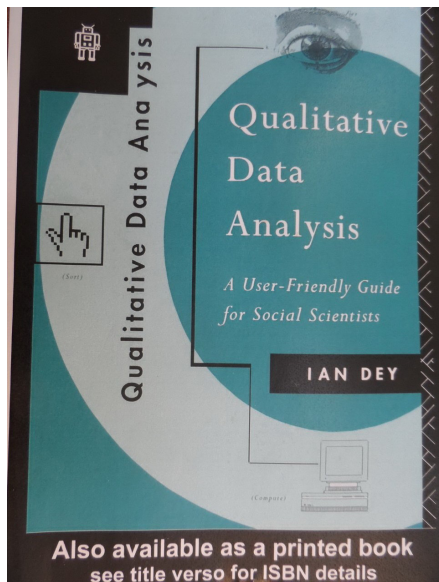


BOOK REVIEW Qualitative Data Analysis: A User Friendly Guide for Social Scientists*

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It's a sign of the times that this resource came to my attention via the Internet, although it is available as a printed book as well. As I now supervise and advise a number of graduate students on a continuing basis, I was looking for student-friendly resources that I could recommend to new MA students, to assist them developing research proposals.

After choosing an interesting topic, the initial enthusiasm of these trainee researchers is often really tested by the need to plan their project in detail and justify how to analyse the data collected. Most of these Arts or Social Science students have little or no background in data analysis or knowledge of statistics. So

accessible guides like this are extremely useful introductions for the student to develop, at their own speed, their own ideas for analysing the particular data they intend to collect. These suggestions or proposals can then be discussed with supervisors or advisors, for approval or improvement.

Based on a previously published book, this 'learning to analyse by computer' package is a logical development, and reflects the author's background of researcher, teacher and software developer. Using humorous everyday examples is an effective engaging strategy and is a good way to illustrate differences in interpretation or categorisation. The progression of topics is intuitive and the inclusion of an Appendix section on software, together with a glossary, references and an Index contribute to a comprehensive 'one-stop' teaching resource – minimising the need to refer elsewhere.

The style is easily followed and highlights important differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, as well as important influences such as context and comparisons of survey question types – as they relate to preliminary data sorting. Generously illustrated with simple figures

* Dey, I. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User-Friendly Guide for Social Scientists*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: London, 2005. (294 Pages) ISBN: 978 – 0415058520.

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and useful summary boxes. The pragmatic approach that discusses different analytical options should enable students to concentrate on their individual project needs.

I think the two most important features were the emphasis on the different types of data and on preparation of data for analysis; these topics were introduced in Chapter 1 and then discussed in more detail in following chapters. These aspects of data types and data sorting or manipulation are particularly relevant because, in my experience, these are the parts of the investigative research process that new students are least aware of, or prepared for. Other authors (e.g. Crotty, 1998) have also emphasised that, as part of preparation for research, students be encouraged to consider the reasons for their work. This should include questions about the purpose of the research, their own aims and biases. Right from the start, this involves decisions on the overall methodology to be used and specific methods – in other words, design, data and analyses.

Unfortunately, there is a general misconception that qualitative or social research is largely limited to survey questionnaires or interviews, and the subsequent analysis of

answers to questions or interview responses; however, the single example of TV Programme Content Analysis demonstrates how raw or derived data of other types and various relative ratings are analysed in different ways, to contribute to an overall assessment. For example, in assessing a programme, input data may include assessor ratings (based on standard scores) on aspects of presenter performance, such as enthusiasm, oral clarity, simple clear script and/or background knowledge. But relevance of material to the target audience, educational content or impact, logical presentation of segments, length of segments or other programme characteristics (communication features) are also important and are scored. In addition, participatory audience survey data may be utilised.

In the current digital context, with emphasis on rapid data distribution, critical comment and marketing, the appropriate analysis of varied data is increasingly important. Resources such as Dey encourage more rigorous assessment and use of data and, indirectly, help to maintain the quality of information available – both in academic circles and in the general community.