



23E80101 Qualitative Business Research Methods

Process, contexts, questions, and assessment

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1

**Most important take-
away from last week:
don't count the
qualitative**



2

Most frequently asked: Why is qualitative research undervalued in (academic) marketing and consumer research?



Levy, S. J. (2006). History of qualitative research methods in marketing. *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*, 3-16.

3

Today's agenda

- What is the qualitative research process like?
- What is a research context?
- Research questions
- What constitutes good qualitative research?
 - Assessing quality of research in traditional scientific research
 - Assessing quality of research in qualitative research



4

- what research questions to answer drawing on what empirical phenomena [i.e. the context]
- (what qualitative research traditions will underpin the work)
- what kinds of data to be certain to collect.

5

✓ Upvoted by instructor

Having read this chapter so far, I feel like it's more challenging than I thought to find a phenomenon to study. The research question should be unique, yet the phenomenon cannot be completely unique because if it is, it's not worth explaining. It seems like you have to find that precise point of view that is unique but able to generate meaningful results. I feel like it's crucial to do a lot of reading of previous literature before you can determine if your phenomenon is worth studying or not.

+10 ✓



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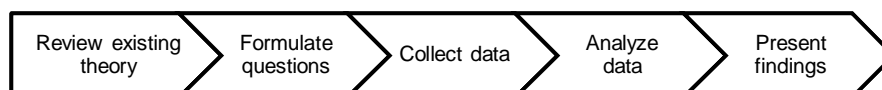
Process



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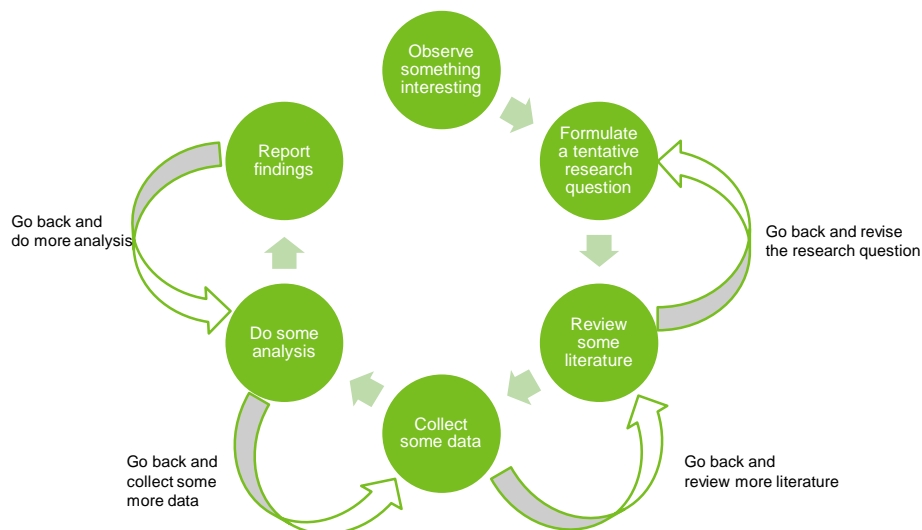
Research process

- What are the steps of a research process?



8

“Having suggested you do this exercise, we want to note that what you see in the final draft of a research paper – the literature review, theoretical perspectives, methods, findings, and discussion – is seldom a good reflection of how the research actually took place. Research **does not usually unfold in a linear fashion** and often **involves cycling back and forth** between data collection, read-ng, thinking, and analysis with fits and starts, breakthrough thoughts and dead ends, and ideas considered, refined, discarded, rethought, and embraced.” (Belk et al. 2013, 28)



Cynical identity projects as consumer resistance – the Scrooge as a social critic?

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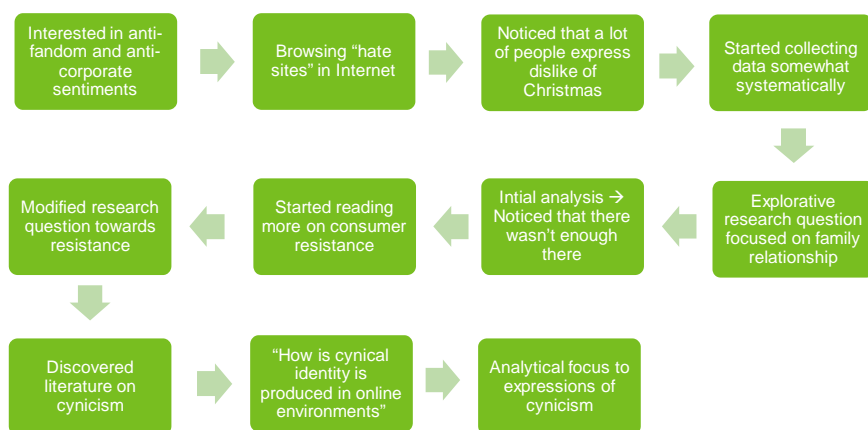
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^cDepartment of Marketing, University of Texas – Pan American, Edinburg, TX, USA

The paper focuses on consumer cynicism in online environments, using the anti-Christmas sites of the Internet as an empirical case. Drawing on the discursive power model of consumer resistance, critical management studies on organizational cynicism, and Foucauldian ideas of political struggle as “politics of self,” it is argued that consumer cynicism, in online environments, may represent a form of resistance against markets and the marketing institution, which is brought about through the problematization and partial rejection of the normalized forms of consumer subjectivity that are offered in the marketplace. The paper illustrates how consumers employ a cynical rhetoric and discursive strategy, creatively drawing from the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, to problematize the received, highly commercialized ways of celebrating Christmas and to work on a cynical identity project, *the scrooge*, which represents an alternative form of consumer subjectivity, disillusioned and critical toward the market and the marketing institution.

