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Leveraging Document Analysis and Its Key Methods in Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Document analysis is an important qualitative research technique for systematically examining documentary materials and generating insights relevant to specific research questions. However, its effective application requires careful alignment among the research purpose, epistemological position, document type, and analytical strategy. This article aims to examine the applications, functions, significance, and evaluation of document analysis within qualitative research. It conceptually explores the epistemological foundations that inform the selection of appropriate document analysis strategies and considers commonly analysed sources, including official reports, personal narratives, organisational archives, and digital content. It also discusses the research contexts in which document analysis is particularly valuable and examines content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, framework analysis, and thematic analysis as approaches to interpreting documentary data. The analysis indicates that documents can provide distinctive perspectives, complement evidence obtained through other methods, and deepen understanding of social phenomena. Nevertheless, the rigour and validity of document-based inquiry depend on selecting an analytical approach that is theoretically coherent and appropriate to the research question and documentary evidence. This article contributes an integrated conceptual account of qualitative document analysis by connecting its epistemological foundations, data sources, analytical methods, and evaluative considerations. It

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thereby offers researchers practical guidance for using documentary evidence more systematically and effectively in qualitative studies.

Keywords: Content Analysis; Discourse Analysis; Epistemological Frameworks; Qualitative Document Analysis; Research Rigour

Introduction

Research requires researchers to think about many things, including the analysis of documents. This is, in fact, the meticulous study of relevant documents to extract insights, discover patterns, and assess the quality and trustworthiness of information. Such an approach can enhance the researchers' capability to back up their findings, broaden their understanding of the issue, come to well-informed conclusions, and buttress their research. Document analysis is a methodological approach for investigating or evaluating documents, whether they are printed or digital materials (Fischer, 2006). This analysis involves intensive scrutiny and evaluation of material to extract meaning, enhance understanding, and yield empirical insights. It is often used with other qualitative research techniques to comprehensively interrogate a topic: how to find different approaches to the same subject under multiple methods of triangulation (Denzin, 2009). The qualitative researcher draws from a variety of evidence collected through the various data sources and methods, representative of research convergence and validation. In addition to documents, there are other valuable resources such as participant or non-participant observations, interviews and the actual artefacts (Patton, 1990).

Through triangulation, the researcher seeks to develop credibility by incorporating different sources of evidence (Rapley and Tagg, 2009). By the triangulation of evidence, researchers can strengthen their findings against the impact of the potentially biased findings in a single study. Triangulation helps safeguard research from claims that the results are solely a product of one method, one source, or the researcher's bias. Triangulation allows the researcher to validate their output from different sources, hence minimising biases affecting only a study. Triangulation serves as a safeguard against criticism that the conclusions of the study are based solely on one method, one source or one researcher's perspective (Berg and Lune, 2019). Document analysis has several approaches under its fold, influenced by the various disciplines of sociology, anthropology,

media studies, film studies, and women's studies (Paul *et al*., 2019). The methods involved in document analysis focus on examining and interpreting what can be found with data indicated through documents. Every document has its unique requirements needed for comprehensive document analysis, which, of course, depends on the epistemological perspective of the researcher and indicates how important it is to have different foundational epistemological theories alive and well in document analysis research.

This study explores methodologies that other researchers may employ in document analysis. This also addresses the advantages and disadvantages of these methodologies and how they affect research outcomes. It emphasises the importance of thorough data collection and analysis for strong qualitative research. In addition, that article emphasises the critical appraisal of document analysis so that there could be an improvement and confidence in the process of process. Different perspectives and critiques may allow the researcher to improve the quality of their conclusions. Document analysis has been a powerful tool for disclosing complex knowledge in various fields of study. This study will demonstrate the value of this method as an academic research practice and inspire researchers to embrace it to contribute towards a deepening of their knowledge and insight. It investigates how the researcher's theoretical tenets relate to his or her interpretation and how contextual situations thus affect the quality of document analysis. The study seeks to contribute towards understanding and appreciating document analysis as a rich qualitative research method and directing researchers to make informed methodological choices that will enrich the credibility and depth of their studies.

