GB6013

EPISTOMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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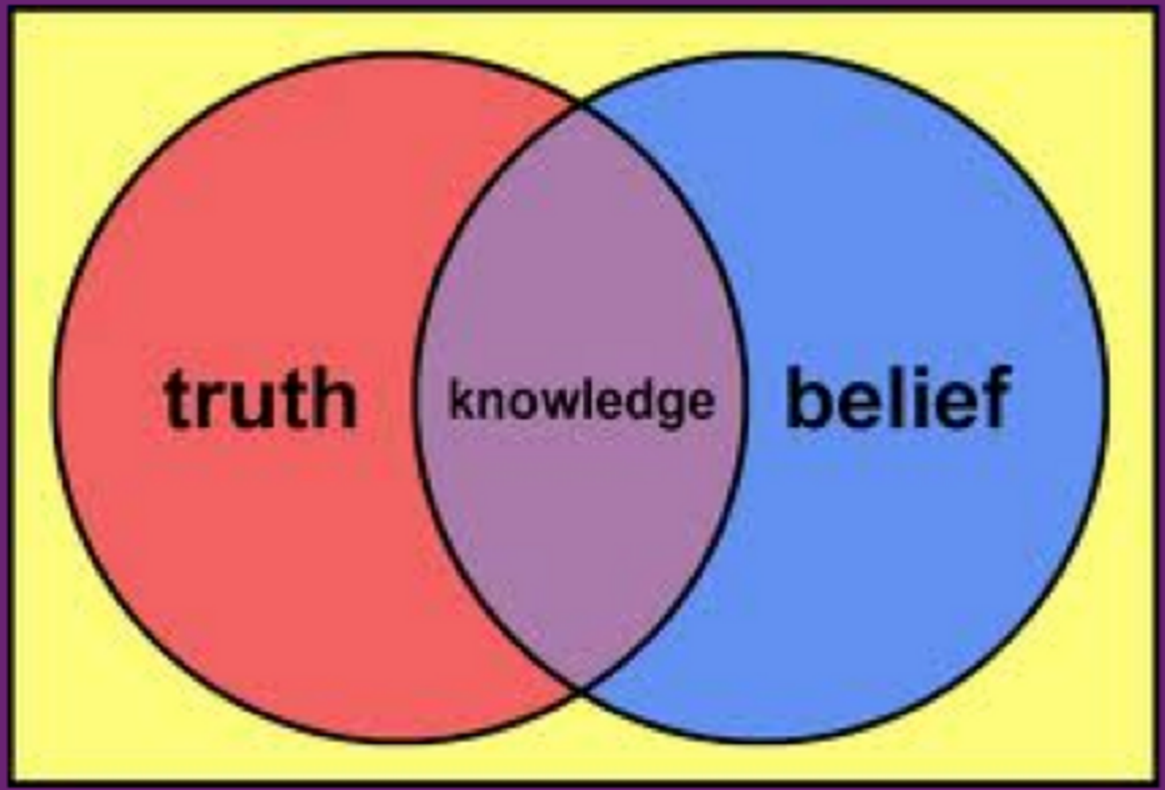
An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline.

Central issue : Whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures as the natural sciences


truth
knowledge
belief

EPISTOMOLOGY

Positivism
(Quantitative)

Interpretivism
(Qualitative)

- Advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social sciences

- The purpose of theory is to generate hyphotheses that can be tested and that will allow explanations of laws to be assessed (deductivism)