Keywords: consumer culture; consumer cynicism; consumer power; consumer resistance; Christmas; holidays; Internet; postmodernism; subjectivity

11



The argument: consumers are resisting Christmas by constructing a cynical self. This can be emancipatory and a creative act → not just therapeutic venting, but also circulation of new consumer discourses → **new kind of consumer resistance identified**

12

THESIS TIP:

If you do qualitative research, accept that your thesis process will involve a lot of back-and-forth between literature, data gathering, and analysis

→ feature, not a bug



13

1. Some exploration of context to orient yourself
2. Reviewing enough literature that you can start gathering data
3. Formulating a preliminary working question
4. Creation of research protocol or interview guide
5. First batch of data gathering (e.g. 2 interviews)
6. Early evaluation of data (i.e., am I getting "good stuff"?)
7. More data gathering, more comprehensive analysis
8. Re-engaging with the literature; critically rethinking research idea
9. Identifying blind spots and evaluating data saturation (negative cases?)
10. Finalizing data analysis; begin writing up final report
11. Finalizing report, revising research idea, literature etc.

14

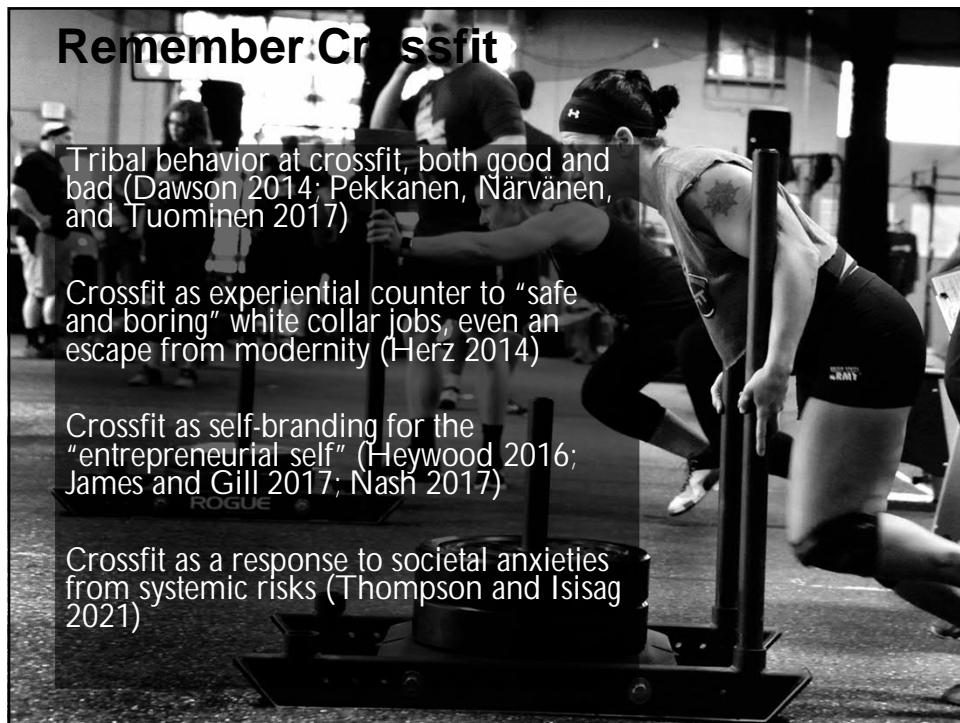
CONTEXT MATTERS

15

What is a research context?

- It is the research setting that drives your (theoretical) question
- Finding a match between what you want to study and where you should be studying it is central to good qualitative research!
- You want to be able to say (ideally): “In no other context could you have studied this as effectively!”

16



17

Two ways of framing a context

1. This context is new and interesting: what can it us teach about consumers / markets /marketing?

- E.g., new technology, new consumer trend, new political phenomenon, new...
- “From context to theory” → a more grounded theory approach

2. I am interested in X, which has not been explained in marketing / consumer research: where should I study this?

- E.g., bringing new theories from other sciences into marketing
- “From theory to context”

18

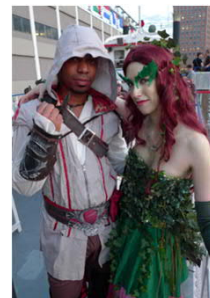


19

COSPLAY

- Cosplay ('costume play'), a form of masquerade, exploding popularity in the last five years
- Emphasis on self-crafted outfits based on pop culture source material plus performances at related events, namely comic book conventions

→ Initial idea: how to embody a brand, what does it mean when a consumer seeks to "be the brand" they enjoy → transferable ideas to other fandom contexts



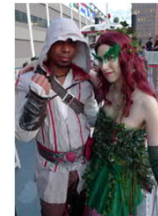
- Exemplifies "playful" consumption: experimentation with identity, immersion, innovation etc.
- Highly time-consuming activity, costly
- Still somewhat stigmatized from others as "not useful leisure"

So what does this context allow you to study, theoretically?

