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# 9

## Qualitative research: data analysis



*Qualitative analysis involves the process of making sense of data that are not expressed in numbers.*



### Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 understand the importance of qualitative researchers being able to reflect upon and understand the social and cultural values that shape the way they gather and interpret qualitative data;
- 2 describe the stages involved in analysing qualitative data;
- 3 describe the array of data types that qualify as qualitative data;
- 4 explain the nature and role of coding in the stage of reducing qualitative data;
- 5 appreciate the benefits of being able to display the meaning and structure that qualitative researchers see in their data;
- 6 understand why qualitative data analysis pervades the whole process of data gathering and why the stages of analysis are iterative;
- 7 appreciate the nature and roles of grounded theory, content analysis and semiotics in qualitative data analysis;
- 8 appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of analysing data using qualitative analysis software and have the means to experiment with demonstration software;
- 9 understand the ethical implications of the ways that qualitative researchers interpret data.

STAGE 1  
Problem  
definition

STAGE 2  
Research approach  
developed

STAGE 3  
Research design  
developed

STAGE 4  
Fieldwork or data  
collection

STAGE 5  
Data preparation  
and analysis

STAGE 6  
Report preparation  
and presentation

## Overview



The application of qualitative techniques can see researchers changing direction as they learn what and who they should focus their attention on. The techniques, the nature of participants and the issues explored can change and evolve as a project develops. This chapter starts by examining how researchers reflect upon what happens to the way they perceive and observe as these changes occur. It discusses how these reflections form a key source of qualitative data to complement the narrative generated from interviews and observations.

The stages involved in a generic process of analysing qualitative data are outlined and described. The first stage of the process involves assembling qualitative data in their rich and varying formats. The second stage progresses on to reducing the data, i.e. selecting, classifying and connecting data that researchers believe to be of the greatest significance. A key element of this stage is the concept of coding. The third stage involves display data, i.e. using graphical means to display the meaning and structure that researchers see in the data they have collected. Manual and electronic means of displaying data are discussed. The final stage involves verifying the data. Marketing researchers aim to generate the most valid interpretation of the data they collect, which may be supported by existing theories or through the concept of theoretical sampling. Though these stages seem quite distinct, the reality is that they are iterative and totally interdependent upon each other; the stages unfold in 'waves' to produce an ultimate interpretation of great value to decision-makers. Three alternative perspectives of analysing qualitative data are presented. First, the purpose and concept of grounded theory are discussed, with the stages involved in building theory. Second, content analysis is presented, a much simpler approach to analysing qualitative data, which is sometimes viewed as a quantitative technique. Third, the purpose and concept of semiotics are presented. This approach adopts the view that consumers should be viewed as products of culture, constructed and largely determined by the popular culture within which they live. It allows for the integrated analysis of cues that emerge from text, pictures and sounds.

The use of computers in the stages of qualitative data collection and analyses is described. There are many distinct advantages to the use of qualitative data analysis software, but many researchers contend that it should be a 'hands-on' process that cannot be mechanised. The arguments from both of these perspectives are presented. To be able to cope with the great amount of data generated from qualitative techniques, a great variety of software packages are available. Examples of analysis software are briefly described followed by Internet addresses that allow demonstration versions of the software to be downloaded and explored. XSight, the qualitative data analysis package specifically designed for marketing researchers, is presented. This is the software package that is available with this text as a full-working version, for use over 90 days.

The social and cultural values of qualitative researchers affect how qualitative researchers gather and analyse data. Understanding the social and cultural norms of participants in international environments is discussed. The chapter concludes by examining how the social and cultural values of researchers affect their interpretation of qualitative data and the ethical implications of not reflecting upon these values.

## The qualitative researcher



### Self-reflection of social and cultural values

In Chapter 2, when discussing the diagnosis of research problems on page 55, we stated:

*A major problem for researchers is that their perception of problems may be reflected through their own social and cultural development. Before defining the problem, researchers should reflect upon their unconscious reference to cultural values . . . The unconscious reference to cultural values can be seen to account for these differences.*

This implies that marketing researchers need to reflect upon their own values and attitudes, the factors that may bias the way they perceive and what they observe. This reflection is just as important in the analysis of qualitative data as it is in the diagnosis of research problems. To illustrate why researchers need to reflect upon what may bias the way they perceive and what they observe, we start this chapter with an example from the world of literature and the treatment of narrative. The example is a precis of an English translation of a Japanese novel; the example could be taken from any novel.

#### Example

#### South of the Border, West of the Sun<sup>1</sup>

This novel tells the story of an only child, Hajime, growing up in the suburbs of postwar Japan. His childhood sweetheart and sole companion in childhood was Shimamoto, also an only child. As children they spent long afternoons listening to her father's record collection. When Hajime's family moved away, the childhood sweethearts lost touch. The story moves to Hajime in his thirties. After a decade of drifting he has found happiness with his loving wife and two daughters, and success in running a jazz bar. Then Shimamoto reappears. She is beautiful, intense, enveloped in mystery. Hajime is catapulted into the past, putting at risk all he has at the present.

Imagine that you had been asked to read this novel, but before you read it you were expected to prepare by reading a description of conditions in postwar Japan. From that you may appreciate the significance of a record collection of 15 albums, and how privileged a family may be to own a record player and to have this collection. Imagine someone else being asked to prepare by reading a biography of the author. From that you may appreciate the social and economic conditions of his upbringing, the literature, music and education that he enjoyed. Preparing to read the novel in these two ways may mean that a reader sees very different things in the story. The reader may interpret passages differently, have a different emotional attachment with the conditions and behaviour of the characters, and appreciate the effect of quite subtle events upon the characters.

Put aside any prior reading and imagine a female reader enjoying the book. She may empathise with the main female character Shimamoto and understand her attitudes, values and behaviour in the way that male readers may not be able to comprehend. In the story, Shimamoto suffered from polio as a child, which made her drag her left leg. Imagine a reader who has had to cope with a disability and who may appreciate how as a child one copes with the teasing of young children. The two main characters were 'only children'; imagine the reader who was an only child and who can recall how they would view large families and appreciate the emotions of the only child. The list could go on of the different perspectives of the story that may be seen. The reader, with his or her inherent values and attitudes, may perceive many different things happening in the story. The reader does

not normally reflect upon his or her unconscious values and attitudes, but just enjoys the story. In talking to others about the story, the reader may be surprised about how others see it. In watching the film version of the book, the reader may be shocked at the different images the film director presents, images that are very different from the one that resides in his or her head. Now consider whether there is one ultimate interpretation of the novel, one ultimate 'truth'. It is very difficult to conceive that there is one ultimate interpretation. One may question why anyone would want to achieve such a thing; surely the enjoyment of literature is the ability to have multiple interpretations and 'truths' of a novel.<sup>2</sup>

### Narrative for the qualitative researcher

What is the link from the interpretation of a novel to qualitative data analysis in marketing research? Quite simply, the qualitative marketing researcher builds up a narrative and creates a story of the consumers whom decision-makers wish to understand. Imagine yourself as a qualitative marketing researcher, supporting decision-makers who wish to develop advertisements for an expensive ride-on lawnmower. The key target market they wish to understand is 'wealthy men, over the age of 60, who own a home(s) with at least 1 hectare of garden'. The decisions they face may include the understanding of:

- 1 What gardening and cutting grass mean to target consumers.
- 2 How they feel about the process of using a lawnmower.
- 3 What relative values (tangible and intangible) are inherent in different brands of lawnmower.
- 4 What satisfaction they get from the completed job of mowing a large lawn.
- 5 The nature and qualities of celebrities they admire (who may be used to endorse and use the product in an advertisement).

These questions may be tackled through the use of focus groups. Imagine yourself running these groups. What could you bring to the groups if you have personally gone through the experience of buying an expensive ride-on lawnmower and have gardening and lawnmowing experiences? You may have an empathy with the participants in the same manner as the 'only child' reading of the experiences and emotions of an only child in a story. From this empathy, you may be able to question, probe and interpret the participants' answers really well, drawing an enormous amount from them. Without those experiences you may have to devise ways to 'step into the shoes' of the participants. You may look to the attitudes, values and behaviour of your parents, grandparents or friends for a start, looking for reference points that you are comfortable with, that make sense to you. As you go through a pilot or experimental focus group, you may be surprised by certain participants talking about their lawnmowers as 'friends', giving them pet names and devoting lavish care and attention upon them. Getting an insight into this may mean looking at cases from past research projects or literature from analogous situations such as descriptions of men forming a 'bond' with their cars.

The direction that qualitative marketing researchers take in building up their understanding and ultimately their narrative is shaped by two factors. The first factor is the *theoretical understanding* of the researchers as they collect and analyse the data. This theoretical understanding can be viewed from two perspectives. The first is the use of theory published in secondary data, intelligence and literature. The use of theory from these sources may help the researchers to understand what they should focus their attention upon, in their questioning, probing, observations and interpretations. The second is the use of theory from a grounded theory perspective. The researchers may see limitations in existing theory that do not match the observations they are making. These limitations help the researchers to form the focus of their questioning, probing, observations and interpretations.

The second factor that shapes the direction that the researchers take is a *marketing understanding*. In the case of understanding the wealthy male lawnmower owner, the researchers need to understand what marketing decision-makers are going to do with the story they create. The researchers need to appreciate the decisions faced in creating an advertisement, building a communications campaign or perhaps changing features of the product. Reference to theoretical and marketing understanding in the researchers helps them to present the most valid interpretation of their story to decision-makers. Unlike writing a novel, where the author is happy for the readers to take their own 'truth', marketing researchers are seeking an ultimate interpretation and validity in their story. Achieving a valid interpretation enables the researchers to convey to decision-makers a vision or picture of a target market that they can quickly 'step into'. Marketing decision-makers, for example, may wish to include a passage of music in an advertisement that the target market has an emotional attachment to, which they find positive and uplifting. With a rich picture or vision of this target market they may be able to choose the right piece of music. The decision-makers' cultural and social development may mean that the piece of music is meaningless to them, but you as a researcher have given them the confidence and enabled them to step into the world of the target market. The following example represents the views of an advertising practitioner praising the support gained from qualitative researchers through their understanding of the issues faced by decision-makers.

