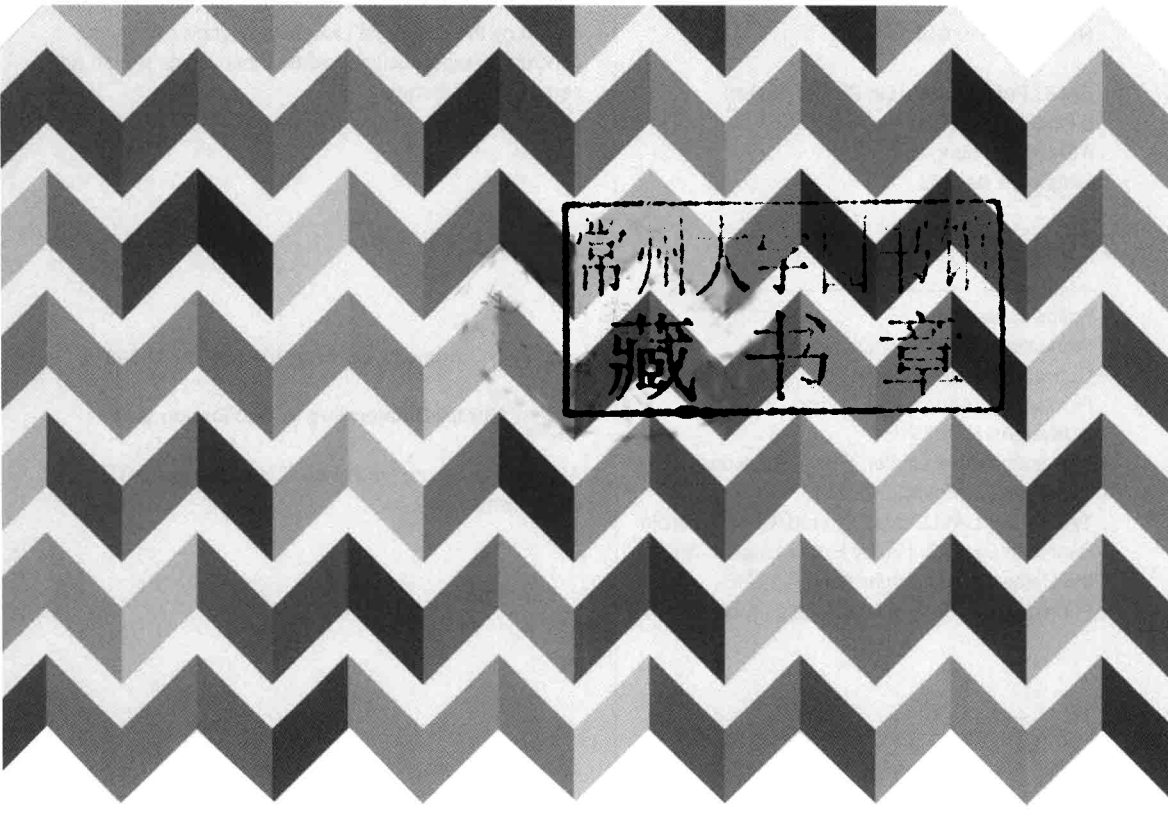
QUALITATIVE TEXT ANALYSIS

UDO KUCKARTZ

QUALITATIVE TEXT ANALYSIS

A Guide to Methods, Practice & Using Software



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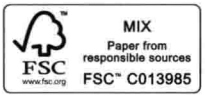

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About the Author

Udo Kuckartz is a Professor of Educational Research and Social Research Methods at Philipps University Marburg, Germany. He teaches courses on qualitative and quantitative methods, general research designs, and mixed methods research. He also taught at the Free University Berlin, the Technical University Dresden, and the Humboldt University Berlin. He received his Master's degree in Sociology and Political Science from RWTH Aachen, Germany. With a doctoral dissertation on "Computer and Verbal Data," he obtained his Ph.D. in Sociology from the Technical University Berlin, Germany. Some years later he earned his habilitation, a second qualification common in many European countries, in Educational Research from the Free University Berlin.

He authored 17 books and more than 180 articles in journals and as contributions to books. Most of his books are focused on qualitative and quantitative methodology, e.g. textbooks on qualitative evaluation, on-line Evaluation, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, and an introduction into statistics. Since the 1980s, he has worked on computer-assisted methods of qualitative data analysis (QDA). In connection with his doctoral dissertation on computer and verbal data, he was a pioneer in the field of QDA-software and developed the software MAX (later winMAX, which is known worldwide today as MAXQDA).