METHODS

The qualitative systematic literature review process adopted in this study is a structured, elaborated means of synthesising results from different research fields. Indeed, systematic reviews of literature can offer an unbiased and comprehensive view of what has been done in research, thus enhancing the credibility and reliability of any such academic investigation (Brereton *et al.,* 2007; Xiao and Watson, 2019). The steps followed in this review process are the following: projecting specific research questions, structuring a detailed plan for the review process, extensive literature searches, and thorough quality assessment of included studies (Xiao and Watson, 2019; Tranfield, *et al.,* (2003). The first step in a systematic literature review is to formulate simple research questions as guidance

for the literature search and analysis (Paul and Barari, 2022). Methodological rigour and transparency in the systematic review process were ensured through the development and validation of the review protocol, a process fully justified and detailed in a comprehensive preamble (Brereton, *et al.,* 2007). A systematic process involves gathering data from multiple or defined databases and filtering for proper and quality studies, as demonstrated by various systematic literature reviews (Kroon, *et al.,* 2021; Hidellaarachchi, 2021). After selecting the relevant studies, the study synthesised and analysed the results for their meaningful interpretation (Paul and Barari, 2022). The results were systematically documented to be transparent and replicable (Paul and Barari; 2022; Paul *et al.,* 2021).

Document Analysis and It's Key Methods in Qualitative Research

Sources of Documents Used for Analysis

Different documents are necessary for effective document analysis and help determine which strategies to adopt. Public records constitute one broad category of documents. Public records are authoritative and ongoing compilations of the activities and functions of an organisation, serving as a transparent view of the workings of that organisation, with many other examples. Public records can be mission statements, strategic plans, policy manuals, annual reports, student handbooks, syllabi and student transcripts. These contain a wealth of information concerning many aspects, such as academic performance, the chosen organisational values, achievements, financial status, procedures, policies, student support, long-term goals, and course objectives (Bowen, 2009).

Second to public records, there is another significant class of documents, namely personal documents (Rapley and Tagg, 2009). These represent first-person accounts from within which individuals document their actions, experiences, and beliefs. They offer an important avenue for exploring communication from a personal perspective and story. Personal documents vary from calendars that keep track of daily activities and commitments, e-mails that capture informal or formal communications, and scrapbooks that may preserve memories and significant moments. Other examples include Facebook posts and blogs that reveal personal thoughts and experiences that are shared in a more public or semi-public forum; duty logs recording specific tasks and responsibilities; incident reports documenting significant events; reflections and journals for personal reflecting; and

even newspapers that could contain personal stories or public responses from individuals. the physical evidence is important: tangible objects found in the research setting, also referred to as artefacts. Such artefacts can provide a contextual background to support the understanding of the subject in question (Rapley and Tagg, 2009). Examples of such pieces of evidence include flyers that might convey promotional information or announcements, posters that may represent events or campaigns, agendas outlining the purpose and structure of meetings or gatherings, handbooks compiling important guidelines or procedures, and any training materials developed to educate people about a specific task or subject. Collectively, these documents provide a well-rounded resource base that will greatly enhance the analytic process while providing an in-depth understanding of the subject.

Functions of Documentary Material

Documents provide contextual information and offer histories about the issues that aid the researcher in coming to terms with the historical origin of some given problems and recognise the circumstances with which the present phenomena being investigated relate (Stake, 1995). Document analysis can subsequently aid in generating new interview questions and locating times for participant observation as more document materialises. The kinds of detail a document contains may suggest questions and contexts for investigation during the course of research (Silverman, 1997). The documents have also offered data for the secondary level of the investigation. The material and insights obtained from those documents can very well substantiate the initial understanding. They provide a means of tracing change and development over time when several drafts exist.

Documents provide context and background, generate additional questions for inquiry, provide alternative data, monitor change and development, and corroborate findings from other sources (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997). They become especially useful in data collection when experiences can no longer be recalled or when participants cannot recall specific details. One must acknowledge that the methods of document analysis presented here have both advantages and disadvantages; thus, these methods ought to be engaged with extreme caution. Although the documents may contain useful information, they may also be very cumbersome and time-consuming to analyse, and therefore, researchers should bear an extra grain of salt when using them; the same applies to

document evaluation. Hence, it is very important to confront these research strategies with their strengths and weaknesses.