### Example

#### Cinderella's getting ready for the ball<sup>3</sup>

I think a lot of researchers have worked hard at understanding advertising and the advertising process and are now regarded as quite critical contributors. What has allowed them to become 'wise' advisers rather than providers of fuel for literal and obedient fools? I think the following:

- 1 *There has been more crossover between planners and qualitative researchers.* Qualitative researchers understand their role in the process of developing advertisements and building brands. They want to know what the creative brief is and what responses or feelings an advert is meant to elicit. For example, when developing a current and famous premium package lager, we purposely discussed what levels of initial bewilderment or mild alienation were acceptable. The campaign had to challenge consumers – hopefully the brightest ones would let their mates in on the secret jokes down the pub!
- 2 *Good researchers work to more 'holistic' views of how ads work and thus avoid mechanistic and simplistic diagnoses.* We may therefore use projective techniques to help consumers express feelings. Whatever it is, good researchers try and look at advertisements in totality, not as a disaggregated series of frames.
- 3 *Good qualitative researchers, planners and clients are much more conscious about stimuli in advertising research.* People put more effort into defining stimuli, e.g. using film clips to get across production values or special effects, mood boards to give texture alongside traditional animatics, narratives or key frames. We have showed *Terminator 2* to help consumers imagine products 'metamorphosing' from one thing to another, and music snippets to conjure up different feelings of sensuality and sexuality.
- 4 *Interpretation has improved.* Good qualitative researchers know that consumers in group discussions are likely to be evaluative/judgemental, cynical and literal. It is the researcher's job to get them to 'imagine' beyond that and to interpret responses using one's cumulative knowledge of advertising chemistry.

### The researcher's learning as qualitative data

Qualitative marketing researchers have to reflect upon their own social and cultural development, their own attitudes and values to see how these have shaped the narrative and how they shape their interpretation of the narrative. The researchers should recognise

their own limitations and the need to develop and learn; in the case above, this means learning about wealthy men and their relationship with lawnmowers. Ultimately they wish to present the most valid story that they see, to have examined the story from many perspectives, to have immersed themselves in the world of their target markets.

If you are reading a novel, you may not be inclined to make notes as your reading progresses. You may not make notes of other books to read that may help you to understand the condition of particular characters, or to understand the environment in which they behave. You may not wish to write down the way that you change and learn as you read through the story. A reflection of your unconscious social and cultural values as revealed through your interpretation of the novel may be the last thing you want to do.

As a qualitative researcher you need to do all the above as you build and interpret your story of target consumers. A notebook or diary should be on hand to note new question areas or probes you wish to tackle, and to reflect upon how they have worked. As interviews unfold and you feel your own development and understanding progress, a note of these feelings should be made. As you seek out specific secondary data, intelligence or theory to develop your understanding, you should note why. If you see limitations in existing theories or ideas, you should note why. As an understanding of how decision-makers can use the observations that are being made, these should be recorded. Included in these notes should be feelings of failure to ask the right question or probe, emotional states should be noted, of feeling up or down, sad or angry, or nervous.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately the story that emerges in your own notebook should be a revelation of your own social and cultural values. There should be an explicit desire to develop this self-awareness and understand how it has shaped the direction of an investigation and the ultimate story that emerges.

The creation and development of the researcher's notebook is a major part of the narrative that is vital to the successful interpretation of questions and observations of consumers. The key lesson that emerges from the creation and development of the researcher's notebook is that qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process through all stages of data collection, not just when the data have been collected.

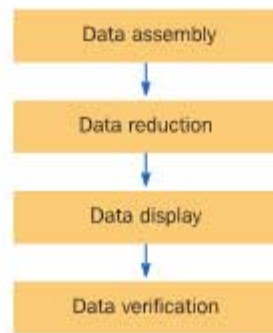
*Analysis is a pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project. Analysis is not simply one of the later stages of research, to be followed by an equally separate phase of 'writing up results'.<sup>5</sup>*

The evolution of questions and probes, deciding who should be targeted for questions and observations and even deciding the context for questioning or observing, means that analysis takes place as data are being gathered.

## The process of qualitative data analysis



We go through four perspectives of analysing qualitative data starting with a generic process. Many of the terms used here differ from those linked to specific types of software or to researchers that follow a particular theoretical approach derived from a specific discipline. The generic process outlined is designed to give an understanding of what is involved in qualitative data analysis and how the stages link and interact. The four stages of the generic process are outlined in Figure 9.1. The concept of coding is introduced in this section, a vital concept to understand in all approaches to analysing qualitative data. The second perspective presented is the concept of grounded theory. The third perspective is the process of content analysis. The fourth is the discipline of semiotics.



**Figure 9.1**  
Stages of qualitative  
data analysis

#### Data assembly

The gathering of data from a variety of disparate sources.

### Data assembly

**Data assembly** means the gathering of data from a variety of sources. These would include:

- 1 Notes taken during or after interviewing or observations.
- 2 Reflections of researchers, moderators or observers involved in the data collection process.
- 3 Theoretical support – from secondary data, intelligence or literature sources.
- 4 Documents produced by or sourced from participants.
- 5 Photographs, drawings, diagrams, i.e. still visual images.
- 6 Audiotape recordings and transcripts of those recordings.
- 7 Videotape recordings.
- 8 Records made by participants such as mood boards or collages.

#### Field notes

A log or diary of observations, events and reflections made by a researcher as a study is planned, implemented and analysed.

As discussed in the previous section, the researcher should get into the habit of maintaining a notebook, diary or **field notes**. As a qualitative investigation evolves in terms of the issues to explore and the participants to target, the researcher goes through a learning process. This learning process means that the researcher may see things differently as interviews or observations progress. Keeping field notes aids the researcher's memory when it comes to the formal process of data analysis and helps enormously in categorising and interpreting collected data. It ultimately helps to generate a 'deeper and more general sense of what is happening'.

In order to make 'deeper and more general sense of what is happening,' it is suggested<sup>6</sup> that researchers keep four separate sets of notes in order to systematise the process and thus improve their reliability:

- 1 Short notes made at the time of observation or interview.
- 2 Expanded notes made as soon as possible after each session of interviews or observations.
- 3 A fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each stage of fieldwork.
- 4 A provisional running record of analysis and interpretation.

Data assembly also includes deciding lines of enquiry which should be developed and those that should be dropped. Given that qualitative research is primarily exploratory in nature, questions and probes are not fixed. As an interview or observation takes place, the researcher learns more about an issue and can develop a new question or probe and decide that a question, initially thought to be vital, is no longer relevant. There may be issues that can be compared over a series of interviews or observations, but the whole data collection and data assembly can evolve. Keeping notes is vital as memory alone is fallible, unreliable and potentially biased. Being able to recall, for example, the hesitation in replying to a question displayed by a focus group participant may upon reflection be seen as someone evading the issue. After all the group discussions have been completed and the same question has been posed to others, the interpretation may change to the individual

being embarrassed about an issue, primarily through becoming aware of his or her own ignorance. The researchers' notes help them to recall how they were feeling at the point of setting the question, and recall the situation in other groups that gives meaning to a pause that shows up as a quiet spot in an audio or video recording. They may also help the researcher appreciate what is happening when laughter occurs by participants in qualitative techniques. The following example illustrates the importance of humour in devising a strategy to develop a brand. It shows the dilemma facing the researcher in interpreting the meaning of laughter. In this example, the marketing researcher Chris Forrest suggests that the humour in an advert can be sensed through the 'relative energy in the room'. If this is the case, group dynamics, the pitch and intensity of laughter, or even the sly smile that masks a feeling that something is incredibly funny, would need to be recorded in the researcher's notes, to set a vital context to the narrative of any discussion.

### Example Funny business, serious money<sup>7</sup>

Humour is something that can communicate a strategy very powerfully, but is not a solution in its own right. There are pitfalls in understanding humour in the research process, with the focus group seen as a poor place to find out if an advertisement is funny. In groups people laugh to show they fit in, to please the moderator or other participants, or simply because laughter can be contagious. In short, laughter (or its absence) is an unreliable piece of evidence. However, Chris Forrest from the research agency The Nursery argues that the focus group can detect what is funny and what is not:

*A really strong script will have a group in stitches, participants will even insist it is an ad that has to be made. Naturally one cannot always hope to be researching a knock-out script, and in these cases its useful to have more than one script.*

Then, Chris says, 'It is possible to benchmark a group's reaction. Even when a group isn't laughing a lot, you can tell from the relative energy in the room which one they respond to the best.'

Unfortunately, the recording and use of field notes or a diary is limited in many qualitative marketing research projects. This may be due to the contents of such notes which could include photographs and other non-verbal data sources. These are unavoidably 'subjective', being what the researcher has chosen to notice. They are developmental, representing the learning and self-reflection that the researcher goes through. The subjective choices are reasoned choices, where issues are deliberately included or excluded. Understanding the reasons for those choices, recognising the learning and self-development that can emerge from these notes, can add so much more depth and greater insight into qualitative data. By developing self-awareness, qualitative marketing researchers can take a more balanced view of the data they collect as they realise many of their own biases and hidden agendas.

Beyond taking notes or keeping a diary, many qualitative techniques make extensive use of material of a semi- or non-verbal nature, generated through participant tasks such as the use of projective techniques. These materials can include drawings, lists, stories, clay models or structures, and collages of photographs, video footage and music. The commonly held view is that it is not these materials that should be analysed but the meanings attached to them by the participants who produced them.<sup>8</sup> These meanings as narrative will have been captured as part of the discussion on tape or are in the notes of the researcher.<sup>9</sup> The materials themselves would normally be available during analysis, enabling the possibility to notice useful features such as consistencies and differences between participants. They can also be useful in communicating and illustrating findings. Other qualitative researchers go further, taking the view that it is legitimate to 'read' these



materials in the absence of the participants who produced them. They would argue that significant and valid meaning can be extracted from them provided they have a strong theoretical basis to drawing their conclusions and meanings.