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As always, the writing of this book was a long process, from recording my first ideas to submitting the final camera-ready draft. It was great fun and often challenging and I thank everyone who has supported me.

Preface

This book is the result of a long-standing plan of mine to write a hands-on guide to systematic analysis of qualitative data. As a university professor, I observed how unsure graduate students and doctoral candidates felt when analysing qualitative data. At a loss, they searched for an appropriate analysis strategy and, specifically, for methods described as accurately as possible as well as techniques they could apply to the practical implementation of their analysis. This book will help to satisfy this need. It presents the central steps of the process of qualitative text analysis in a straightforward way and describes three main methods in detail: *thematic*, *evaluative* and *type-building analysis*.

Qualitative text analysis, as described in this book, derives from many sources – thematic analysis, grounded theory, classical content analysis, and others. It is a sort of *hermeneutical-interpretive informed systematic analysis*. In European countries, very often, the term 'qualitative content analysis' is used for that kind of analysis. In the Anglo-Saxon world, however, the method 'content analysis' is strongly associated with the quantitative paradigm. There, the term 'qualitative content analysis' seems like a contradiction in itself. To avoid misunderstandings, I will therefore use the term qualitative text analysis in this book instead of 'qualitative content analysis'. Three distinct forms of qualitative text analysis are described in detail in this book, with particular regard to complex types of analysis and the presentation of results. The possibilities for qualitative text analysis have expanded greatly because of modern computer technology; thus, this book will also present possibilities for practical implementation using QDA software (QDA stands for Qualitative Data Analysis).

The three methods described in this book, 'thematic text analysis', 'evaluative text analysis', and 'type-building text analysis', represent three independent approaches that can also build on each other. Uwe Flick (2006, pp. 295–298) differentiates between methods of qualitative data analysis that use 'coding and categorizing' on the one hand and 'sequential analysis' (broken down into 'conversation and discourse analysis' and 'narrative and hermeneutic analysis') on the other hand. The three methods presented in this book belong to the first group, i.e. *category-based methods for the systematic analysis of qualitative data*.

Like Clive Seale and others (Seale, 1999b; Seale & Silverman, 1997), this book strives for methodological rigour in qualitative social research. An accurate description of the analytical approach and the recognition of the existence of quality standards are, in my opinion, as essential to qualitative text analysis as to any analysis method in the social sciences. With the new techniques of computer-based analysis, ranging from different methods of coding and re-finding, linking and writing notes to complex modelling and visualization of qualitative data analysis, powerful tools are available to increase the quality of the analysis. The closer proximity to the data, better accountability, transparency and documentation are likely to increase the credibility of qualitative analysis and thus, their general appreciation in the scientific community. For this reason, this book assumes that modern computer techniques will be used and includes them as an integral part of the presentation of methods.

The aim of the book is to provide a hands-on description of the qualitative text analysis approach, using the example of the analysis of qualitative interviews, and more specifically of guideline-structured interviews. Theoretically, the methods presented are suitable for other data types such as narrative interviews, observation protocols, visual data, images, documents, etc., but they must be adjusted accordingly. The three methods presented here are not intended to form a rigid, constricting concept. These methods can be modified, expanded and differentiated according to the approach adopted for actual analysis in a research project. Here, I refer to the position expressed by Huberman and Miles regarding the flexible application of evaluation strategies:

> Data analysis is not off-the-shelf, rather it is custom-built, revised, and 'choreographed'. (quoted by Creswell, 2003, p. 142)

Thus, this book does not present a one-size-fits-all approach to qualitative data analysis, rather methods of analysis are presented, which have to be adapted to the specific situation of a research project.

