


Chapter 7

Ensuring Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Social Sciences Research

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ABSTRACT

Social sciences (SS) researchers have produced far less qualitative than quantitative research. This is due to many factors including particularly the lack of straightforward and easy-to-implement guidelines that would help researchers in the process of ensuring research rigor through reliability, validity, and/or other concepts. Nonetheless, the extant literature shows that most qualitative research measures on research rigor were developed in nursing, which is a natural science discipline, and that social science researchers often adopt these measures in their works. This chapter focuses on multiculturalism in business management discipline, as a rapidly growing field of the SS. While multiculturalism has become a key feature and a determinant of organizational success in today's rapidly globalized business environments, it may be a source of bias in qualitative research. Most importantly, the chapter develops a set of measures/techniques that will aid qualitative social science researchers, and business researchers specifically, on how to ensure research rigor.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike quantitative research that deals with numbers, qualitative research emphasizes the collection and analysis of data displayed in form of words to answer specific research questions. These differences have implications on the scientific accuracy, rigor, and robustness as well as generalizability of the research findings. Nonetheless, establishing research rigor is relatively easier for quantitative researchers than for their qualitative peers. This is attributed to the existence of clearly established, straightforward and agreed-upon quantitative measures as documented in a plethora of textbooks and research articles.

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These measures are built upon statistical principles (Noble & Smith, 2015) to subsequently deliver most possibly accurate results.

However, this is not the case in qualitative research, which lacks similar measures (Riege, 2003), particularly in the social sciences including the business management field (Singh et al., 2021), where rigor is still a problem for both researchers and readers (Andersen & Anne, 2004). Indeed, qualitative research has, despite efforts, been repetitively critiqued for lacking consensus on how to assess quality and rigor (Marschan-Piekkari, 2017; Murphy & Yelder, 2010; Rolfe, 2006; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Welch & Rose & Johnson, 2020). For example, while Welch and Marschan-Piekkari (2017) describe it as complex and messy, Rolfe (2006, p. 304) contends that:

“After a quarter of a century of debate in nursing about how best to judge the quality of qualitative research, we appear to be no closer to a consensus, or even to deciding whether it is appropriate to try to achieve a consensus”.

Overall, the existing critics point to the lack of scientific rigor, poor justification of the methods, absence of transparent procedures of analysis, researchers’ bias in form of personal opinions that shape the interpretation of findings, and insufficient examination of the practical application of rigor strategies such as reflexivity (Darawsheh, 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015).

To date, most of the existing works and discussions on reliability and validity in qualitative research comes from the field of nursing. Much less has been done in the Social Sciences (SS) disciplines particularly business management (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Rajasinghe et al., 2021); Beside being shaped by higher tendency for empirical testing, the business management field through lenses of the workplace remains a perfect place for multicultural dynamism and thriving. This is clearly seen in the disciplines of multinational firms (Marschan-Piekkari & Rebecca, 2004a), as well as international, ethnic, and migrant entrepreneurship. Specifically in entrepreneurship, it has been argued that researchers focus on rigor at the cost of practical relevance (Frank & Landström, 2016).

Scholars have not agreed upon a specific framework or model to guide researchers the question of maintaining reliability and validity (and research rigor in general) in qualitative SS research. However, despite the usefulness of the existing works in assisting researchers, four main limitations are apparent. First, some works simply draw on the quantitative research approach and how it deals with reliability and validity (Rolfe, 2006). As such, these works have not just ignored the specificities of qualitative research, but failed to draw a clear separation between reliability and validity and could not precisely specify the rigor measures that belong to each of them. For example, Rolfe (2006) recommends “the use of multiples sources of evidence” to increase construct validity but recommend this technique again to ensure credibility. Second, although the available models and frameworks have given detailed accounts of the research components and the steps that add to or distort research rigor, they do not provide detailed or simplified techniques to guide researchers. To us, providing simplified techniques are crucial to researchers.

Third, opposing approaches do exist for some research components related to rigor such as objectivity and reflexivity (Meyrick, 2006). Fourth, the overemphasizing triangulation of researchers, methods and/or data sources for scientific accuracy and rigor (Renz et al., 2018; Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Natow, 2020; Santos et al., 2020) not just require extensive resources and therefore limit qualitative research production which is already scant, but contradict the views that argue for limited interviews/cases as

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