This relationship between participants' discourse and non-verbal materials mirrors the debate in using photography in ethnographic studies (a common occurrence in qualitative marketing research where participants are given disposable or digital cameras to capture stills or moving images of their experiences). Many significant anthropological ethnographies dating from the mid-1920s onward include photographs relating to the fieldwork. The question that faces anthropologists relates to why photographs may be used in analysis and the relationship, if any, between the photograph and the written text. It is difficult to generalise, but it seems to be the case that photographs have been included in ethnographic reports more for evidential than analytic purposes. The photographs serve essentially presentational and illustrative purposes rather than providing a focus for a more sustained analysis of the visual dimensions of culture.<sup>10</sup>

There is however, a class of anthropological works (that includes marketing phenomena) in which the phenomenon investigated is itself clearly a visual one that benefits from visual representation:<sup>11</sup> the cross-cultural study of the visual arts, plastic and graphic, costume, self-decoration, masks, architecture, religious iconography, and other aspects of material culture. The following example describes a seminal anthropological study where photographs were seen as a valid form of data

### Example

#### Gender advertisements

A study that exemplifies the use of photographs as data is Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*.<sup>12</sup> Goffman presents more than 500 photographs, drawn mainly from illustrated newspaper and magazine advertisements. The aim was to analyse 'gender displays': the culturally conventional expressions of sex-class membership that are ordinarily available to us 'at a glance'. Goffman examines the various senses in which pictures can and cannot be regarded as depictions of some 'real' state of affairs. He is well aware that advertisements present a distorted view of the world, one that is prettier and more affluent than the everyday reality. However, using pictorial materials has the considerable advantage of allowing subtle features of gender displays to be exhibited where words alone would stand deficient.<sup>13</sup>

The key feature of the above example is to note the subtlety of features that may be displayed where words alone would be deficient. This feature has an impact for qualitative marketing researchers for two reasons. The first can be seen from the perspective of qualitative technique participants. Certain participants may not be able to express what they feel about a product, service, advertisement, brand, etc., using words. They may, however, be able to use visual cues from sources like photographs to represent their feelings. The second can be seen from the perspective of decision-makers who use qualitative research findings. Certain marketing decision-makers working in visually creative fields such as advertising, product and package design, and branding work better with visual data compared with words or statistics. They may understand the impact of how consumers feel and will react to their designs through very subtle interpretations of visual data. Given the importance of visual data to this type of marketing decision-maker, we explore the concept of semiotics later in this chapter.

#### Data reduction

**Data reduction** involves handling the data. This process involves organising and structuring the data. It means having to throw some data away! Imagine a series of 10 focus group discussions and the amount of data that can be collected. There are the memories and

#### Data reduction

The organising and structuring of qualitative data.

**Transcripts**

'Hard copies' of the questions and probes and the corresponding answers and responses in focus group or in-depth interviews.

notes of the moderator and any other observers who took part, there are the transcripts of what was actually said in interviews, and there may be contributions from participants in the form of mood boards. The **transcripts** are a vital and for most studies the primary data source in qualitative data analysis and much care should be taken in typing them up. Transferring the dialogue from tape is tortuous as tape recordings are notoriously 'unclear'. Imagine a focus group in full swing; not every participant takes their turn to speak without talking over other participants, and then they may not speak clearly and loudly enough. As a result it can take a great deal of time to work out what participants actually said and how the questions, responses and ideas connect together. In producing transcripts, it is much better for the researchers to work through the tape recordings and piece together the components using their notes and memory of events. This is very time consuming, so many researchers use typists to transcribe their tape recordings of interviews, arguing that their time is better spent reading through and editing transcripts produced in this manner. The use of the Internet in in-depth interviews and focus groups means that this time-consuming task is eliminated as the transcript is built up as the interview progresses.

**Coding data**

Breaking down qualitative data into discrete chunks and attaching a reference to those chunks of data.

The researchers with their transcripts, notes and other supporting material have to decide what is relevant in all these data. Reducing the data involves a process of **coding data**, which means breaking down the data into discrete chunks and attaching a reference to those chunks of data. Coding is a vital part of coping with qualitative data analysis and, given this importance, the process is discussed in some detail.

**Coding data.** Researchers need to be able to organise, manage and retrieve the most meaningful bits of qualitative data that they collect. This is normally done by assigning 'labels' or



Source: © Bryan Allen/CORBIS

codes to the data, based upon what the researcher sees as a meaningful categorisation. What happens is that the researcher condenses the great mass of data from a qualitative study into analysable units by creating categories from the data.<sup>14</sup> This process is termed the coding of data. Coding is the process of bringing together participants' responses into categories that bring together similar ideas, concepts, themes, or steps or stages in process. Coding can also enable the categorisation of names, evidence or time sequences. Any hesitations, emotional states or levels of humour can be coded. Indeed, anything that is felt to be revealing in the data can be coded. Data such as a simple response to a question can

be coded in many different ways, or placed into many different categories; there is no expectation of mutual exclusivity and data can be recoded as often as is thought necessary.<sup>15</sup>

An illustration of coding is presented using the data presented in the Table 9.1. This table presents the verbatim responses from an open-ended question in a self-completion survey targeted at 12–14 year olds. The question asked participants what facilities they would like in a planned new community centre. Though the technique used was quantitative, the survey generated qualitative data and in its much shortened format demonstrates the process that qualitative researchers must go through.

In categorising the responses, the researcher could create codes of 'swimming pool' or 'disco' and count the times that these were literally expressed. Alternatively, the researcher

**Table 9.1** Teenager requests for facilities at a planned community centre

Requested feature of new community centre	Gender
Skate park, death slide, basketball courts, swimming pool	Male
Computer room	Male
Stuff for all ages	Male
Swimming pool	Male
Computers, snooker room	Male
A space for computers, tuck shop	Male
Music, television, up-to-date magazines, pool tables	Female
Music, discos	Female
Swimming pool	Female
Music, pool/snooker, discos	Female
What people will enjoy	Female
All the things people enjoy	Female

could code on the basis of 'sports activities' or 'recreational activities' and group together activities such as 'swimming, basketball and snooker' for sports and 'computers, television, discos and tuck shop' for recreational activities. The researcher could code 'indoor activities' and 'outdoor activities', or activities that would need supervision and those that would need no supervision. There are many ways that the researcher can categorise the data, it is his or her choice. Consider how the researcher may cope with the requests for a 'computer room' and 'computers'. Could these be combined under one heading of 'computing' or would this lose the meaning of having a devoted space, away from other activities that could be noisy and distracting? Consider also how the researcher would cope with the requests for 'stuff for all ages', 'what people will enjoy' and 'all the things people enjoy'. It may seem obvious that a new leisure centre needs to develop facilities that people enjoy and that these may be discarded, but there may be a hint in the first statement of 'stuff for all ages' that may link to the word 'people' used in the two other statements. If the researcher interprets the statements in this way, a category of 'activities to draw in all ages' could be created; these responses may be seen as tapping into a notion of a leisure centre that is welcoming and not exclusive.

Table 9.2 presents a small selection of the verbatim responses from the same open-ended question in a self-completion survey, this time targeted at adults.

**Table 9.2** Adult requests for facilities at a planned community centre

Requested feature of new community centre	Gender
Regards for residents living nearby, special car parking area to avoid streets nearby being jammed	Male
New centre would soon bring the wrong sort of people; it could form a centre for thugs and crime	Male
Strict rules so as to inconvenience local people living close by as little as possible, e.g. noise	Male
Run and organised well to run functions at affordable prices with dress rules for the lounge and bar	Male
Membership should be given on signature of applicants to a strict set of rules	Male
Emphasis on youth on the estate and run in a way to encourage rather than regiment them	Male
Supervised youth activities, daytime crèche, dance floor, serve coffee/soft drinks for youths	Female
Should be very welcoming and developed for all kinds of people	Female
Active participation by those using the facilities which should give opportunities for the young	Female
To make a safe place for all people of all ages to enjoy	Female
Exterior should be modern. Inside decorated tastefully with nice seats and tables, plenty of hall space	Female
Youth club with a youth leader. Luncheon club for older groups and gentle keep-fit for the elderly	Female

The interesting feature in comparing the statements from the adults with those from the teenagers is how they express themselves in more detail and how they thought beyond specific facilities that make up the leisure centre. These statements were unprompted, so one can imagine how much richer the explanations and justifications would be with an in-depth interview or a focus group. Again, there are many ways that the researcher can categorise the data, perhaps even more than with the teenagers. Categorising these adult statements is not as straightforward as for the teenagers. The researcher could draw out the words 'youth' or 'rules' and set these as categories. The researcher could pull out named 'facilities' such as 'dance floor' and 'nice seats and tables' or 'activities' such as 'youth club' and 'luncheon club'. What becomes apparent in reading through the statements (especially with the full set of responses) are implied problems related to issues of parking, the types of people that are attracted or could be attracted, and how 'regimented' or not the centre should be. These are categories or patterns that may be apparent to a reader, though not explicitly expressed. There may be words expressed that make up the categories, but the words broken down and taken in isolation may lose their impact, if they are just counted.

Table 9.2 illustrates that categorisation into the component words may mean that the contextual material that gives these words meaning can be lost. From the above example, coding can be thought of as a means to:

- 1 *Retrieve data*, i.e. from the whole mass of data, particular words or statements can be searched for and retrieved to examine the 'fit' with other words or statements.
- 2 *Organise the data*, i.e. words or statements can be reordered, put alongside each other and similarities and differences evaluated.
- 3 *Interpret data*, i.e. as words or statements are retrieved and organised in different ways, different interpretations of the similarities and differences can be made.

Coding is a process that enables the researcher to identify what he or she sees as meaningful and to set the stage to draw conclusions and interpret the meaning. Codes are essentially labels to assign meaning to the data compiled during a study.

In broad terms the coding process involves the following stages:

- 1 *Set up a broad group of coding categories*. These would emerge from an initial reading of the gathered data and the intended purpose of the study. For example, these may be the themes that structured a number of focus group interviews or in-depth interviews.
- 2 *Work through the data to uncover 'chunks' of data that may be put into brackets or underlined or highlighted*. Codes are usually attached to 'chunks' of varying size, i.e. words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, an extended story, an image, indeed any component of the collected data, connected or unconnected to a specific context.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes a single sentence or paragraph might be coded into several categories. For example, one paragraph where participants are overtly discussing parking problems at a community centre may also be discussing issues of 'mobility' or 'independence'. Once the start and end of a chunk to be coded is established, a name or number is assigned to it.
- 3 *Review the descriptions given to the codes*. Working through the data, it may be clear that important themes emerging from the data do not fit into the preset categories or that one theme blurs into two or more separate concepts. At this point new categories have to be set to fit the data. With new categories, the data must then be reviewed and recoded where appropriate. This stage therefore is one of immersion in the data and refining the nature of categories as more meaning is uncovered in the data.
- 4 *Examine differences between types of participant*. This could be simple demographic comparisons, e.g. to see if there are differences between men and women in how they view independence. The comparisons could be between types of respondent that emerge from other codes, e.g. lifestyle aspirations may emerge from the data with

groups emerging that may be labelled 'sophisticated minimalists' and 'spiritual warriors'. Comparisons of the behaviour between these emerging groups can be made. Through these comparisons, new insights may emerge about the assigned codes and the descriptors applied to them. New insights may also emerge about the way that participants are described and categorised, combining knowledge of their demographic, geographic, behavioural, psychographic and psychological characteristics. The following Sports Marketing Survey example on rugby league illustrates how it classified focus group participants to perform the analyses.