The book is constructed as follows: Under the heading, 'Analysing Qualitative Data – But How?', Chapter 1 presents essential foundations and argues the importance and the central role of the research question. Chapters 2 and 3 then turn to qualitative text analysis in the strict sense. The second chapter traces the path from different 'sources' like grounded theory, thematic analysis and classical quantitative content analysis to qualitative text analysis, after which the basic concepts and the general process of qualitative text analysis are shown in the third chapter. The fourth chapter represents the core of the book, in which three methods of qualitative text analysis are described in detail. Chapter 5 focuses on the possible assistance computer software can provide throughout the entire analysis process, from transcription to presentation and visualization of results. The following chapter, Chapter 6, is devoted

to issues of quality standards, creating the research report, and documenting the analysis process. My original plan envisaged the book with the chapter on quality standards before the chapter 'Qualitative Text Analysis using Computer Assistance'. This proved to be unpractical because the way in which the software itself is used is relevant when assessing the quality of qualitative text analysis. Thus, one would have had to take frequent reference to something which was only described in the subsequent chapters, so that ultimately it seemed sensible to move the chapter on quality standards back.

In the Internet era, it has been found that texts are perceived more as a hypertext rather than read sequentially or in their entirety. People often search very selectively for the information they need. This book does not follow this trend; rather, it has a linear structure, i.e. it is designed so that individual sections build on one another and should therefore be read consecutively.

Udo Kuckartz, Marburg, April 2013

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1

Analysing Qualitative Data – But How?

In this chapter, you will learn more about:

- The difference between qualitative and quantitative data.
- The ambiguity of the term 'qualitative data analysis'.
- The relationship between qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research.
- The importance of the research question in an analysis.
- The need for methodological rigour in qualitative research.

1.1 Qualitative, Quantitative – A Few Clarifications

What do the terms 'qualitative data' and 'quantitative data' mean? While the term 'quantitative data' is directly associated – even by laymen – with numbers and statistics, and likely with costs in economic fields, the term 'qualitative data' is not equally self-explanatory, as it has very different meanings in various scientific disciplines as well as in everyday life. In human resources, for example, it entails areas such as employee satisfaction, motivation, and work environment as opposed to quantitative (hard) data, such as personnel costs, headcount, etc. For geographers, the number of inhabitants in various communities represents typical quantitative data, while classifying a municipality into zones involves qualitative data. In psychology, qualitative data often refers to data of the scale type nominal or categorical, i.e. actual data from the field of standardized (quantitative) research. There you will even find textbooks that introduce the term 'qualitative data' in the title, but which actually involve quantitative analysis methods for categorical data.

This book is based on the following pragmatic definition of quantitative and qualitative data:

> Numerical data, or numbers, are considered quantitative data. Qualitative data are more diverse in contrast and can include texts as well as images, movies, audio-recordings, cultural artefacts, and more.

Despite the multimedia revolution that took place in the last decade, and despite the noted epochal shift towards the visual in our culture, text is still the dominant type of qualitative data in social sciences, psychology, and education. The methods of qualitative data analysis described in the following are originally designed for the data type 'text' and texts will be used in the examples shown. Theoretically, the methods can be transferred to other types of qualitative data such as images, movies, audio-recordings, etc.

Unlike the attitude often found in textbooks on social research methodology, I do not view qualitative data as inferior to other (quantitative) types of data. There is no hierarchy of analytical forms similar to that of scales – which includes nominal, then ordinal, and finally interval scales on the highest level. 'Real science' does not begin with numbers, quantification, and statistical analysis of data. One glance at other scientific disciplines proves this point. In many branches of science, including geophysics and medicine, scientists work with non-numerical data, such as in the field of advanced medical imaging techniques (MRI, NMRI, etc.). Qualitative data are by no means a *weak* form of data; rather, they are a *different* form that requires different, complex and systematic analysis.

An interesting aspect in this context has been introduced by Bernard and Ryan (2010, pp. 4–7). They have pointed out the ambiguity of the term 'qualitative data analysis', which is immediately apparent when the three words 'quality', 'data', and 'analysis' are linked together in different ways. While qualitative data *analysis* refers to the analysis of qualitative data in the above sense of texts, images, films, etc., *qualitative* data analysis can mean the qualitative analysis of data of any kind, that is, both qualitative and quantitative data. Differentiating between data and analysis results in the following four-cell table (according to Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 4)[1]:

The chart presents two expected and two unexpected cells. The upper left Cell A and the lower right Cell D appear well known to us: Cell A includes the *qualitative analysis of qualitative data* in the form of hermeneutical analysis,

[1]The table is based on the earlier differentiation by Bryman (1988), which differentiated between qualitative and quantitative *research*, not *data*. Bryman called the cells B and C 'incongruent'.

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