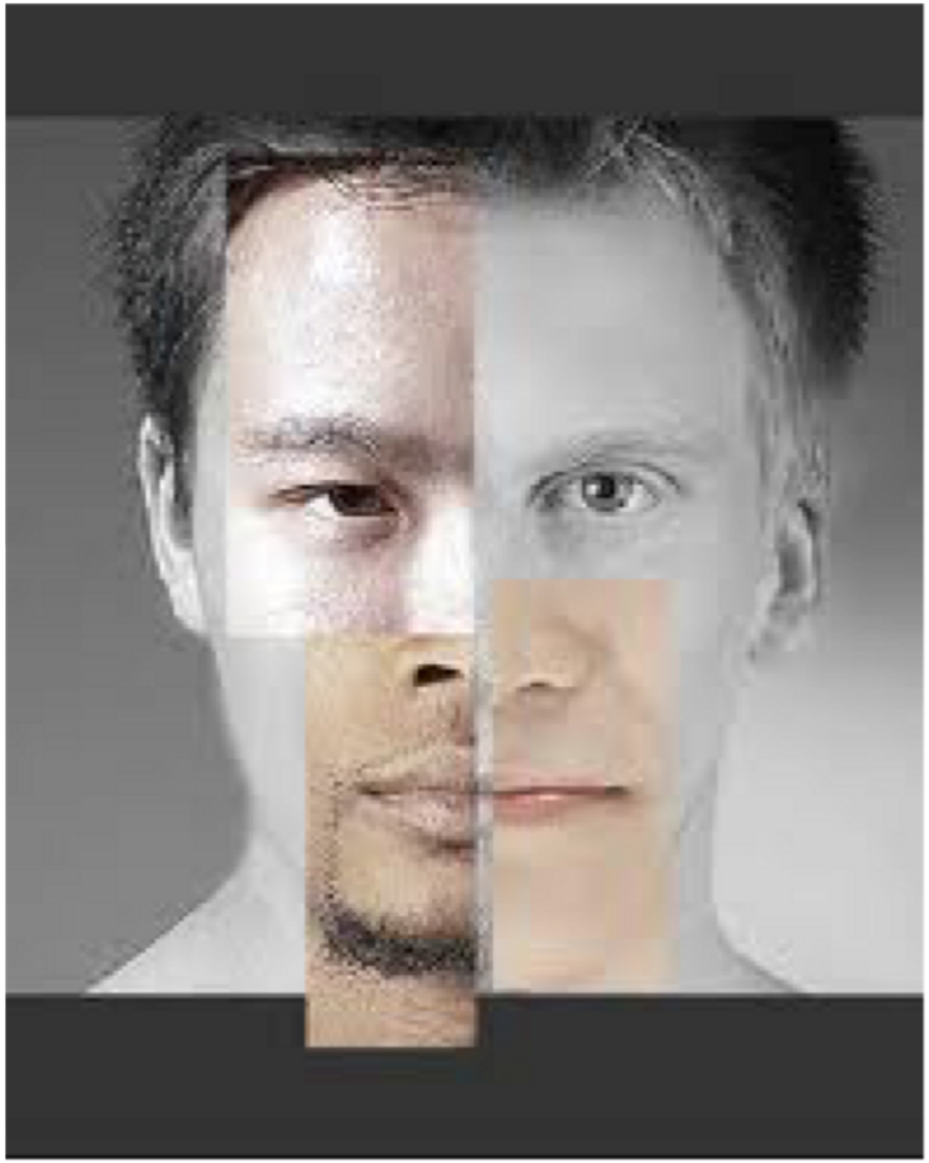
Positivism

Interpretivism

- A contrasting epistemology to positivism
- Interpretivists believe that the social sciences (the people and their institutions) is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences

Interpretivism

- Emphasise on the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order (respect the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action)



Interpretivism

- Gain access to people' s 'common sense thinking' and hence to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view.
- Multiple realities – what true for you might not be true to others

Quantitative	Qualitative
Numbers	Words
Points of view of researcher	Points of view of participants
Researcher distant	Researcher close
Theory testing	Theory emergent
Static	Process
Structured	Unstructured
Generalization	Contextual understanding
Hard, reliable data	Rich, deep data
Macro Behaviour	Micro Meaning
Artificial settings	Natural settings

Common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, 2004)

Point of comparison	Qualitative	Quantitative
Focus of research	Quality (nature, essence)	Quantity (how much, how many)
Philosophical roots	Phenomenology, interpretivism	Positivism, objectivism
Associated phrases	Fieldwork, ethnographic, naturalistic, grounded, constructivist	Experimental, empirical, statistical
Goal of investigation	Understanding, description, discovery, meaning	Prediction, control, description, hypothesis testing
Design characteristics	Flexible, emergent, evolving	Predetermined, structured
Sample	Small, non-random, purposeful	Large, random, representative
Data collection	Researcher as primary instrument, interviews, observations, documents	Inanimate instruments (scales, tests, surveys, questionnaires)
Mode of analysis	Inductive (by researcher)	Deductive (by statistical methods)
Findings	Comprehensive, holistic, expansive , richly descriptive	Precise, numerical

Merriam (1998)