20

COSPLAY

"Cosplay is highly time-consuming and costly (Gunnels 2009). Outfits can take multiple months or even years to build, with potential costs reaching thousands of dollars. Cosplay's growing temporal and monetary demands invariably become problematic. Thus, we see cosplay as an ideal context for studying how ludic communal experiences are produced and sustained when consumers are faced with increasing instrumental costs."



Play at Any Cost: How Cosplayers Produce and Sustain Their Ludic Communal Consumption Experiences

ANASTASIA SEREGINA
HENRI A. WELO

Communal consumption is often described as involving shared physical or symbolic consumption experiences that are socially constructed and sustained through social interaction. This paper examines how consumers produce and sustain their ludic communal consumption experiences through cosplay. We argue that cosplay is a form of communal consumption that is characterized by high temporal and monetary costs, which are often justified by the social and symbolic benefits of the experience. We explore how consumers produce and sustain their ludic communal consumption experiences through cosplay, and how these experiences are shaped by the social and symbolic benefits of the experience.

21

Festivus

FOR THE REST OF US

(Mikkonen & Bajde 2013)

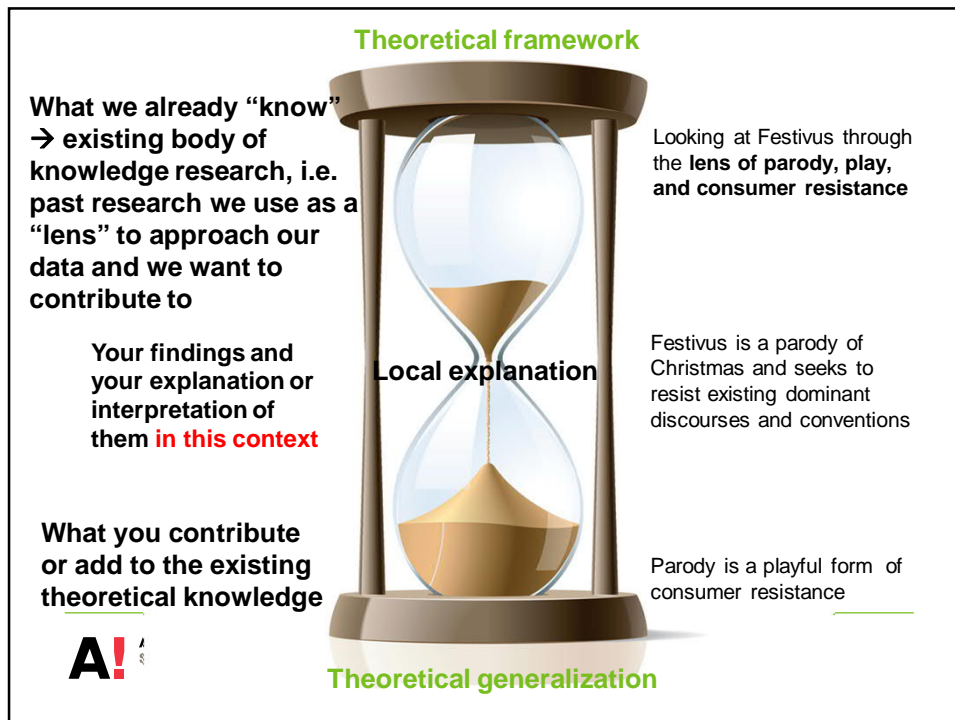
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FESTIVUS

- Festivus is a made-up holiday introduced in the sitcom Seinfeld in 1997
- The holiday was pitted against Christmas
- It was only present in one episode, but some fans took to it and started to celebrate it
- The main elements of Festivus are
 - No-decoration-rule, save the Festivus pole, an aluminum pole
 - Airing of Grievances, a ritual which involves participants telling others how they have disappointed you during the past year
 - Feats of Strength, during which the head of the household, or the host of the Festivus dinner, challenges others to different physical trials



**Theory is both
the starting point
and
the end result**



25

- **THEORY TO CONTEXT:**

“The role and performance of maintenance practices have not been studied within consumer research. Therefore, an ideal context for studying consumer maintenance would be...”