## Sports Marketing Surveys

### Rugby league study

In the rugby league study, Sports Marketing Surveys analysed its focus group findings based upon gender, behavioural and attitudinal characteristics. The analysis focused upon four distinctive groups that it labelled and described as:

**Male Avid Rugby League Fans** – whose interest in the game ranged from 7–65 years, following and experience, averaging over 30 years. Most of them were brought up with the game encapsulated by *'first match inside mother's stomach! 'since I was a student', 'Grandad used to play, I used to play'*. They all attended matches with their family: *'go with my daughter', 'the wife, she's madder about it than me!', 'the whole family – my aunts, uncles, cousins ... everyone!'*

**Female Family Rugby League Fans** – whose interest in the game ranged from half to 'all' of their lives, initiated by *'dad made us watch it when we were small', 'thought it would be good for my son, and social for me', 'kids got tickets from school'*. They all attended matches with their family from a single parent with her son, through to attending with a husband after all the children had grown up and moved on.

**Male Occasional Rugby League Fans** – whose interest in the game was part of an overall 'sports interest'. Around half also played other sports but 'armchair involvement' was popular: *'mad about all sports!', 'sports freak all my life', 'play golf, badminton, swim, go to football with friends, rugby league finals sometimes'*. They were all family men with children ranging from toddler age to young adults, but more likely to attend games with friends and colleagues (albeit usually football).

**Male General Sports Fans** – whose interest in the game was part of an overall 'sports interest', were 'non-rejectors' of rugby league but were predominantly avid football supporters: *'watch anything with a ball!', 'like all sports', 'watch all sports, but selectively!'* They were all family men with two or three children, who were most likely to watch live football games outside their family unit or *'prefer to watch in the pub where there are no distractions'*.

- 5 *Develop models of interconnectivity amongst the coded categories.* This involves basic graphical modelling to explain a sequence of events or a process that the data describe. It could show how categories relate to each other, how participants may be alike or differ and how different contexts impact upon the categories and participants. Again, new insights may emerge about the meaning seen in the data, and the coding process may be further refined.
- 6 *Iterate between the code descriptions and the developing model.* This stage is again one of immersion in the data, with continual refining of the nature of categories and the structural relationship of those categories. These iterations continue until the researchers have what they believe to be the most valid meaning that they see in the data.

The approach described above can be completed manually or proprietary software can be used. The relative advantages and disadvantages of manual or electronic approaches to analysing qualitative data, and especially the iterative process of coding and modelling, are presented later in the chapter. The point to consider at this stage is that the immersion in the data to draw out meaning is not formulaic. Reducing qualitative data to the essence of meaning as seen by the researchers is a highly creative and subjective process. Given the time that may be allocated to this process, coding can be observed from two perspectives. First, if there is relative little time for the researchers to immerse themselves in the data, it can be thought of as a means to simplify or reduce the mass of data. If an initial broad group of coding categories is kept and their number is relatively small, then the data can be 'stripped down' to a simple general form. This coding approach can be compared directly with simple forms of content analysis.<sup>17</sup> Second, if more time can be afforded, it can be thought of as a means to expand, transform and reconceptualise data, opening up more diverse ideas and analytical possibilities. The general analytical approach is to open up the categories in order to interrogate them further, to try to identify and speculate about further features. Coding here is about going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks.<sup>18</sup>

Coding is a major process involved in data reduction. The process forces the researchers to focus upon what they believe to be the most valid meaning held in the data. In order to develop that meaning further, the researchers need to communicate their vision to others, to evaluate their interpretations of the data and to reflect upon their own vision. The stage of data display is the means by which researchers communicate their vision of meaning in the data.

### Data display

#### Data display

Involves summarising and presenting the structure that is seen in collected qualitative data.

**Data display** is an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action.<sup>19</sup> The most frequent form of display for qualitative data in the past has been *extended text*. Such an approach is cumbersome, dispersed and sequential, poorly structured and extremely bulky. The qualitative researcher can resolve these problems with the use of matrices, graphs, charts and networks. All are designed to assemble information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step of analysis the displays suggests may be useful. The creation and use of displays is not an end output of analysis, it is an integral part of the analytic process. For example, designing a matrix as a display involves decisions on what should be displayed in the rows and columns, and deciding what qualitative data, in which form, should be entered in the cells.

Data display also allows a 'public' view of how the researcher has made connections between the different 'data chunks'. Even if others may not have made the same connections and interpret the data in exactly the same manner, the logic of connections should be clear. The display may be in a graphical format, with boxes summarising issues that have emerged and connecting arrows showing the interconnection between issues. Verbatim quotes can be used to illustrate the issues or the interconnections. Pictures, drawings, music or advertisements can also be used to illustrate issues or interconnections. The overall structure allows the marketing decision-maker who is to use the analysis to see the general meaning in the collected data. The illustration of issues or interconnections brings that meaning to life.

One of the simplest means to display data is through the use of a spreadsheet. This can be built up and displayed in a manual or electronic format. Table 9.3 presents an example of how a spreadsheet may be set out. This spreadsheet is a sample of all the interviews that may be conducted and the number of issues that may be tackled. The example relates to a bus and tram operator who wishes to understand the attitudes and behaviour of 18–25

year olds related to using public transport. In the columns, details of each interview are presented, and in the final column, notes are made of observations between interviews with a focus on each issue. In the rows, the issues that were discussed in the interviews are presented. These issues may be generated from the topic guide used and/or from the notes of the researcher related to what he or she sees as the emerging issues. The final row details notes of the dynamics of the group, explaining why particular exchanges may be interpreted in a particular way. The analyst cuts and pastes extracts from the transcripts into the relevant cells. With the spreadsheet built up of the reordered transcripts (each focus group may tackle the issues in a different order and with different emphases), comparisons can be made across the columns on particular issues, looking for similarities and differences. Connections between issues can be mapped out with the use of arrows to show the flow of dialogue. The responses from types of participants such as 'city-dwellers' or 'suburb-dwellers' can be colour coded to examine differences. Different notes, images or any other supplementary material can be pasted onto the spreadsheet to help in the interpretation; all the assembled data can be displayed, or more probably a reduced and coded set of data can be displayed.

**Table 9.3** Spreadsheet data display of focus group discourse

Interviews?  Issues, e.g.?	Group 1 – 18–25-year-old male car drivers	Group 2 – 18–25-year-old female car drivers	Group 3 – 18–25-year-old male bus and tram users	Group 4 – 18–25-year-old female bus and tram users	Notes on the similarities and differences between groups on issues?
Evening travel	Verbatim discourse taken from the interview that relates to this issue				
Commuting					
Freedom					
Friends					
Notes on the dynamics of individual groups?					

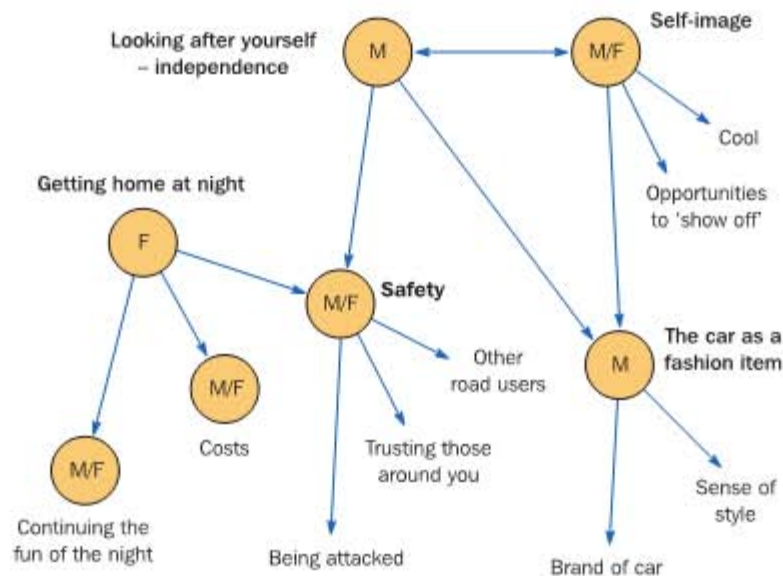
Such a spreadsheet can be built up manually using large sheets of paper from, for example, flip charts, divided into a grid, and the evidence such as chunks of the transcript physically pasted in. The big advantage of this approach is being able to visualise the whole body of data and to move around the data to 'play' with ideas and connections. This works particularly well when there is more than one person working on the analysis and they are drawing ideas and questions out of each other as they relate to the data. The disadvantage is that editing, moving data around and recategorising data can become very cumbersome and messy. This is where electronic means of displaying the data work well. With electronic means, images and notes can be scanned in and added to the transcripts. Changes can be made very easily and quickly in moving data around, recategorising and incorporating new material. Different versions can be easily stored to allow an evaluation of how the thought processes of the researcher have developed. The disadvantage of the approach is that, when attempting to view the data in their entirety, the entire dataset is there but in effect is viewed through a 'window' with a limited field of vision. The 'window' can be readily moved about but the overall perspective is limited.

Another simple means to display data is through the use of a qualitative cross-tabulation. Table 9.4 presents an example of how a cross-tabulation may be set out. Again, the example relates to a bus and tram operator who wishes to understand the attitudes and behaviour of 18–25 year olds related to using public transport. The table shows a sample of categories that have been built around issue of ‘evening travel’. As the analyst works through the transcripts and codes distinct chunks of data, and with knowledge of who expressed a particular view that is embodied in that chunk, that relationship can be displayed. The table shows that the analyst has established codes to represent views of ‘expense’, ‘personal attacks’, ‘spontaneity’ and ‘style’. With a simple classification of participants, in this case by gender, the analyst can display differences in the number of incidences that a specific code emerges. The large differences between males and females in how they brought up the issues ‘expense’ and ‘personal attacks’ can help the analyst to explore the data further, or indeed collect more data to understand what is creating such divergent attitudes and behaviour. Again, different notes, images or any other supplementary material can be pasted onto the cross-tabulation to help in the interpretation.

