using the design? [Survey journals focussing on cultural practice, e-learning and social media, include Digital Ethnography]

What are the various data collection processes? [Outline data collection mechanism, the relationship between online material and reported material, how they correspond or interact between informants and change over time. How will I physically record data and track this information? Will I use video recordings, audio recordings, field notes, etc.?]

What are the various data analysis processes? [Outline modelling process, how different elements interact or correspond, and how they change over time. Will this include any specific models worked out via other studies, for example, organisation management, behavioural studies, conversational analysis?]

What are the typical formats for reporting the information? [Tabulated, narrative, relationship mapping, etc?]

Are there any other special characteristics of the design? [Does digital ethnography pose any specific problems? What are the contingencies between what people say and what they are observed to do? Are the observations of the researcher verifiable?]

7 Conclusion

"The data collection steps involve (a) setting the boundaries for the study, (b) collecting information through observations, interviews, documents and visual materials, and (c) establishing the protocol for recording information" (Creswell 1994 p.148).

"It can be useful to start with one set of research questions that evolve during the process of the investigation. By the time the final research project is complete, that original set of research questions may be changed quite dramatically, with new ones emerging in the process of investigation and analysis"(Kozinets 2010).

References:
Bell, J. (2005). Doing Your Research Project. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Creswell, J. W. (1994). Research Design: Qualitative and Quantative Approaches. London, Sage.
Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design - Choosing Among Five Traditions. London, Sage.
Flick, U. (2009). An Introduction to Qualitative Research Design. London, Sage.
Kozinets, R. V. (2010). Netnography - Doing Ethnographic Research Online. London, Sage.
Miller, G. and R. Dingwall, Eds. (1997). Context & Method in Qualitative Research. London, Sage.