Philosophical and Epistemological Underpinnings in Qualitative Document Analysis

Considered an important technique in qualitative research, document analysis entails the careful examination of many document types in search of information pertinent to one's research questions. This technique is grounded in several ideas from Edgar Morin, Paulo Freire, and Edmund Husserl (Morin and Freire, 2018). In conducting document analysis, researchers apply a variety of strategies and evaluations during the research process. This method has its advantages, such as being time-saving and economical; it also has disadvantages that must be borne in mind (Bowen, 2009). By juxtaposing epistemological frameworks and methodological tools, document analysis opens a chance for researchers to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of social realities (Morin and Freire, 2018).

Positivistic Approach to Qualitative Document Analysis

It is the very essence of quantitative research paradigms to seek any empirical evidence or confirmation that may either sustain or reject a particular hypothesis. Some approaches central to these positivist methodologies are the validation of facts, content analysis, qualitative document analysis, and historicism (Denzin, 2009). Qualitative document analysis encompasses many methods that span the continuum from strictly positivist approaches to more interpretive ones, thereby permitting more understanding of the material under study (Lacity and Janson, 1994). Within qualitative research, flexibility is deemed an asset for the researcher, as they can tailor their methods to fit the specific needs presented by their inquiries. Content analysis method used for a qualitative approach may be applied through several processes, such as conventional, directed and summative. Each approach employs specific coding schemes corresponding to its distinct history and assumptions underlying them (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This kind of flexibility allows researchers to analyse and interpret information from multiple angles, through which additional insights can be gained. Document analysis is considered a systematic technique for the substantial evaluation and understanding of documents to derive significance and enhance understanding (Bowen, 2009). This method is invaluable to the research as it is both cost-effective and time-efficient; however, with certain limitations, among them being one impediment: the analysis may yield insufficient details. In addition, biases may be

introduced in the selection of documents, increasing the danger of the validity of the overall findings (Bowen, 2009).

Qualitative data analysis looks mainly at human experiences, thoughts, and emotions. For these analyses, text or images are more frequently than not chosen as primary sources (Seers, 2012). Despite the multitude of philosophical paradigms and methodological approaches, several qualitative investigations tend to arrive at common themes and patterns (Seers, 2012). From the standpoint of the positivistic view towards qualitative document analysis, it is maintained that textual data holds meaning. From this position, the view is that the influence of the researcher in the interpretation process should be minimised, thereby retaining objectivity. Furthermore, this view upholds the idea of conducting validity checks to support the interpretations made so that the generated conclusions are well-supported and credible (Lacity and Janson, 1994). This rigorous approach enhances the trustworthiness of the findings while feeding into the discourse of qualitative methodologies.

Interpretivist Approach to Qualitative Document Analysis

Qualitative document analysis presents an interpretivist perspective that provides a subjective interpretation of texts. It conceives of the interpretative process as shaped essentially by biases and insights of the researcher (Lacity and Janson, 1994). It is different from positivism and linguistics, having implications of objectivity, measurement or studies on language structure, for the centre of interpretivism is the social and contextual specifics under which technology is deemed to be used across settings (Munkvold and Bygstad, 2016). Document analysis in qualitative research is a technique where scholars search through and interpret almost all kinds of documents, from official reports to personal correspondence, media articles, and social media postings. The essence is to bring meanings and promote a better understanding of context-relevant phenomena (Bowen, 2009). Most emphasised is the role of the context within this interpretivist framework.

The documents may have a distinct sense of meaning as they stand in certain historical, social, and cultural contexts. Contextually, though, the researcher's involvement is very central; insights, perspectives, and interactions that a researcher brings about with data contribute a lot to the construction of meaning out of the information gathered (Eisner, 2017). It should also be noted that not every qualitative research can be considered interpretivist. Researchers are encouraged to clarify their philosophical position explicitly

because the categorisation of the study would have a lasting effect on its design and results (Munkvold and Bygstad, 2016). Interpretation of documents in an interpretive framework requires researchers to assess a very strict range of relevant document characteristics, including advantages and disadvantages relevant to each document type. The application of suitable validation methods should back this critical evaluation to assure the reliability and validity of interpretations (Bowen, 2009; Lacity and Janson, 1994). Such practice may help researchers make their results more credible and thus contribute more significantly to the prevailing knowledge in their domains.

