

Qualitative Comprehensive Exam Questions, Spring 2015

1. How can a qualitative researcher enhance the validity and reliability of their study throughout the research process, from the methodology chosen, the research design, the data analysis, and the presentation of their results?

2. You are a new faculty member at a local college. You have a heavy teaching load but must also conduct research so you decide to combine the two by implementing several interactive techniques in the classroom and evaluating how your students learn. You want to go beyond test scores and assess what students are taking away from each of the interactive techniques, and the ways students respond to higher order thinking based on the competencies you have developed for the class. Frame a qualitative research design that includes an hypothesis, a theoretical framework, research purpose, research questions, variables (and how they will be measured), methodology, data collection, analysis, representation, ethical issues, limits, and possibilities.

3. The general public is increasingly aware of and concerned about the vast sum of data collected by the NSA, corporations, marketers, and social media sites. Wearables, embedded devices, and unique identifiers related to the Internet of Things (IoT) are now capable of producing data such as from heart monitoring implants, GPS biochips for finding lost pets or Alzheimer's patients, and smart sensors for home appliances that allow remote monitoring. This rich and complex data is of interest to social scientists yet there are concerns over privacy, ownership, and the commoditization of all this data. Design a qualitative study that addresses these concerns as well as how likely the general public will be to voluntarily use sensors and IoT devices, and are they likely to see the data as their own (belonging to themselves), understand the value of it, and demand more control over its use as well as some compensation for it. Describe your method, sample, variables, data collection and analysis.

4. A mid-sized state college spent a small fortune on a new recruitment project that went horribly wrong. You have been hired as a consultant to determine what happened in order to prevent a similar failure in the future. You visit the college administration and obtain a list of key personnel involved with the project. You interview these people, and also interview others named by them. You ask all of them what went wrong. You then put together a composite picture (weighing some people's account more than others based on your judgment of the accuracy of their reports) and you present the results to management.

--Is this a good methodology given the research objective?

--Where would you place the attitude toward the interviewees along the continuum of subject—respondent—informant—expert?

--Is this an emic or an etic study? In general, when is an emic and when is an etic study called for?

--What other qualitative method could you have used? Describe it in detail.

5. Social media and open-source apps have enormous potential for innovative qualitative research. You have been hired by a new non-profit cancer support organization and have a hypothesis that companies (whether selling products or providing services) can find audiences that are relevant to them, engage them in conversations, and enrich the value of their product or service by participating in social media. How would you go about testing this hypothesis? Consider the use of Twitter (or other social media) and metrics such as:

--Engagement (participating in conversation rather than just broadcast, are tweets interesting and informative enough to build an audience?);

--Reach (how diverse is the group that @messages the company? How far has content been spread across Twitter? Are people adding the organization to lists, and are those lists being followed?);

--Velocity (how likely is the organization's tweets to be retweeted? Do a lot of people retweet the organization or is it always the same few followers?);

--Linguistics (cognitive or emotional content of tweets) and motivation (how motivated are people to continue following the organization?).

--Ethics and privacy issues (related to cancer support organization, and public data).

Assume that you will not be able to interview followers. Describe the research process, from the methodology chosen, the research design, variables and measures, sampling, ethical issues, data collection, coding and analysis, and the presentation of your results.