26

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHOD

Context: Sailing and Boat Maintenance in the Baltic Sea Area

"A boat is a hole in the water into which money is poured." –Maritime proverb

Sailing is a popular leisure activity in Finland. Official reports estimate that Finland, a country of 5.6 million inhabitants, has at least 50 000 sailboats (Askola, Takala and Tefke 2017). Finnish sailors also come from socio-economically diverse backgrounds, as heavy state and municipal subsidies through cheap land rent for boat clubs and public harbor services keep the costs of sailing reasonable. For studying maintenance practices, sailing proved ideal. Sailboats require extensive and time-consuming maintenance due to the significant wear and tear from harsh winds and corrosive saltwater (Martin et al. 2019). Boats are often owned for long time periods and well-maintained boats can remain in use for as long as 60 years. Most boat sales indeed take place through second-hand markets. For example, the law states that boats longer than 5.5 meters have to be added to the official Finnish registry, and in 2017 the registry listed 13 942 of such sailboats of which only 29 were first-time registrations for new boats (Askola et al. 2017). The average age for sailboats was 27 years and a survey of registry members further found that 80% of sailboat owners did "most, if not all" of maintenance themselves, with an average annual maintenance spend of 1 801€ (ibid.).

27

A great research context **intensifies** some element of human behavior, making it easier to perceive and study!

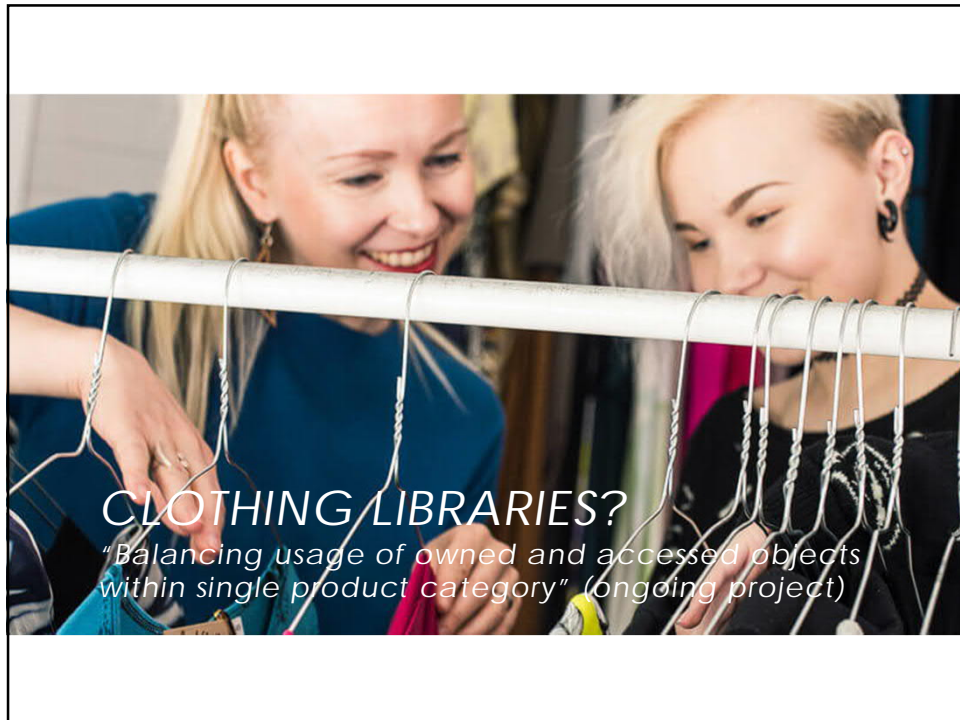
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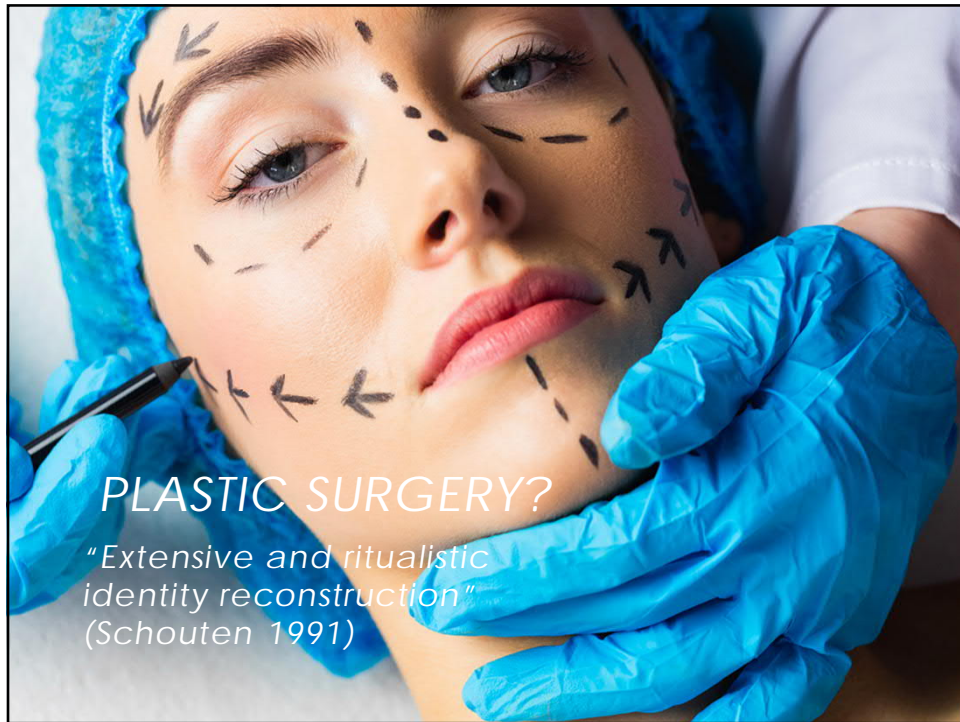
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31



32



33

THESIS TIP #7:

When preparing your thesis project, try to think in terms of:

"My master's thesis studies _____ in the context of _____. It is an ideal context for the study, because _____."