**Table 9.4** Cross-tabulation of emerging categories related to evening travel by gender

Evening travel	Gender	
	Male	Female
Expense	16	2
Personal attacks	8	24
Spontaneity	5	5
Style	3	5

The other major means of displaying data is to use flow charts. Figure 9.2 displays a very basic structure of the issues or major categories and subcategories related to how 18–25 year olds view the use of public transport after an evening out.



**Figure 9.2** Flow chart depicting how 18–25-year-olds view public transport



Visualising the data in this manner can allow the researchers to dip back into the transcripts and their notes to seek alternative ways of connecting evidence and justifying connections. This means that this form of graphic can play a vital role in data reduction and coding, i.e. in making sense of the data, as well as in portraying a final interpretation of the data. Most proprietary qualitative analysis software packages allow data structures to be displayed as in Figure 9.2 but with far more sophisticated features to display structure, differences and supporting evidence. A simple illustration of this in Figure 9.2 is the 'M/F' label attached to categories, used to display behavioural tendencies of male or female participants. With an analysis package, quite distinctive structures for participant types may be mapped, with the ability to tap into supporting evidence in actual categories or in the links between categories.<sup>20</sup>

Once the researchers have displayed what they see as the meaning in the data, they need to demonstrate the credibility of their vision. This involves data verification.

### Data verification

**Data verification**  
Involves seeking alternative explanations of the interpretations of qualitative data, through other data sources.

**Data verification** involves seeking alternative explanations through other data sources and theories. From the start of data collection, qualitative researchers are beginning to decide the meaning of their observations, and noticing regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions. The researcher should form these meanings 'lightly' maintaining openness and scepticism, developing conclusions that are embryonic and vague at first, then increasingly explicit and grounded. Final conclusions may not appear until data collection is over, depending upon the volume of data collected in all their forms, the coding, storage and retrieval methods used, and the resource constraints placed upon the researchers. When final conclusions have been drawn, researchers need to demonstrate that they have presented a valid meaning of the data that they have collected. They need to show that the structure or meaning they see is not just a reflection of their own views. This is where the concept of theoretical understanding as discussed at the start of this chapter can help. It is also where the use of the researchers' field notes proves to be invaluable. The use of theory from secondary data, intelligence and the literature can help to guide what may be reasonably expected as a meaning. Other means to verify the data can be through seeking 'similar' research findings and explanations taken from different contexts, different time frames and different researchers.<sup>21</sup> Though the findings from these different scenarios will not be the same, there can be categories that give qualitative researchers the confidence that they are representing a valid view of their participants.

Two forms of validation have been suggested as particularly appropriate to the logic of qualitative research.<sup>22</sup> The first is termed 'triangulation', a term derived from navigation, where different bearings give the correct position of an object. In research terms, comparing different kinds of data (e.g. dialogue and photographs, quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g. observations and interviews) allows reflection upon the extent of corroboration, and what may be the causes of any differences.<sup>23</sup> The second is termed 'participant validation'. This involves taking one's findings back to the participants under study. Where the feedback from participants on emergent conclusions is verified by them, there can be more confidence in the validity of the findings.

The concept of validity will be examined in more detail in Chapter 12.<sup>24</sup> At this stage it is worth noting that the qualitative researchers should not just present an interpretation and then seek validation or verification of that perspective. The search for verification is a quest that permeates the whole research process. At face value, data assembly, reduction, display and verification appear to be quite distinct and consecutive stages of data analysis. The reality is that they are iterative and totally interdependent upon each other. As the

researchers assemble new data, they should be thinking of means to validate their views, asking questions of different individuals in different ways and recording these thoughts in their field notes. As data are being reduced and coded, the researchers seek different possible explanations and evidence to support categorising, naming and connecting views in a particular manner. The researchers will question their interpretations of words and gestures and their own ways of seeing. This questioning process adds to the verification. The use of data display is a means to communicate to others the meaning and structure that researchers 'see' in qualitative data. The display allows others to understand that vision, to question and evaluate it. The exposure and critique of the vision by other researchers and decision-makers further verify the data. Ultimately, such critique can direct the researchers to further data assembly, reduction and display; the stages may unfold in 'waves' to produce an ultimate interpretation of great value to decision-makers.

## Grounded theory



### Grounded theory

A qualitative approach to generating theory through the systematic and simultaneous process of data collection and analysis.

In 1967 Glaser and Strauss published the seminal work *The discovery of grounded theory*.<sup>25</sup> It was their formal description of the approach to handling and interpreting qualitative data that they had developed in the 1960s in a participant observation study of hospital staff's care and management of dying patients.<sup>26</sup> The method they developed was labelled **grounded theory** to reflect the source of the developed theory which is ultimately grounded in the behaviour, words and action of those under study.<sup>27</sup> The essence of their beliefs was:<sup>28</sup>

- The need to get out into the field if one wants to understand what is going on.
- The importance of theory grounded in reality.
- The nature of experience in the field for the subjects and researcher as continually evolving.
- The active role of persons in shaping the worlds they live in through the process of symbolic interaction.
- An emphasis on change and process and the variability and complexity of life.
- The interrelationship between meaning in the perception of subjects and their action.

Grounded theory methods consist of guidelines that aid the researcher to:<sup>29</sup>

- 1 Study social and social psychological processes (the essence of consumption experiences).
- 2 Direct data collection.
- 3 Manage data analysis.
- 4 Develop an abstract theoretical framework that explains the studied process.

Grounded theory researchers collect data and analyse them simultaneously from the initial phases of research. They would argue that they cannot know exactly what the most significant social and social psychological processes are in particular settings. They could be guided by existing theories which may predict the processes, but they would argue that such guidance may constrain their observations, forcing them to observe a particular setting from a narrow perspective. So they start with broad areas of interest and form preliminary interviewing questions to open up those areas. They explore and examine participants' views and then further develop questions around those views, seeking out participants whose experiences address the emerging issues. This sequence is repeated several times during a research project, which means that researchers are kept 'close' to their data. Grounded theory gives researchers tools to analyse data that are concurrent with obtaining additional focused data that inform, extend and refine emerging analytical themes. This means that interviews become more focused with a tight fit between the col-

lected data and the data analysis. With grounded theory, the researcher works in the actual environments in which the actions take place, in natural situations in order analytically to relate participant's perspectives to the environments through which they emerge (such as ethnographers sharing the homes of families to observe how they use and listen to the radio).<sup>30</sup> The style of grounded theory adapts well to capturing the contextual complexities in which action unfolds, enabling researchers to understand better the interrelationships of context and action.

Essentially the approach is most commonly used to:

- 1 Generate new theory where little is already known,
- 2 Provide a fresh perspective on existing knowledge, i.e. to supplement existing theories.
- 3 Challenge existing theories. Researchers may challenge or disagree with existing theories for two reasons. The first is based upon the substantive representation of what the theory expounds, e.g. of how toddlers respond to certain forms of advertising. The second may be based upon how the theory was created, i.e. the research approach, techniques or forms of analysis.

### The grounded theory approach to analysing data

Grounded theory provides researchers with guidelines for analysing data at several points in the research process, not simply at an end point or 'analysis stage'. It involves the following four stages:<sup>31</sup>

- 1 **Coding data.** Grounded theory coding is at least a two-step process. It starts with an initial or open coding process, which forces the researchers to begin making broad analytical decisions about the data they are collecting. It moves on to more selective or focused coding in which the researchers use the most frequently appearing initial codes to synthesise and conceptualise large amounts of data. In essence, coding is a form of shorthand that distils events and meanings without losing their essential properties. During the coding process, the researchers work through their collected data on a line-by-line basis, use 'active' terms or descriptors to define what is happening in the data, and ultimately follow leads in the initial coding through further data gathering. Throughout the process of coding in grounded theory, the researchers should regularly address the data, as they are built up and in their entirety, with the following list of questions. Attempting to answer these facilitates the questioning of how codes are defined, connected and subsumed into broader categories:<sup>32</sup>
  - a *What?* What is it about here? Which phenomenon is mentioned?
  - b *Who?* Which persons are involved? What roles do they play? How do they interact?
  - c *How?* Which aspects of the phenomenon are mentioned (or not mentioned)?
  - d *When? How long? Where?* Time, course, location?
  - e *How much? How strong?* Aspects of intensity.
  - f *Why?* Which reasons are given or can be reconstructed?
  - g *What for?* With what intention, to what purpose?
  - h *By which?* Means, tactics and strategies for reaching that goal.
- 2 **Memo writing.** Memo writing links coding to the writing of the first draft of the analysis. This stage helps researchers to: define the properties of the categories that they have created, specify conditions under which each category has developed, note the impact of each category and the interrelationships with other categories. Memos can be loosely written notes to fully formed analytical arguments which are added to the original data and interpretations. The process of memo writing helps the researcher to achieve the following:<sup>33</sup>
  - a Stop and think about what is emerging from the data.
  - b Generate ideas to explore through other means of collecting data.
  - c Reflect upon gaps and missed opportunities in earlier interviews and observations.

#### Coding data in grounded theory

A form of shorthand that distils events and meanings without losing their essential properties.

#### Memo writing

Loosely written notes through to fully formed analytical arguments which are added to the original data and interpretations.

- d Reflect upon the meanings and impact of personal field notes.
- e Treat coded data as distinct categories to analyse.
- f Clarify categories, through their definitions, properties, distinctive elements, consequences and interconnectivity with other categories.
- g Make explicit comparisons of data with data, category with category, concept with concept.

**Theoretical sampling**

Data gathering driven by concepts derived from evolving theory and based on the concept of 'making comparisons'.

- 3 **Theoretical sampling.** This concept was introduced in Chapter 6 in our discussion of the differences between a positivist and interpretivist approach to research. This type of sampling is not designed to represent a chosen population, but to develop theory by seeking out new data. The process of gathering more data is driven by the challenges in building categories and concepts that are derived from evolving theory. It is based on the notion of seeking out different situations and learning from the comparisons that can be made. The purpose is to go to places, people or events that will maximise opportunities to discover variations amongst concepts. By generating more focused data to fill in any gaps in emerging categories and concepts, the whole process of theory building becomes more precise, explanatory and predictive. The process of theoretical sampling helps the researcher to achieve the following:<sup>34</sup>
- a Define gaps within and between categories.
  - b Discover variation within categories.
  - c Seek out and gather more focused and rich data.
  - d Develop the strength of categories and their interconnections.