EXAMPLES OF
Qualitative research types

Etnography

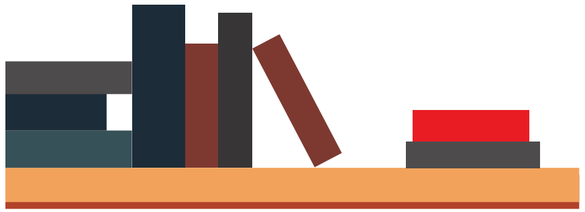
Phenomenology

Case study

Grounded theory

Biography

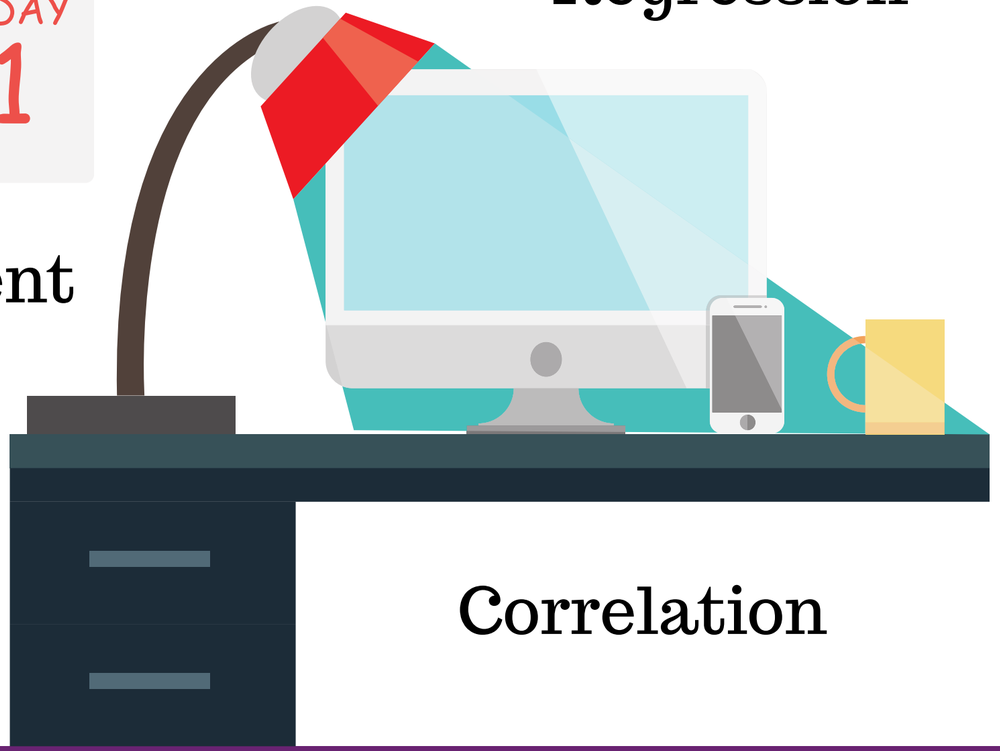
EXAMPLES OF
Quantitative research types



Survey

Regression

Experiment



Correlation

Steps in quantitative research (deductive)

1. Theory
2. Hypothesis
3. Research design (experiment? case study? Comparative? Etc)
4. Devise measures of concepts
5. Select research sites
6. Select research subjects / respondents (sampling?)
7. Administer research instruments/collect data (survey? Interviews?)
8. Process data
9. Analyze data
10. Findings/conclusions
11. Write up findings/ conclusions

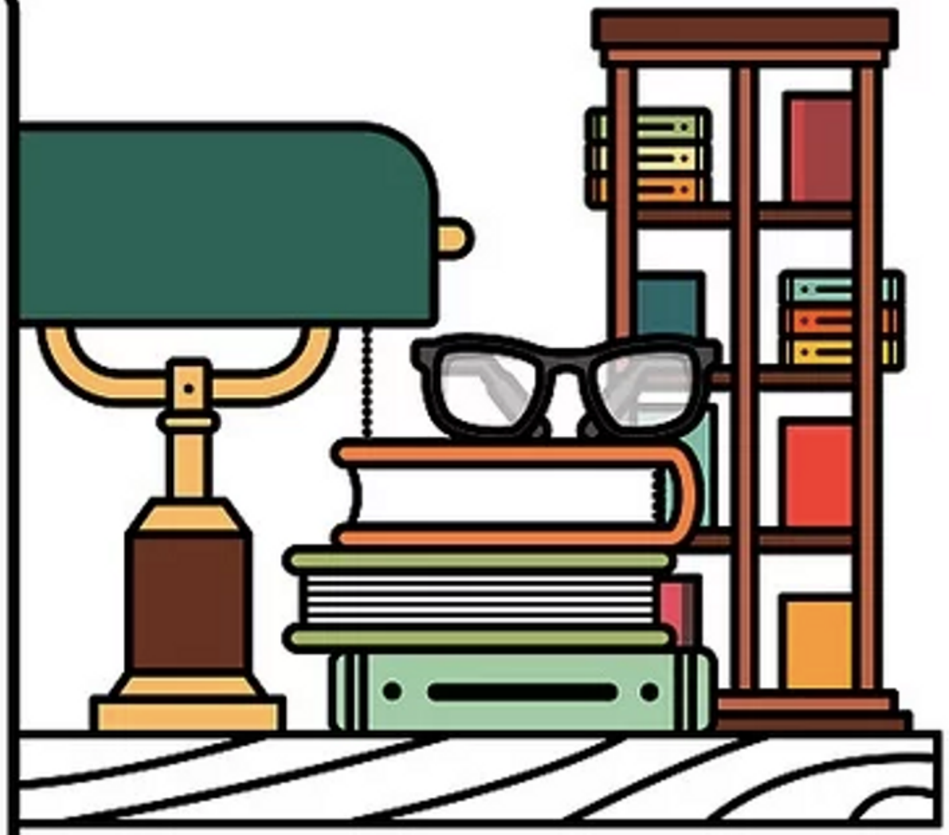
Steps in qualitative research (inductive)