Constructivists' Approach to Qualitative Document Analysis

Constructivist qualitative research is based on exploring and understanding the complexities of human experiences and the meanings that individuals attribute to them. It uses a variety of methods to encapsulate the value and diversity of human perspectives (Fahy and Harrison, 2005). Among the various qualitative mechanisms, document analysis is the most effective. This technique consists of a systematic and in-depth examination of written sources such as private correspondence, official documents, works of literature, or internet content to derive meaningful insights about social phenomena (Bowen, 2009).

Document analysis is an important mechanism for emphasising the role that language and discourse play in the construction of human understanding and experience. It further assists the researcher in analytically considering the context where documents were generated for a more effective reading of the issues at hand in different cultural settings. Viewing the issue through this critical lens is important because it also exposes complexities and power relationships within the text, which in turn significantly influence the very meanings constructed by people and communities. Document analysis has many significant advantages; however, underlining its limitations, its opponents argue that document selection may be biased and the interpretation process may be subjective. When thoughtfully and rigorously applied, document analysis remains an invaluable tool for qualitative researchers. Constructivist qualitative approaches, including document analysis, provide great potential for understanding human experiences and the complex social dynamics that condition them. When applied with maternity and methodological fidelity, they promise to create rich, transformative knowledge that can powerfully interject into the wider domain of qualitative research.

Phenomenological Approach to Document Analysis

The phenomenological method looks for meanings expressed or implied-embedded in a document. This established methodology involves a lot of inferencing, which comprises interpretative analysis, certain kinds of historical research or historiography, narrative analysis, hermeneutics, and aesthetics. Qualitative document analysis under a phenomenological approach further understands lived experiences and personal viewpoints. This method emphasises the participant's interpretation with rather deep understandings of human experiences (Lester, 1999). A particular breed in this regard is hermeneutic phenomenology, which is a blend of interpretative techniques with the study of lived experiences (Ramsook, 2018). In document analysis, phenomenology covers a wide spectrum for examining intrinsic and extrinsic information and makes it possible to disentangle information from meaning (Gorichanaz and Latham, 2016).

This approach allows researchers to "bracket" taken-for-granted assumptions and view phenomena through the lens of the participating actors (Lester, 1999). Qualitatively, through phenomenological approaches, one can achieve heightened theoretical clarity and coherence beyond the limitations of traditional paradigms and advanced methodology (Giorgi, 1994). Ultimately, any major phenomenological tool focuses on interests, actions, and inner experiences in qualitative document analyses. The qualitative research approach that an investigator chooses to adopt is differentiated according to the epistemology of the researcher. These epistemological foundations provide a footing for qualitative document analysis, presenting fundamental issues related to understanding research aims and which methods would be employed while outlining potential strategies for analysis (Mills, at al., 2006). Techniques for analysing documents are closely tied to certain epistemological theories.

Qualitative Document Analysis

Document analysis is a lengthy and arduous procedure in qualitative research through which a diverse array of document types, including printed and digital, are evaluated for their content (Fischer, 2006). The technique calls for systematic scrutiny of documents to understand and to derive inferences from the content. To come up with empirical illumination, document analysis investigates a contextual analysis of documents, the position of the author, and the intended audience. By doing thorough document analysis, researchers can identify patterns, themes, and insights that deepen their