**Integrating analysis**

Creating an order and connectivity that is seen to be emerging from memos.

- 4 **Integrating analysis.** Producing more focused and well-developed memos as the analysis proceeds should enable the researchers to produce theory that is clear and well validated. The researchers should aim to integrate the memos they have crafted in order to reflect the theoretical direction of their analysis or stages of a process. They have to create the order (how do the ideas fit together?) and the connectivity (what order makes the most sense?) that they see emerging from their memos. The process of integrating the analysis helps the researchers to achieve the following:
- a Sort the memos, usually done by the titles of categories.
  - b Map out a number of ways to order the memos.
  - c Choose an order that works for the analysis and the target audience.
  - d Create clear links between categories.

When ordering memos the researchers should consider whether a particular order reflects or challenges the logic of the experiences of participants and their target audiences of marketing decision-makers. A balance needs to be made between both parties, which may mean collapsing categories for clarity and ease of reading.

**Limitations of grounded theory**

Grounded theory has been criticised for its failure to acknowledge implicit theories which guide qualitative researchers in the early stages of their work. Grounded theorists argue that such guidance may constrain their observations, forcing them to question and observe a particular setting from a narrow perspective. The downside of claiming to have such an approach is that it may be extremely difficult to ignore theories that may be embedded into their way of thinking. It may also be counterproductive to ignore relevant theories (used with a healthy dose of scepticism) that could be useful in creating focus in gathering and interpreting data. Another major criticism of grounded theory is that the process can degenerate into a fairly empty building of categories, especially when aided by data analysis software.<sup>35</sup>

## Content analysis



### Content analysis

The objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of a communication.

In qualitative research, **content analysis** is one of the classical procedures for analysing textual material or communication rather than behaviour or physical objects. The text being analysed may come from the narrative held in brochures or advertising copy, to dialogues held in interview data. Primarily the objective of content analysis is to 'reduce' the data, to simplify by summarising and structuring the data according to rules derived from existing theory. In effect, even though a researcher may be working with qualitative data, content analysis should be classified as a quantitative technique based upon classifying and 'counting'. Content analysis is seen by many as an 'objective', systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of a communication.<sup>36</sup> The term 'content analysis' is set to include observation as well as analytic activity. The unit of analysis may be words (different words or types of words in the message), characters (individuals or objects), themes (propositions), space and time measures (length or duration of the message) or topics (subject of the message). Analytical categories for classifying the units are developed, and the communication is broken down according to prescribed rules. Marketing research applications involve observing and analysing the content or message of advertisements, newspaper articles, TV and radio programmes and the like. For example, the frequency of appearance of ethnic minorities and women in advertising has been studied using content analysis.

Content analysis has several virtues.<sup>37</sup> First of all, it is a standardised technique that permits the processing of large amounts of data covering long time spans. It is an unobtrusive research method, avoiding the problems of researcher effects on the data that are inherent in interpretative research methods such as in-depth interviewing.

### Limitations of content analysis

Content analysis has its shortcomings; the most serious involve the issues of manifest content, data fragmentation and quantification. For qualitative researchers, these set limits on the usefulness of the method for the analysis of visual representations:

- 1 *Manifest content.* A crucial requirement to the success of content analysis is that the established categories of analysis are sufficiently precise to enable different coders to arrive at the same results when the same body of material (e.g. advertising copy) is examined. Thus, manifest content refers to what may be seen to be manifestly apparent in the established categories of any communication. This means that in coding the meanings in any communication a clearly defined category system must plainly state the characteristics of content, there can be no implicit or hidden meanings from the coding operation. For some analysts,<sup>38</sup> the insistence upon coding only manifest content is too restrictive. The essence of their argument is that excessive emphasis on a standardised approach can result in reliability being attained at the expense of validity. The significance of the message may lie more in its context than in its manifest content.
- 2 *Data fragmentation.* By virtue of the constraint of focusing upon manifest content, the tendency is to break up communications into their elements, and it is solely the presence, absence or frequency of these elements that is deemed relevant to the investigation. This categorisation isolates those elements of the communication determined by the researcher's analytical framework or theory. This process decontextualises the message in a communication, a process described as losing the phenomenon, or failing to respect the original right of the data.<sup>39</sup>
- 3 *Quantification.* Berelson<sup>40</sup> argued that content analysis is essentially a quantitative research technique. He would be suspicious of any attempt to bring qualitative considerations into the technique – to do so would risk its objectivity and systematicness. He

argued that its strength lies in allowing the selection and rational organisation of categories to condense the substantive meanings of a communication, with an aim to testing assumptions or hypotheses. If the aim of a study were to count frequencies in order to test hypotheses about communications, then the technique would have much to offer. In this case it could be argued that the requirements of objectivity and systematicness should be the prime aim of the content analyst, and that the issue of manifest content be treated on a case-by-case basis. When examining individual cases and contexts, the presence or absence of a 'theme' may be measured, but not the frequency with which it occurs in the communication. What the essence is of that 'theme' takes the method into the realms of qualitative research.

## Semiotics



### Semiotics

The study of signs in the context of consumer experience.

We have described a range of different qualitative techniques and approaches that primarily focus on the participants or the consumers; questioning and observing them in a direct or indirect manner. **Semiotics** takes a different approach in that consumers are not viewed as independent, self-determining agents, making their own choices. Rather, consumers are viewed as products of culture, constructed and largely determined by the popular culture within which they live. Consumer needs and aspirations are seen as not being the result of freely made choices of the individual, but a reflection of the surrounding cultural discourses. Semiotics therefore moves the marketing researcher's focus towards the cultural context of the consumer, including both popular culture and the marketing context.<sup>41</sup> Semiotics combines knowledge and research techniques from across a spectrum of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies and the visual arts. It analyses data such as paintings and photography that some other qualitative research methods do not tackle so well.<sup>42</sup> It is based on a detailed analysis of language and images which untangle how meaning is conveyed as well as what that meaning is. The difference between a semiotic approach and other qualitative approaches can be illustrated using the following examples.

### Example Just a sign of the times?<sup>43</sup>

Semiotics contributed to the cult status achieved by Pot Noodle by depicting the brand as food pornography. Semiotics consultant Greg Rowland drew the unlikely comparison between dried noodles and pornography:

*We looked at the relationship between instant snacks and real food and saw parallels in the relationship of porn to love. Neither claim to be the real thing or to be good for you. It's instant gratification and overly intense hits of pleasure.*

The idea was taken up and developed into the notorious 'Slag of all snacks' campaign, which portrayed Pot Noodle as a shameful, but irresistible pleasure that has consumers irredeemably hooked.

### Example Fish out of water<sup>44</sup>

Pulse ([www.pulse.com](http://www.pulse.com)) explored the world of electronic music communication (linguistic and visual) to understand the cues that define the genre, and those that do not. Pulse also looked beyond the music sector, to related markets such as alcohol and fashion, to understand

better the cultural interplay and genre references. Pulse sees the study of communications, cultural signs, cues and signifiers as really adding value, providing extra evidence to back up the researcher's intuitive thoughts or inherent knowledge of the sector. This approach was taken in a project using semiotics to evaluate album covers for a dance music label.

A conventional qualitative researcher might ask, 'Why does Frank buy Pot Noodle?' The semioticians would be more likely to ask, 'How does consumer culture give meaning to Pot Noodle, and what are these meanings?' They might argue that if we can answer these questions, we will be able to make a good guess not just at why Frank buys it, but also why anyone buys it. This is because its meanings are constructed within popular culture, and consumers are influenced and constrained by this cultural context. An understanding of the broader cultural context is something that semiotic analysis is uniquely well placed to provide, because it focuses on the culture and not just on the consumer.<sup>45</sup>

Examples of how semiotics can help marketing decision-makers are:<sup>46</sup>

- Mapping out a new market or a whole field of cultural activity.
- Seeing the opportunities to position new brands.
- Analysing how different aspects of marketing communications work together, and the means to create synergies across different media.
- Evaluating in-store developments and harmonising the different aspects of marketing communications.
- Diagnosing problems with brand or marketing communications.
- Providing models and guidelines for successful brand communications, indicating the key signifiers within the relevant context.
- Understanding the process of encoding and decoding more precisely, to minimise the potential for misunderstanding between the marketer and the consumer.

As can be seen from the above list, semiotics can play a major role in the development of a wide array of marketing communications. In terms of conducting a qualitative analysis of marketing communications, the approach goes into far more depth in comparison with content analysis. Semioticians investigate the subtext of communication. They begin with the brand, combing through the cultural connotations of advertising imagery and language, the colour, shape and forms of corporate identity, where the brand is distributed and how it is displayed. Then they look outwards to the consumer's world, hunting for shifts in cultural meaning – how concepts such as masculinity, heroism or indulgence have changed over time and how they might be reinterpreted.<sup>47</sup> To illustrate this point, the following questions may be set by a researcher examining the advertising of a particular brand, looking at the past, the potential and the competition. The questions would be directed at the text, sounds and images of the advertisements, the wide breadth of qualitative data:<sup>48</sup>

- What are the major signifiers (i.e. the material signs – what it is)?
- What signifieds (i.e. the conceptual sign – what it means) might they be creating and to whom?
- How do the advertisements work on a symbolic/metaphorical and on a product/metonymical (literal) level?
- How do the form and content of the advertisement work together?
- What codes (i.e. bundles of signs) do the advertisements use?
- How does the advertisement measure up to the brand's historical codes and those of its competitors?
- How do the advertisements work in relation to the brand's history and its futures?

- Is the advertisement using a dominant (everyday, mainstream), emergent (leading edge, culturally dynamic) or residual (old fashioned, lacking in energy) set of codes or are residual codes being applied in an emergent way?
- What kinds of discourse or discourses are apparent, e.g. postmodernism, feminism, spirituality?