34

Research questions



35

Let's start with you

1. What kind of questions do you think are **suitable in academic research in general**
2. What kind of questions are **in/appropriate** for qualitative research?

36

All academic reasearch

- **Practical, business-related questions are not enough** → has to relate to theory
- Scope must be **broad enough** for academic research, also **narrow enough** that it is still doable in practice
- Have to be formulated so that they somehow relate to existing theory, **ideally** making a **theoretical contribution**

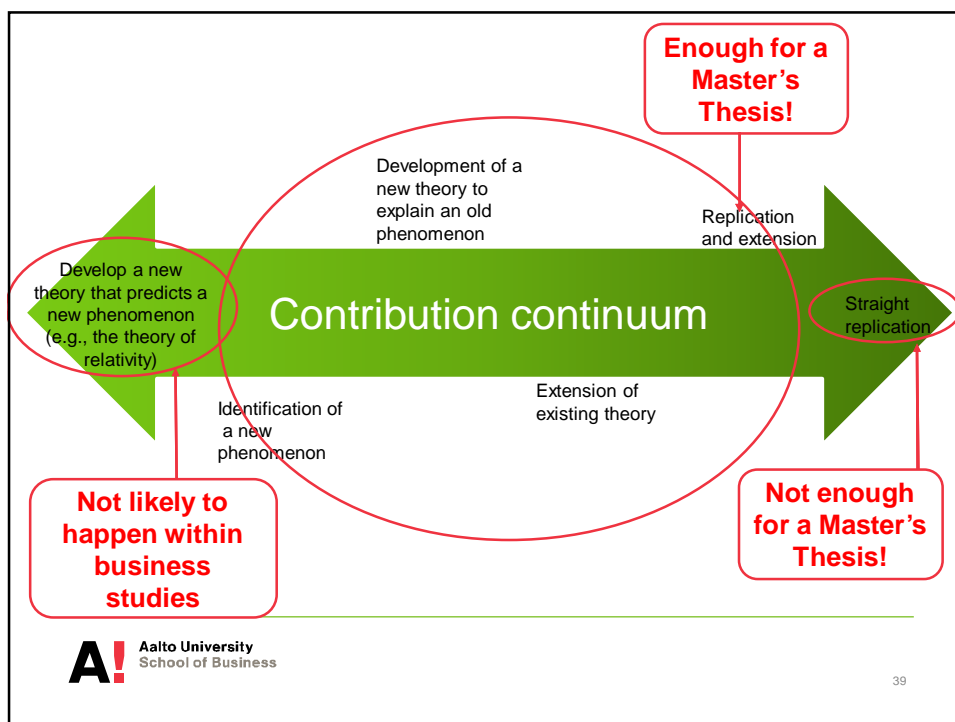
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"Nothing is more critical to the success of a research project than choosing research questions that reviewers and readers – and you yourself – find to be (1) original, (2) important, and (3) interesting. It is the research question – not the context in which you study it – that is ultimately the most important criterion in determining the academic worth of your project. That is, an interesting site, event, or phenomenon is no guarantee of an interesting and important research project." (Belk et al, 2013, 17)

→How do you know your question is like this??

→What counts as "original"??

38



39



CURRENT MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT – CELEBRATORY DISCOURSES OF CANNABIS USE

- Current literature has identified three discourses around cannabis consumption; normalization, neutralization, and celebration
- This work extends the theory by focusing further on the celebratory discourses in cannabis self-help literature
 - Therapeutic discourse
 - Spiritual discourse
 - Aesthetic discourse

40



CURRENT MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT – ENTREPRENEURIAL FAILURE

- Existing literature looks into the precedents and reasons for entrepreneurial failure. There is a lot of stigma surrounding failure.
- This project focuses on first-hand experiences and how failed entrepreneurs make sense of their failure → identify different framings of failure (e.g. a learning experience, badge of honor)

→ Stigma management strategies

41

Poll 1 - Scope

Which one of the following has an appropriate scope (i.e. not too narrow and not too broad)?

- a) What is the 1994 rate of juvenile delinquency in the U.S.?
- b) What can we do to reduce juvenile delinquency in the U.S.?
- c) Does education play a role in reducing juvenile delinquents' return to crime?

42

Poll 2 - researchability

Which one(s) of the following questions are/are not researchable?

1. Do the economies that result from a trash burning plant outweigh or not outweigh its environmental impact?
2. Is sexual orientation a result of nature (physically based) or nurture (socially-culturally based)?
3. Does McDonald's or Burger King make a better burger?
4. Are SSRI's a good way to treat clinical depression in certain cases?
5. Is there a link between hours of television viewing and violent behavior in children aged 8-14?

43

Poll 2

1. Do the economies that result from a trash burning plant outweigh or not outweigh its environmental impact?

→ Can be researched with quantitative data – you would need a lot of it!