DECIDE ON A QUESTION YOU WANT TO STUDY

To do qualitative research, your question should explore reasons for why people do things or believe in something.

DO A LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a process of studying what others have written about your research question and particular topic.



EVALUATE WHETHER QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IS THE RIGHT FIT

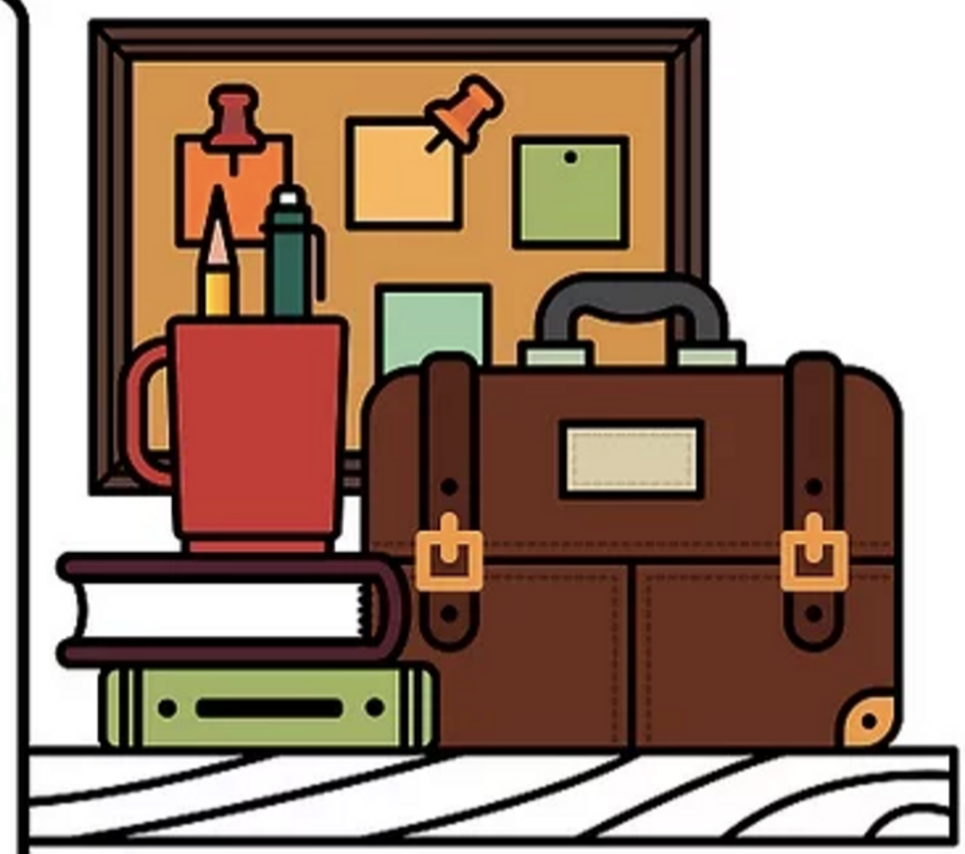
Qualitative methods are useful when a question cannot be answered by a simple **yes** or **no** hypothesis.

CONSIDER YOUR IDEAL SAMPLING SIZE

Qualitative research methods don't rely as heavily on large sample sizes as quantitative methods, but they can still yield important insights and findings.

CHOOSE A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of qualitative research is the most flexible of all the experimental techniques.



COLLECT YOUR DATA

Each of the research methodologies has uses one or more techniques to collect empirical data. The form of data collection will depend on the research methodology.

ANALYZE YOUR DATA

Once you have collected your data, you can begin to analyze it and come up with answers and theories to your research question.

WRITE UP YOUR RESEARCH

You will want to make sure that your purpose for your research question is compelling and that you explain your research methodology and analysis in detail.