This set of questions and processes will illuminate the advertising for the researcher. They will help the researcher to understand more completely the material that viewers will be evaluating. However, this may not be readily achievable using a single researcher. To maximise the potential of semiotics, an action research approach (described in Chapter 6) may offer the best results. This would involve taking a more facilitative and involving approach; sharing the actual techniques and questions of semiotic analysis with researchers and decision-makers working together towards the co-creation of knowledge. This would be more open and interactive. Semiotics specialists would be vital to the process, but as facilitators and mentors in a workshop style of joint working, helping clients identify and understand the way forward themselves. A more involving approach also provides the tools to recode, enabling the client to move from insight to the successful implementation of new strategy in any of the applications above.<sup>49</sup>

### Limitations of semiotics

Although semiotics is able to analyse a great breadth of interrelated qualitative data, there are four core criticisms of semiotics:

- 1 *Reliability.* The main criticism of semiotics lies in how reliable or replicable it is.<sup>50</sup> Although an individual analyst's interpretation may be very insightful and could be a valid representation of cultural influences upon the consumer, there is little guaranteeing that another analyst would come to the same conclusion about the relevant codes or structures.
- 2 *Qualitative dataset.* In practice it can be hard to assemble the relevant data to analyse, given that there is usually no discourse or discussion as may be assembled with a series of focus groups or in-depth interviews.
- 3 *Logic of interpretation.* It is not usually clear how the analyst has arrived at an interpretation. It must be accepted that there is no unique way to interpret text or other types of qualitative data. On this score, Derrida<sup>51</sup> makes the point that no single interpretation can ever claim to be the final one.<sup>52</sup> In the case of semiotics, in many instances an interpretation seems to rely upon a shared knowledge of a cultural background and intuition, which may be valid but extremely difficult to validate. This is where an action research approach can help, where the team of researchers and marketing decision-makers share and 'own' the interpretation.
- 4 *Consumer theory.* The position of the consumer can be unclear in semiotic analysis. In principle, the consumer is seen as passive, determined by culture and unable to break out of his or her contextual frame.<sup>53</sup> Many consumer theorists would disagree with this view, giving the consumer a more active role in interpreting, accepting or resisting the brand's semiotically encoded meanings.

## Using computers in qualitative research and analysis



A major problem for the qualitative researcher is the sheer volume of data that may be collected. In an attempt to 'step into the shoes' of target consumers, a whole array of questions, probes, observations, answers and personal notes have to be analysed. As with quantitative data analyses, it is possible to complete analyses without the aid of a com-



puter. Using the computer should provide speed, memory, ease of data access and the ability to transform and manipulate data in many ways. Overall it allows a much more efficient and ultimately effective process, as the researcher's effort may be focused upon generating the most effective support for decision-makers as quickly as possible rather than upon laborious administrative tasks. The following list summarises qualitative research activities that may be supported by the use of computers:

- 1 *Field notes.* Making notes before, during and after interviews and observations. Writing and editing these notes if needed as part of a data display to justify a particular interpretation.
- 2 *Transcripts.* Building up transcripts to represent the discourse in interviews.
- 3 *Coding.* Attaching keywords to chunks of data or text.
- 4 *Storage, search and retrieval.* Keeping data in an organised manner, so that relevant segments of data or text can be located, pulled out and evaluated.
- 5 *Connection.* Linking relevant data segments with each other.
- 6 *Memoing.* Writing up reflective comments that can be 'pasted' onto relevant codes and connections.
- 7 *Data display.* Placing selected or reduced data in a condensed and organised format using a spreadsheet matrix or network. The display can be part of the development of the analysis or in the final vision produced by the researcher.
- 8 *Drawing conclusions and verification.* Aiding the researcher to interpret the data display and to test or confirm findings.
- 9 *Theory building.* Developing systematic and conceptually coherent explanations of findings that are meaningful to marketing decision-makers.
- 10 *Reporting.* Presenting interim and final reports of the findings in a written and oral manner.

Many of these tasks can be performed with readily available word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation packages. Many researchers may be very comfortable using such packages to gather and record data and to present findings. What may be new to many researchers is the use of proprietary software to help with the technical integration of data assembly, reduction, display and verification. Improvements in the functions and power of software that copes with this technical integration occur at a rapid pace. To see an array of different qualitative data analysis packages, download demos and evaluate how applicable they may be to a particular qualitative technique, visit the following websites:

Qualitative data analysis software	Website
NVivo and XSight	<a href="http://www.qsrinternational.com">www.qsrinternational.com</a>
Atlas ti	<a href="http://www.atlasti.com">www.atlasti.com</a>
Ethnograph	<a href="http://www.qualisearch.com">www.qualisearch.com</a>
C4-SAID	<a href="http://www.code-a-text.co.uk">www.code-a-text.co.uk</a>

The demo disc attached to this book is the QSR International product XSight. Conventional qualitative data analysis software was designed for and used mainly by academic researchers in the social sciences. XSight was designed for marketing researchers by marketing researchers who understood the challenges faced by the profession. The following example summarises a review of the software and shows how it has changed the data analysis practices of the leading marketing research agency MORI. We recommend that you visit the QSR website to review descriptions of applications and cases. You can then choose when you wish to start working with the XSight demo disc. Remember that this demo has the full suite of XSight features and that, once it is installed, you will be able to use it for a period of 90 days.

**Example** XSight reviewed<sup>54</sup>

Sara Butler, an associate director at MORI's Qualitative Hothouse ([www.mori.com/qualitative/](http://www.mori.com/qualitative/)) used QSR's XSight qualitative software to handle a six-month 'mega-project' of some 80 focus groups throughout the UK. Not only did XSight impose a discipline and rigour on the process, but also it reduced the burden of management, made it easier for her to monitor the job in progress and the consistency of work from different moderators, and brought her extra thinking time. The tool is now in regular use at MORI. Sara rates XSight highly for overall design, ease of use and 'the way it pulls everything together, like a virtual whiteboard'. She estimates it saved her about two hours of work on each group, while through the project tracking capabilities, she achieved much higher levels of consistency across all groups because she could get her hands on the data much sooner. Sara observes: 'People are taking on larger and larger qualitative projects, which opens up a whole new world of project management. One of its key strengths is that it provides a project management tool too.'

XSight is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (or CAQDAS) tool from QSR, an Australian software developer ([www.qsrinternational.com](http://www.qsrinternational.com)). QSR started by developing NUD\*IST and NVIVO, both widely used in academic and social research but rarely applied in the world of marketing research where there is still much scepticism about the use of software to analyse qualitative data.

The core of XSight is based upon three components:

- 1 Transcripts.
- 2 The analysis framework, which can equate to the interview guide.
- 3 Interviewer observations, selected verbatim quotes and other notes.

The framework is a tree structure of headings and subheadings which can be broken down to many levels. So if 'packaging' for a product was a high-level topic, 'colour', 'images' and 'wording' might be the next level down, and within, say, 'colour', could be listed 'pink', 'blue', 'white', then down to 'like', 'dislike', and so on. With a framework set up from the start, this could be used to supplement or even replace the interview guide. The screen is divided into three main areas: transcript, analysis framework and a space for comments and observations. When coding the transcript, the relevant level is chosen from the analysis hierarchy. Comments are now focused only on that single analysis heading, and they can be amended or new ones added, which can be paraphrases, notes, hunches or actual, selected verbatim, which are simply dragged from the transcript and dropped into place. This usefully creates a hyperlink back to the text which means that, several hundred comments later, they can always be seen in the full context of any verbatim quote, simply by clicking on the link. The real power comes once all of the coding has been completed. Bringing everything together is done through the 'query' window, where all the responses can be sifted and any classification or any level of the analysis framework enables all of the responses to be pulled out for all the groups, or filtered by demographics. This is where the real thinking goes on, and at the bottom of the window, a document can be opened up which can gradually be developed into a report. Reports can be destined for either Microsoft Word or PowerPoint.

Qualitative data analysis packages do not automate the analysis process, nor is that their purpose. The process of coding, as described in the data verification section, depends upon the interpretations made by the researcher. The overall description, model or theory that emerges from the analysis also depends upon interpretations made by the researcher. No analysis package can perform such interpretations.

Qualitative data analysis is not formulaic; it requires an approach that gives quick feedback to the researcher on the results of emergent questions. This involves an iterative cycle of reflection and innovation, which means total interaction between the researcher and the computer. So, rather than seeing analysis as an automated process, the purpose of soft-

ware is to aid the researcher to analyse data in a systematic and thorough manner. The researcher seeks patterns, meanings and interconnections in the qualitative data. This can be conducted manually, but by using software the researcher can manipulate the data far more efficiently to help see patterns, meanings and interconnections and ultimately to develop theory. In summary, software packages offer the qualitative researcher the following advantages.

### Advantages of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

- 1 *Speed.* The speed at which programs can carry out sorting procedures on large volumes of data is remarkable, and continues to get faster. This gives the data analyst more time to think about the meaning of data, enabling rapid feedback of the results of particular analytic ideas so that new ones can be formulated. Analysis becomes more devoted to creative and intellectual tasks, less immersed in routine.
- 2 *Rigour.* Rigour adds to the trust placed in research findings. In this context it means counting the number of times things occur as well as demonstrating that negative incidences have been located rather than selecting anecdotes that support a particular interpretation.
- 3 *Team.* In collaborative research projects where researchers need to agree on the meaning of codes, a check can easily be made of whether team members are interpreting segments in the same way. This is particularly useful as coding moves from the more descriptive and mundane codes to ones that reflect broader theoretical concerns. Researchers can pass coded interviews between them, and compare the results.
- 4 *Sampling.* It is easy to keep track of who *has* been interviewed, compared with the intentions of who *should* be interviewed. Beyond the sampling of individuals is the concept of theoretical sampling, i.e. the inclusion of events that corroborate or contradict developing theory. As researchers have more time to spend on creative and intellectual tasks, they can develop stronger descriptions and theories and strengthen the validity of their views by ensuring they have sampled sufficient incidences.<sup>55</sup>

It must be reinforced, however, that software packages cannot interpret and find meaning in qualitative data. The programs do facilitate, and in some cases automate, the identification and coding of text. But there is sometimes a false assumption that identification and coding are simple and unproblematic, and critical evaluation and scrutiny of coded segments and code counts are not needed. By facilitating quick analyses which focus on quantitative category relationships, the software may discourage more time-consuming, in-depth interpretations. Thus while the programs are intended as a means of allowing the researcher to stay close to the data, their misuse can have the unintended result of distancing the researcher from the data. As discussed earlier, many decision-makers who use qualitative marketing research do not question how analysis is completed, or indeed why it should be completed. The following arguments illustrate the nature of their concerns.<sup>56</sup>

### Disadvantages of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

- 1 *Mechanistic data analysis.* The computer cannot replace the creative process expected of the qualitative researcher. The researcher can evaluate the interrelated play on particular words, the tone of voice or the gestures of a particular participant. The sensitivity towards these relationships and connections can be lost in a mechanistic search for statements.
- 2 *Loss of the overview.* The researcher may be seduced into concentrating on the detail of individual chunks of data and assigning codes to the data. This focus may detract from the overall context that is so vital to identify and name chunks of data. Making sense of codes can be greatly facilitated by an ability to visualise the data in their entirety.