44

Poll 2

2. Is sexual orientation a result of nature (physically based) or nurture (socially-culturally based)?

→ Somewhat researchable – at least researchers are trying to establish the origins, but not everybody agrees on the methods

45

Poll 2

3. Does McDonald's or Burger King make a better burger?

→ Not researchable phrased like this, as no meaningful measure of "better" exists

→ Researchable if the focus is on people's opinions and perceptions

46

Poll 2

4. Are SSRI's a good way to treat clinical depression in certain cases?

→ Researchable

47

Poll 2

5. Is there a link between hours of television viewing and violent behavior in children aged 8-14?

→ Researchable (quantitative)

48

Inappropriate questions for qualitative?

- Qualitative research in general is not suited for questions that
 - Imply general **causalities** or **correlations**
 - Are focused on **quantities** or **frequencies**
- If we alter X, how much will Y change?
- How many % of X think Y?
- How often do X do Y?

49

Appropriate questions?

- Instead, we can ask about meanings, processes, and features – the appropriate question tends to be *how* or *what*
 - How does X occur (within a context Y)?
 - How is X experienced by Y (within a context Z)?
 - What kind of meanings are attached to X by Y (within a context Z)?

50

What about...

How does X impact Y?

51

Maybe instead of "impact" consider

Facilitate, enable, promote, support, improve, relieve,
permit, advance, assist, forward, support, aid

Or

Hinder, impede, delay, obstruct, depress, harm, lessen,
prevent, inhibit, limit

52

Poll 3

Which of these topics and issues can be researched **qualitatively**?

1. The link between playing violent computer games and violent behavior in children aged 10–15
2. The experience of living with an autistic child
3. The success of a healthy eating program in schools

53

Poll 3

1. The link between playing violent computer games and violent behavior in children aged 10–15

→ Phrased like this **suggests measuring the correlation** between hours of playing violent games and subsequent violent behavior → **quantitative**
 → Could be phrased differently for qualitative study – examples?

54

Poll 3

2. The experience of living with an autistic child

→ Phrased like this suggests an **qualitative research**

55

Poll 3

3. The success of a healthy eating program in schools

Depends on how success is defined

- Do we give it some objective criteria, and then measure it? → quantitative
- Do we look at the actors' perception of successfulness? → qualitative
- Do we look at how people understand and define success? → qualitative

56

Example

Consider these two **quantitative** questions:

- "What proportion of smokers have tried to give up?"
- "Does parental education of pediatric diseases reduce consultations with GPs?"
- What kind of **qualitative questions** could you ask about the **same general topics?** (i.e. **giving up smoking and parents & pediatric diseases=**

57

Example

- "What kind of meanings do smokers attach to smoking cigarettes?"
- "What kind of education on pediatric diseases would parents like to receive"
- "How do parents experience their children's illnesses?"
- "What kind of parental practices occur in the context of children having fever?"

58

Qualitative questions

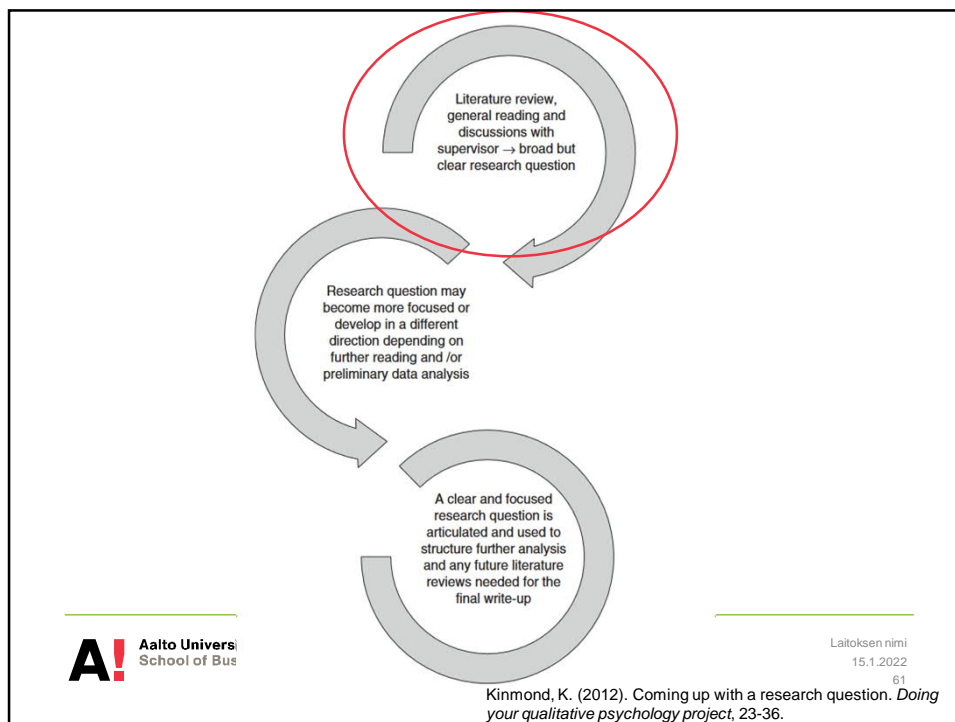
- Formulating the research questions is *an iterative process*
 - Usually you start with a *how* and *what* questions
 - The questions may get more specific and refined during the process
 - The end result is often contextual/local explanations to questions of “*why?*”