understanding of the topics. This, therefore, means that document analysis is very valuable for researchers who want to acquire a deep understanding of complex issues and phenomena. Thus, this paper examines some of the major strategies used in document analysis, including discourse, framework, thematic, narrative, content analyses, and grounded theory, which are key methodologies in qualitative research.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis refers to the analysis of how meaning is built, socially constructed, and internalised through oral and written modes of communication, conceptualisation, and sometimes action. Besides, the context around which the research and its co-variables would occur is also put under scrutiny. It investigates the average day's life of the respondent, during which the data were analysed. In addition, discourse analysis involves various approaches to examining the use of language within social contexts. It goes beyond the technicality of words and sentences (Berg and Lune, 2019; Munkvold and Bygstad, 2016). Language would, in this context, reflect either writing or speech. Context is an operative term meaning that those specific circumstances are or background information in which someone's talk or text occurs; it includes the social situations or forums in which text or talk occurs (Paul, *et al.,* 2003). To clearly define a research problem is thus necessary because the best way to investigate the issue will depend on the kind of communication required. Examples of which would be a corpus formed of speeches of a political leader, or printed news media. To redefine the research problem, it should be clear enough to allow the researcher to locate such communications. Thus, the researcher should understand the determinate universe within that context and the process that creates communications (Silverman, 1997). Some advantages of this approach are that it investigates various situations and subjects and can reveal firm opinions and perceptions of individuals. However, it is an exhaustive, time-consuming and energy-hungry exercise, focusing on language alone, thereby blind to other factors.

Framework Analysis

This is a method that allows the researcher to choose between first collecting data for analysis or analysing while data collection itself is still ongoing. The data are typically reviewed, organised, and classified according to significant themes and patterns during the analysis phase. There is a five-step process where the framework analysis consists of getting

familiar with the data, identifying key themes, indexing, charting, and interpreting the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Familiarisation

During familiarisation, the researcher gets acquainted with his or her data, whether it relates to the interview transcripts or field notes, to gain a broader understanding of what is contained therein. Based on research, the researcher collects important ideas and repeated themes ((Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As qualitative research typically generates huge amounts of information, much of it will not be reviewed, and researchers will have to choose specific parts of the data set to analyse and justify those choices in terms of factors specific to the data collection process. Qualitative research is about getting to know the data. It is diving deep into all the data collected, like interviews, field notes, and tapes. It is how researchers know which important ideas, recurring themes, and patterns surface. Since there is a lot of data, selection becomes critical. Therefore, it is how much one selects based on relevance, importance, and congruence with research objectives. Data familiarity may even lead to discovering the research realities and significant conclusions.

Identification of Key Themes

Once the researcher is familiar with the information, they move on to the second stage, whereby they map out a thematic framework. There are key themes and issues to be identified by the researcher during this stage, and the researcher needs to allow the data to inform the very recognition of topics and issues. Recorded observations from the initial phase have been used to underpin important concepts as expressed by participants, and these are the starting point for a thematic framework for organising and analysing data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Once the data has been thoroughly researched, it is then time for the researcher to make the next step by formulating the thematic framework. It consists of the identification and extraction of key themes and issues that arise from the data. What should happen next is that the researcher allows the data to inform the recognition of significant topics and issues. The initial phase observations are meant to emphasise important ideas communicated by the participants, and these serve as the basis for structuring and interpreting the data using a thematic framework (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Indexing

Indexing is the third stage of thematic framework analysis, where researchers identify and categorise data sections that are relevant to specific themes or topics. This step is crucial in organising and making sense of the collected text data. Ritchie and Lewis recommend using a numerical system to index references, which can be further explained in the margins or alongside the text charting for easy reference and retrieval (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Indexing is the creation of a filing system for your research data. It helps you organise and categorise different sections of data based on what they are about. Researchers can use numbers or labels to identify specific groups of data that belong together. This way, when a researcher is looking for a piece of information, they can easily find it by looking at the index. Indexing also simplifies the analysis of data systematically; researchers can spot patterns, trends, and connections that they might not have noticed otherwise.

Charting

In the fourth stage, the indexed data from the previous stage is organised into thematic charts. The information is extracted from its original text and organised into charts based on the themes identified in the research or in a format considered most suitable for presenting the findings (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). It is crucial to note that even though the data is extracted from its original context, it is still clearly labelled with the case it belongs to. To maintain clarity, it is recommended to keep the cases in the same order in each chart (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In this phase of thematic analysis, data is meticulously arranged into organised charts. This entails extracting content from the original text and categorising it based on research themes. Data is presented in formats that effectively convey findings, with each piece tagged with its respective case. Consistency is crucial, with cases maintained in the same order across charts for clarity and ease of analysis.