- 3 *Obsession with volume.* Given the ability to manipulate large amounts of data, there may be a push to increase the number of interviews. This may be counterproductive in that the emphasis should be on the interrelated *qualities* of:
  - individual participants
  - the interview process.
- 4 *Exclusion of non-text data.* As noted earlier, qualitative 'text' can include notes, observations, pictures and music that make up the total 'picture' or representation of individuals. Many programs can only cope with the narrative of questions and answers recorded in transcripts (though rapid developments are being made to overcome this shortcoming).

Many software developers recognise these limitations and have gone to great pains to overcome them. One of the trade-offs faced by software developers in overcoming these limitations is the user-friendliness of their programs compared with the sophistication of being able to manipulate and represent the structure that may lie in multifarious data. As qualitative researchers use and learn how to generate the most from the software, user-friendliness may take a lesser though not ignored role. Experienced qualitative researchers can demand more sophistication to match the realities of coping with qualitative data. For the novice qualitative researcher the packages may seem daunting, but this problem is analogous to an initial exposure to sophisticated survey design packages such as SNAP or statistical packages such as SPSS. In all cases researchers need to appreciate how the software may serve them and work through the examples and cases, to experiment and to build up their knowledge and confidence.



## International marketing research

If one were to take the very naive view of qualitative data analysis being to feed data into an analysis package, and to wait for processed data to emerge, then international analysis would focus purely upon issues of language and translation. Such a perspective of qualitative analysis would ignore the context and process of collecting data and the role that context and process play in interpreting the meaning that emerges from interviews and observations. As discussed at the start of this chapter, qualitative marketing researchers need an acute self-awareness of how they 'see' – which affects the way they pose questions and interpret answers.

Consumers in any country use their social and cultural frames of reference to interpret questions posed to them by qualitative researchers and to present a response. Likewise, qualitative researchers use their social and cultural frames to present questions and interpret answers. If the researcher and the participant share the same or similar social and cultural frames of reference, the analysis and interpretation of the data can be relatively straightforward. If the qualitative researcher goes into an international market, there is the potential for big differences in social and cultural frames between the researcher and the researched. The qualitative researcher needs to develop an understanding of the social and cultural frames of the types of participant in an international market. At the same time, they must have a strong awareness of their own social and cultural frames. Only when qualitative researchers have examined both perspectives can they start to interpret consumer responses.

The process is summarised by leading qualitative researchers Virginia Valentine and Malcolm Evans as:<sup>57</sup>

*Consumers give a 'coded' version of the social and cultural relationship with products and brands that drive their 'feelings'. Because language (and language systems) are the*

*medium of culture, the rules of language become the rules of the code. Qualitative research then becomes a matter of working with the code through understanding the rules of language.*

Thus, simple literal translations of transcripts of interviews from international markets entered into a qualitative data analysis package are doomed to failure. Understanding the rules of language and understanding oneself are vital for the qualitative researcher to interpret interviews and observations. As the rules of language, with the social and cultural forces that shape those rules, become more alien to the researcher in international markets, the task of analysis and meaningful interpretation becomes more difficult.



## Ethics in marketing research

It is interesting to note that within the ESOMAR code of conduct, little reference is made to what is deemed the ethical practice of data analysis, be that quantitative or qualitative. This is understandable, as the chief concern for the marketing research industry is how participants are handled, i.e. the process of eliciting data from them. Care must be taken to ensure that the precious resource of participants is not misled or manipulated.

With quantitative data, as will be seen in Chapters 18–24, there are many established and consistent procedures of analysis. With qualitative data, even though there exists a broad framework to manage analysis procedures, there does not exist a body of consistent and established procedures of analysis. The difficulty in establishing consistent procedures lies primarily in the great diversity of data that can be included in the analysis procedure. Go back to the ‘Data assembly’ subsection to see the list of types of qualitative data and it is easy to see why this is so. Combining the researcher’s notes, transcripts of interviews, pictures, audio and video recordings and mood boards does not lead to a structured process. It is a messy process that owes much to individual patience, creativity and vision.

In searching for support of ethical practice to cope with such a ‘messy process’, there is one area of support that comes from the code of conduct of the Market Research Society in the UK. In its section ‘Mutual Rights and Responsibilities of Researchers and Clients’, Rule B26 states:

*When reporting on the results of a marketing research project the Researcher must make a clear distinction between the findings as such, the Researcher’s interpretation of these and any recommendations based on them.*

The key element of this rule is that the researcher should be explicit about his or her interpretation of the data collected. This takes us back to the start when we discussed the self-reflection of the social and cultural values of researchers. If qualitative researchers fail or cannot be bothered to reflect upon their own values and cultural norms, their interpretation of qualitative data may be extremely biased. It therefore follows that, for the most valid as well as the most ethical interpretation of qualitative data, researchers must continually reflect and test the extent and effect of their social and cultural values.



## Summary

Qualitative marketing researchers should reflect upon how their social and cultural values affect the way they perceive and observe target participants. These reflections should be built up as field notes as the whole process of data gathering develops and evolves. These notes form a key source of qualitative data to complement the broad array of qualitative data generated from interviews and observations. To successfully draw together a valid interpretation, qualitative data analysis must be set in the context of a theoretical understanding of the issue being researched, and an understanding of the marketing decision-makers' use of the findings.

The first stage of the process of analysing qualitative data involves assembling data in their rich and varying formats. The second stage involves reducing the data, i.e. selecting, classifying and connecting data that are believed to be of the greatest significance. A key element of this stage is the concept of coding. The third stage involves displaying data, i.e. using graphical means to display the meaning and structure that a researcher sees in the data collected. The final stage involves verifying the data. The marketing researcher aims to generate the most valid interpretation of these data, which may be supported by existing theories or through the concept of theoretical sampling. The stages of analysis seem quite distinct but in reality they are totally dependent upon each other.

Three of the most commonly used approaches to analysing qualitative marketing research lie in grounded theory, content analysis and semiotics. Grounded theory is an approach that develops theory which is ultimately grounded in the behaviour, words and action of those under study. Content analysis is used to 'reduce' qualitative data, to simplify them by summarising and structuring the data according to rules derived from existing theory. Semiotics combines research techniques from across a spectrum of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies and the visual arts. It helps to analyse visual data that some other qualitative research methods do not tackle so well.

To be able to cope with the great amount of data generated from qualitative techniques, a great variety of software packages are available. Used correctly, they can facilitate a speedy and rigorous exploration of qualitative data, allowing teams of researchers to perform creative and incisive analyses and interpretations. The main concern with the use of qualitative data analysis packages lies in the potential for them to be mechanistic and to encourage yet more interviews to be completed, sacrificing the quality of data capture. The qualitative researcher needs to develop an understanding of the social and cultural frames of target participants in international markets. At the same time, qualitative researchers must have a strong awareness of their own social and cultural frames. Only when they have examined both perspectives can they effectively interpret consumer responses. There are ethical implications of the extent to which researchers seek the valid interpretations they can make of the qualitative data they have gathered.

## Questions



- How may the social and cultural background of researchers affect the way they:
  - gather qualitative data?
  - interpret the whole array of qualitative data they have gathered?
- What is the significance of a qualitative researcher having a theoretical and marketing understanding of the subject he or she is researching?
- Why should a qualitative researcher maintain a field notebook?
- What should be recorded in a field notebook?
- What may be classified as 'data' when assembling data as part of the data analysis process?
- What does the word 'coding' mean in the context of qualitative data analysis? What problems do you see associated with the process of coding?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of handing over audiotapes of qualitative interviews to a typist who has taken no part in the interviews?
- Evaluate the purpose of displaying qualitative data.
- What advantages and disadvantages do you see in displaying qualitative data in a spreadsheet format?
- Evaluate 'when' the stage of data verification should occur.
- How may theoretical sampling aid the process of verification?
- How may computers help in the whole process of qualitative data gathering and analysis?
- Evaluate the main concerns that exist with the use of computers in qualitative data analysis.
- Why is the researcher's understanding of his or her social and cultural values particularly important in international marketing research?
- Why does the interpretation of qualitative findings have ethical implications?

## Exercises



- You have been given the task of conducting a series of in-depth interviews about luxury cruises targeted at women of 50 years of age and over. What preparatory work could you do to understand characteristics of this subject, the target group and how the target group relate to the subject?
- You have just started to work for a major qualitative marketing research agency. The CEO notes that her researchers use a great variety of methods to keep field notes, ranging from scrappy notes taken at interviews to detailed diaries. You have been given the task of designing a format of field notes that will incorporate 'short notes made at the time of observation or interview', 'expanded notes made as soon as possible after each session of interviews or observations', 'a fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each stage of fieldwork', and 'a provisional running record of analysis and interpretation'. Present the design and the case you would make to other researchers to use your format.
- You have conducted a series of focus groups with 18–21 year olds about travelling home from evening events. As you complete each group, you give each participant a disposable camera to record significant events of their journeys home for the forthcoming weekend. What would you do with the images that they send to you?
- An ethnographic study is planned of young men using Lynx deodorant. You have been asked to compare the relative merits of the qualitative data analysis packages Ethnograph ([www.qualisearch.com](http://www.qualisearch.com)) and XSight ([www.qsrinternational.com](http://www.qsrinternational.com)) in terms of coping with the types of data that will be generated and the interpretations that will be performed.
- In a small group discuss the following issues: 'Quantitative techniques of analysis and data display have no role to play in qualitative data analysis?' and 'Theoretical sampling could never work in commercial marketing research given that it creates an open-ended agenda of issues to explore and participants to pursue.'

### Video Case Exercise: Wild Planet

To what extent do you feel the gender of qualitative researcher has an impact upon how they interpret the differences between boys and girls playing with Wild Planet toys?



download from  
[www.pearsoned.co.uk/mahotra\\_euro](http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/mahotra_euro)

## Notes

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- 21 This process is known as triangulation. For a fuller description of this topic, set in the context of researcher bias, see Griseri, P., *Management Knowledge: A Critical View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 60–78.
- 22 Silverman, D., *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing text, talk and interaction*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2001), 233.
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