59

For example

- “*What kind of meanings do smokers attach to smoking an cigarettes?*”
 - might help you to later theorize as to **why** quitting seems to be so difficult for many smokers
- “*How do parents experience their children's illness?*”
 - might help you later theorize as to **why** parents worry so much about even mild fever

60



61

THESIS TIP:

Accept that the first research question is not likely to be the final one



62



63

Traditional (quantitative) assessment criteria

A! Aalto University
School of Business

Laitoksen nimi
1/15/2022
64

64

Traditional assessment criteria

- Traditional scientific principles of assessing the quality of the research are based on (Patton 2002)
 - Objectivity
 - Reliability
 - Validity
 - Generalizability

65

Objectivity

- Objectivity refers to **minimizing the possibility of investigator related bias**
 - the researcher does not influence the measurement or the observation
 - The researcher eliminates his/her own preconceptions from the research



66

Reliability and validity

Reliability:

A measure is said to have a **high reliability** if it produces similar results under consistent conditions

For example:

- Your scale is reliable, if it gives a constant reading your weight

Validity:

Is the chosen method actually **suited for measuring** what we are using it to measure

For example:

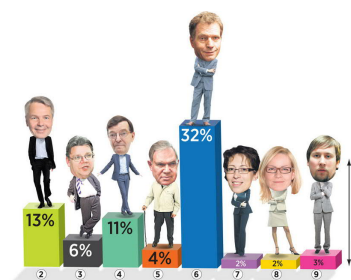
- A scale is a **valid** device for measuring weight, but an **invalid** device for height
- Are exam grades a valid device to measure student learning?

67

Generalization – two types

One type deals with **how widespread something is**

For example, the prevalence of an opinion in the population (e.g. 32 percent of the Finns supported Sauli Niinistö in the presidential election first round in 2012)



68

Generalization – two types



The other type stipulates **differences between social groups**

For example differences between women and men

69

Based on what you know about qualitative research..

Are these criteria applicable to QR?

70

Reliability and validity?

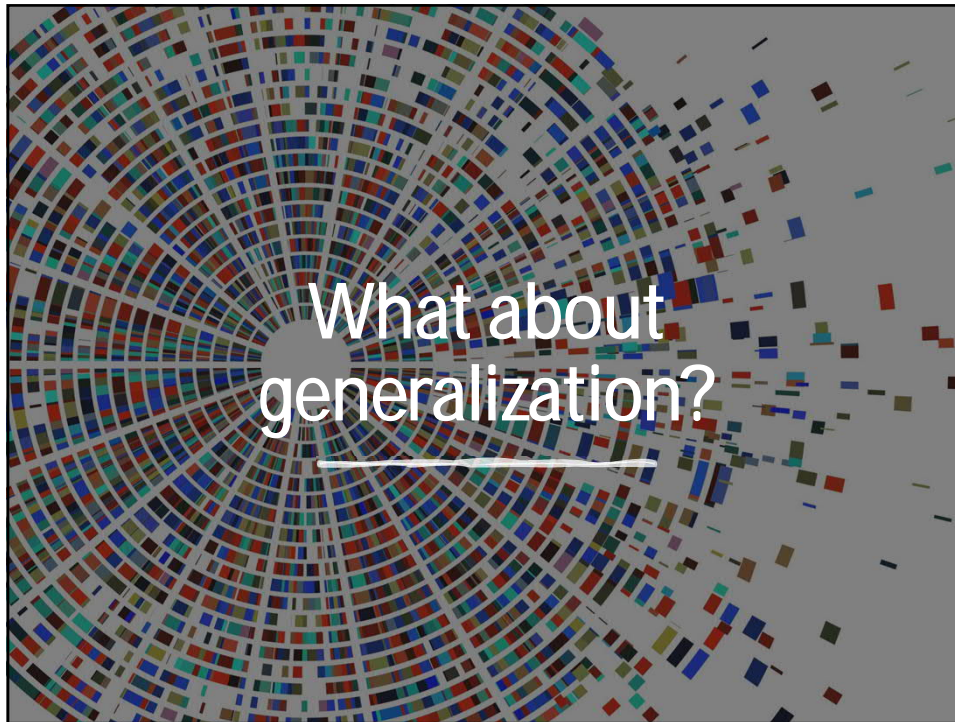
- We cannot talk about validity and reliability **in their statistical meaning**
- Repeatability is not the goal → reliability is a problematic concept

71

Reliability and validity?

- There are two types of 'validity' that can be applicable to qualitative research
 - **Face validity** – have we chosen a theoretical framework that is actually **relevant and appropriate**?
 - **Theoretical validity** - does our analysis and interpretation **fit the data** and is it **credible** and **defensible**?

