

STUDY NOTES FOR MULT20003 CRITICAL ANALYTICAL SKILLS

WEEKLY TOPICS

- Week 1:** Foundational Concepts & Definitions
- Week 2:** Introduction to Research
- Week 3:** In-Depth Interviews
- Week 4:** Focus Groups
- Week 5:** (Digital) Ethnography
- Week 6:** Content Analysis
- Week 7:** Discourse Analysis
- Week 8:** Social Network Analysis
- Week 9:** Mixed Methods & Policy

WEEK 1. FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS & DEFINITIONS.

- I. Positivism vs. Interpretivism.
- II. Quantitative vs. Qualitative.
- III. Ontology & Epistemology.
- IV. Definitions of Methods, Methodology, Theoretical Perspective & Epistemology.

Positivism vs. Interpretivism

Positivist

- Scientific objectivity: knowledge can be measured and observed.
- Social world has regularities that can be discovered by testing theories.
- Truth is determined through verification of neutral facts.

Interpretativist

- No neutral foundation for grounding knowledge claims.
- 'Social problems' stem from instrumental rationality and scientific knowledge.
- Truth is critiqued or abandoned as a singular neutral foundation.

Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Quantitative

- Numerical data (large: N)

- Qualifies variation, predicts relations, describes population characteristics.
- Stable: study design and categories are not affected by participants.
- Operationalised in terms of independent and dependent variables, or 'cause and effect'
- Concerned with causal question.
- Proving causation is very difficult.

Qualitative

- Textual data (small: n)
- Describes variation, explains relations, describes individual experiences and group norms
- Participant responses affect research design and categories.
- Operationalised in terms of interpreting and understanding cases/ subjects.
- Does not purport causation. Interested in ways of knowing, understanding, investigating, patterns, meaning.

Ontology & Epistemology

Ontology

The theory of what exists, and thus what can be known.

Key ontological questions:

- Does social reality exist independent of human interpretation?
- Is there a single social reality, or many social realities that depend on context?
- Is social behaviour governed by immutable and universal 'laws'

Three branches:

- *Realism* claims that a real world exists.
- *Materialism* claims that a real world exists only in terms of material features.
- *Idealism* claims that reality exists through social constructs and through human interpretation.

Epistemology

The theory of the nature of knowledge and how we know what we know.

- Concerns the sources, methods and limits of knowledge and the justification for those sources, methods and limits.

Key epistemological questions:

- How do we know?
- Where is the distinction between justified belief and opinion
- What is the nature of our knowledge?

Three branches:

- *Objectivism* claims that there is a reality independent of human consciousness that can be discovered by an objective researcher.
- *Constructivism* claims that reality is socially constructed and reality and human consciousness interact; objective reality thus is inexistent.
- *Subjectivism* claims that reality is constructed by each individual; reality is imposed by human consciousness.

Definitions of Methods, Methodology, Theoretical Perspective, & Epistemology

- I. *Methods*:** Techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis.
- II. *Methodology*:** The strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes.
- III. *Theoretical Perspective*:** The philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria.
- IV. *Epistemology*:** The theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology.

WEEK 2. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH.

- I.** Deductive vs. Inductive Reasoning.
- II.** Social Science Research Types.
- III.** Validity & Reliability.
- IV.** Case Types.
- V.** Case Study vs. Comparative.
- VI.** Sampling.
- VII.** Sampling Strategies.
- VIII.** Factors That Influence Sample Size.
- IX.** Sample Frames.
- X.** Sample Designs.
- XI.** Key Terms.