Mapping and Interpretation

Mapping and interpretation are the last step that involves carefully analysing and interpreting the data presented in the charts and identifying key trends, patterns, and relationships between different variables. This examination generates a visual depiction of the phenomenon to assist the researcher's data analysis. At this point, the researcher becomes cognisant of the objectives of qualitative analysis, which are clarifying definitions, identifying patterns and characteristics of phenomena, categorising information, establishing connections, offering interpretations, and formulating plans (Ritchie and

Lewis, 2003). These ideas, technologies, and connections once more represent the views of the participants. Thus, any strategies or suggestions proposed by the researcher mirror the authentic attitudes, beliefs, and values of those involved. Therefore, the structured and detailed approach of this analysis is well-suited for interdisciplinary and collaborative endeavours. It is also highly beneficial for facilitating thematic (qualitative content) analysis by offering a systematic framework for organising and visualising data.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a method that concentrates on examining the structure and content of narratives to uncover underlying themes and meanings. It examines content derived from a variety of sources, including interviews, observations, and survey responses. This method prioritises the use of personal experiences and stories to address and answer specific research questions. Narratives, or stories, arise when one or more individuals share their experiences or recount significant events. In a conversational context, storytelling typically unfolds over several exchanges, highlighting the dynamic nature of interaction. These narratives often exhibit common structural characteristics (Mays De Pérez, 2000). This includes elements such as setting, characters, plot, conflict, and resolution. At its core, narrative analysis treats the story itself as the central object of inquiry, allowing researchers to delve into the deeper meanings and implications of the events described. Narratives are shared in both written and oral forms and may be prompted through various elicitation techniques.

This method of analysis is mainly efficient at exploring specific events and delving into their meanings for the individuals who experienced them. Examples of narratives frequently analysed include oral histories, where individuals recount their lived experiences, and auto-ethnographies, which blend personal narratives with cultural analysis (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997). While narrative analysis offers several advantages, such as challenging the conventional notion of objectivity and providing significant flexibility in methodology, it comes with some limitations. The effectiveness of this analysis heavily depends on the skills of the narrator, as their ability to convey their experiences profoundly impacts the richness of the data obtained. Additionally, narrative analysis is intrinsically subjective; researchers must be mindful of their interpretations and the potential influence of personal biases when analysing narrative data. Narrative analysis provides an effective means for uncovering the complexities of human experience through storytelling.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a document analysis strategy employed to recognise the existence of specific words and concepts in texts or collections of texts. Researchers quantify and examine the occurrence, meanings, and relationships of these words and concepts, drawing inferences regarding the messages embedded in the scripts, the audience, the writer(s), the cultural and temporal context in which they exist (Eisner, 2017). Examples of texts suitable for this analysis include book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, and more. The decision to utilise this method hinges on the research questions and the form of research being conducted. Content analysis is typically considered a qualitative research method.

This strategy encompasses three different approaches: conventional, directed, and summative, each used to extract the text in a way that retains the original meaning but uses different words and sentence structure. The primary differences among these approaches lie in the coding schemes, code origins and the threats to trustworthiness (Pandit, 1996). In conventional or traditional content analysis, categorisation of codes is done through direct extraction from the textual data, while a directed approach uses existing theories or research to guide the coding process. Summative or collective content analysis entails quantifying data by counting and comparing keywords or content and then interpreting the overall context. The strength of this strategy is its capacity to incorporate qualitative and quantitative methods, offering insights into complex models of human thought and language that may be challenging to analyse through other strategies. However, noting that this method can be time-consuming, lacks a robust theoretical foundation, and often strives too diligently to draw meaningful inferences about the relationships and effects suggested in the study is vital.