72



73

What is generalization?



generalization noun

Save Word

gen-er-al-i-za-tion | \ ˌjən-rə-le-ˈzā-shən ˌje-nə- \

Definition of *generalization*

- 1 : the act or process of *generalizing*
- 2 : a general statement, law, principle, or proposition
// made broad *generalizations* about women
- 3 : the act or process whereby a learned response is made to a stimulus similar to but not identical with the *conditioned* stimulus

74

When we talk about generalization, we
usually mean
statistical generalization
→ extrapolating from a sample to a
population

“Generalization [is] often seen as the Achilles heel of qualitative research” (Höijer 2008, 275)

- It is true that we **cannot do statistical generalizations with qualitative data**
- **However**, “most qualitative researchers are certainly interested in some form of generalization” (Höijer 2008, 285).

Generalization?

- We can talk about
 - **Analytic generalization** (Yin, 1984)
 - **Theoretical generalization** (e.g. Alasuutari)
 - **Moderatum generalization** (e.g. Williams 2000)

→ We can, and we **should** attempt to, make
this kind of generalization

77

Qualitative form of generalization

- Theoretical generalization = *theorizing* on how the findings may work in some other contexts
- To avoid confusion with traditional understanding of generalization, the terms '**transferability**' (Lincoln & Guba) and '**extrapolation**' (Mitchell; Alasuutari) have been used

78

GENERALIZABILITY

Law-like *predictability* that applies elsewhere (everywhere?) → quantitative

For example pricing theory

TRANSFERABILITY

Findings are specific to a context, but can *illuminate* similar other contexts → qualitative

For example, you may not be able to use findings as is, but they might help you to understand you customers a little better under similar circumstances

Qualitative form of generalization

- There's **no specific method** for theoretical generalization: you as the researcher have to **analyze, demonstrate, and argue** for the applicability of your findings in other contexts
 - “To generalize to a theory is to **provide evidence that supports** (but does not definitively prove) that theory” (Firestone 1993)

Qualitative form of generalization

- In other words:
 - **You cannot “prove”** that your findings are applicable to other contexts or situation – you can only **provide your evidence and argument** as whether or not this is the case and why
 - (Based on your findings, a “working hypotheses” can be formulated)

“The **researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand” (Alasuutari 1995)**

81

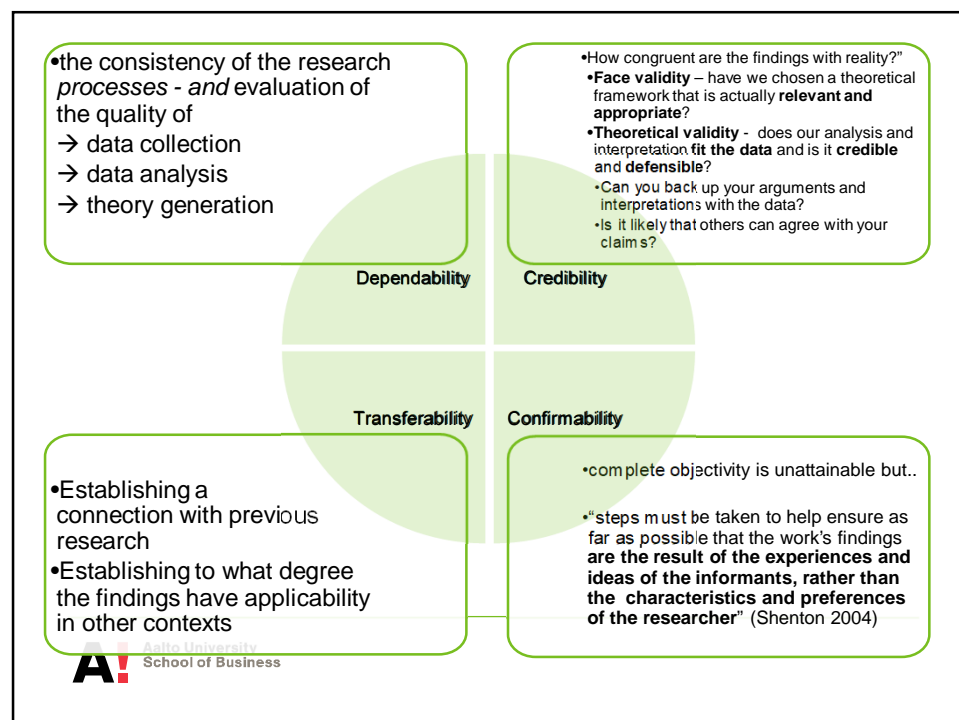
So, how can/should qualitative research be evaluated?

82

Assesment criteria

- **Dependability** instead of reliability
- **Credibility** instead of validity
- **Confirmability** instead of objectivity
- **Transferability** instead of generalizability

83



84

Assignment 1: research question and context



85

Assignment 1: research context and question

- Write a 1-2 page (12 bullet point font, 1,5 line spacing) report with the following parts:
 1. Based on your knowledge of what kinds of questions are appropriate in qualitative research, **formulate a (preliminary) research question** for your Master's thesis. (0-4 points)
 2. Discuss the **context you think would be suitable for your research** --> what kind of theoretical contribution could you make? Also, how would you go about collecting the data in practice --> what kind of methods would you use and how to gain access. (0-7)

86