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Qualitative Research in Communication. Introductory Remarks

Questions regarding communication practices in everyday interactions and how people attribute meanings to the communication acts are issues frequently addressed by social-science researchers and practitioners. Qualitative research may reveal possible answers, as it tends to be concerned with meanings (Willig, 2013). That is, with how people make sense of the world and how people experience events:

Qualitative researchers tend to be concerned with the quality and texture of the experience, rather than with the identification of cause-effect relationships. [...] The objective of qualitative research is to describe and possibly explain events and experiences, but never to predict. (ibid, p. 51-52)

This approach can also contribute to addressing social problems from a perspective that might complement other methodological approaches. Not only the academia is interested in qualitative approaches to social problems, but also policy makers and practitioners demand and appreciate them for decision making. It is of most importance, in any case, to guarantee the quality of the research. Particularly, we can identify three specific dimensions that are becoming an increasingly important issue: the quality of methods, the quality of data, and the quality of data analysis (Silverman, 2004).

There are different ways of understanding how, and what, can we know. That is, there are different epistemological approaches that lead to differentiated research objectives, and to the use of different methods and methodologies. In consequence, and as argued by Denzin & Lincoln (2005), the field of qualitative research is defined primarily by a series of essential tensions and contradictions. These are reflected in the different ways handbooks of qualitative research are designed and organized.

Qualitative inquiry is a multidisciplinary field due to differentiated epistemological approaches. Existing tensions, contradictions and hesitations make worthy to establish appropriate contexts for dialogue and cross fertilization. Under our point of view, the International Conference “Qualitative Research in Communication” (QRC) provided such a context.

This issue gathers a selection of papers presented at the International Conference “Qualitative Research in Communication” celebrated in October 3-4, 2013 at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest. The QRC conference was

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designed to explore qualitative research as a method of inquiry which enriches the understanding of communication and of social phenomena. It also aimed to provide a venue for discussing and assessing theories and methods currently used in qualitative research in communication, as well as future trends likely to impact the work being done in this field. The conference focused on sharing and examining qualitative research methodologies, research topics, questions and applications, with a consistent emphasis on their merits and limitations as inquiry tools deployed in the study of communication. The conference was not limited to methodological aspects, and welcomed studies that focus on the results qualitative research in communication.

This was the first of a biannual series of conferences co-organized by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, Romania (via the Center for Research in Communication), and by the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, Poland (via the Academic Counseling Studies Society) and gathered 43 peer-reviewed, high level contributions.

The reader will find a set of different perspectives in this issue. First, Bryan C. Taylor and Thomas R. Lindlof explore the globalization of qualitative communication research methods by analyzing them as artefacts of globalization. Second, Liz Yeomans develops a phenomenological approach to research emotional labour in a given context, public relations consultants in the UK. Third and still in the labour environment, Valeriu Frunzaru approaches to tensions and contradictions regarding workplace health and safety committees in Romania by means of in-depth interviews. Fourth, Diana-Luiza Dumitriu conducted textual and visual discourse analyses to bring new empirical evidences on how mass media frame sport actors' responsibility by focusing on the Romanian women handball team. Finally, Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol and Loredana Ivan focused on interpersonal communication and, by means of semi-structured interviews, analyzed the relationship older people have with and through mobile communication in two different European contexts.

References

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