

How to Ensure Data Validity when Characterizing Audiences through Interviews and Focus Groups

Social Coast Facilitated Discussion – February 10, 2016 10:30 am – 12:00 pm
Caitie Nigrelli and Mary Culver

Credibility and Data Validity

- Validity can be defined as data that are representative and appropriate
- Interviews and case study collection can be viewed as anecdotal and less valid or credible
- Questions around credibility and validity can be a problem with quantitative data, too.
- Qualitative data is valuable because:
 - It can be generalized
 - It identifies themes
 - Combined with quantitative data, it provides more insight into strengths and weaknesses
 - It is valuable for evaluating and investigating processes
 - It helps with prioritizing by providing information beyond quantitative rankings

To better use qualitative data, need to expand our thinking and minimize bias.

Qualitative Data Use - Process Improvement

- Plan to publish jointly with natural and social science components in a peer-review journal
- Use qualitative data to support outreach efforts
- Use an ethnographic approach
- Use non-leading questions
- Qualitative information may reach audiences that quantitative data may not
- Respect the interview client and collaborate on the script.
- Integrate qualitative methods into academic and professional development methods courses to provide formal training
- Define and communicate the role of the researcher
- Follow-up with transcribed data – member checking.

Considerations to Balance Credible Data Collection with Everything Else...

- Use locals to conduct interviews
- Think about opportunities to improve the qualitative component
- Think ahead on the time it takes for the full process
- Identify key informants to minimize interview time
- Be clear about the time it takes to collect credible data – especially transcription
- Modify methods to fit time available

- Delegate with attention to quality control
- Focus transcriptions so as not to spend time on sections that are not valuable

Communicating Validity and Credibility to Scientific Audiences

DO

- Use appropriate scientific jargon – scientists are not afraid of jargon!
- Define a focus group for a group discussion (e.g. testing the endings of movies)
- Plan joint publications
- Demonstrate methods with scientists so they can experience the process
- Understand the scientific experience with describing methods and replicability, error and variance
- Distinguish data from opinion
- Discuss limitations of the methods
- Use mixed methods to gather complementary information
- Distinguish between outreach and social science activities
- Use analogies
- Collaborate!

DON'T

- Overgeneralize the results
- Be defensive or dismissive
- Skip the explanation of the methodology
- Undersell your results