Thematic Analysis

This process entails recognising trends or regularities in the data, which can help in making informed decisions where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane). Document analysis entails a careful and focused re-examination of the data. The reviewer engages in a more in-depth exploration of the selected material, conducting coding and category construction based on the characteristics of the data to reveal themes relevant to a specific phenomenon. Pre-established codes can

be used, especially if they are consistent with other research methods used in the study. For instance, codes applied to interview transcripts can also be transferred to document content. These codes, along with the themes they generate, aid in synthesising data collected through various methods. Researchers must represent the research material accurately and respond to even subtle cues in meaning during the selection and analysis of document data. Such documents may include promotional materials, schedules, sign-in sheets, official records, instructional guides, written materials, publications, personal logs, event schedules, correspondence, visual aids, and news publications (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997). This strategy's strength lies in its ability to support theme interpretation with substantial data. Additionally, it addresses research questions that extend beyond individual experiences. However, the method's inherent flexibility can pose challenges for novice researchers in determining which aspects of the data to prioritise and limit the ability to make technical claims regarding language usage.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a systematic approach to developing theory based on social research data. It entails a systematic and researcher-led approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997). The aim is to develop a theory that is deeply rooted in the research issue. Grounded theory, as outlined by Glaser, is an inductive and interpretative method that uses qualitative data to explain why certain events occurred. It involves analysing diverse cases in different situations to identify causes and generate alternative explanations. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach employs the constant comparative method to collect and analyse data systematically. In qualitative research, grounded theory involves coding, analysing, and synthesising narratives from various data sources to develop a theory. Grounded theory benefits from document analysis, expanding its data sources as it develops a theory. This approach may rely on both literary and fieldwork data.

Evaluation Criteria for Document Analysis

Paul and Yardley highlight a critical perspective on the nature of documents, arguing that they should not be regarded as inherently precise, accurate, or comprehensive accounts of events. Instead, they advocate for a thorough evaluation of these documents, recognising that they may contain biases or gaps in information. They emphasise that researchers should refrain from the common practice of simply 'lifting' quotes or snippets

from existing documents to insert into their reports without proper context (Rhodes and Yardley, 2003). Researchers must clearly understand the documents they encounter and evaluate their relevance to the issues being studied.

As analysts, researchers have the responsibility of evaluating how relevant these documents are to their specific research problems and objectives. This requires an in-depth analysis of how the information in the document relates to the primary research questions. There is a need to ensure that the content of the documents is in line with the study's underlying framework, suggesting that a cohesive understanding of both the documents and the framework can enhance the overall quality of the research (Stake, 1995). Besides evaluating relevance, researchers must also assess the authenticity, credibility, accuracy, and representativeness of the documents they select. This comprehensive evaluation guarantees both document integrity and reliable research findings. Assessing documents for their thoroughness and evaluating whether they address the entire subject comprehensively or concentrate solely on particular elements is imperative. This comprehensive assessment draws meaningful conclusions and constructs a well-rounded understanding of the research topic.

Conclusion

A comprehensive knowledge of document examination is essential for effectively applying qualitative research methods. This article has sought to enhance researchers' foundational knowledge and deepen their grasp of qualitative document analysis. It has outlined specific applications of documents in various research contexts, highlighting how different types can be utilised for qualitative inquiry. In examining the advantages and drawbacks of these methods, the study has highlighted the strengths of qualitative data's richness and the challenges related to interpretation and bias. A clear framework is presented, delineating different methodological approaches to document analysis, which empowers researchers to navigate their investigative processes more effectively. Moreover, the article has emphasised the importance of evaluating not only the existence and accessibility of documents but also their authenticity and relevance for research purposes. Researchers are encouraged to reflect on the original intent behind each document, the specific context of its creation, and its intended audience. This thoughtful approach ensures that researchers fully comprehend the complexities surrounding the materials they

analyse. Additionally, the author has urged researchers to engage in the document analysis process with rigour and transparency. This involves being meticulous throughout the analysis stage, documenting decision-making processes, and clarifying how conclusions are drawn. In so doing, Researchers can improve the trustworthiness of their results and contribute meaningfully with integrity and depth to the broader field of qualitative research. Researchers can then, therefore, benefit from document analysis as a qualitative method of data collection and analysis.

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