# HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS IN THE MORNING?

## Research Methodologies

***How do you like your eggs in the morning?***

Poached, boiled, sunny-side up? There are countless ways to cook an egg and each one involves doing something different and using different tools with which to do it. These are methods and each set of actions taken to cook the egg is called a methodology. Simply put a methodology is a way of planning an investigation or as Hart (1998, p.28) explains is '…a system of methods and rules to facilitate the collection and analysis of data'. It provides the starting point for choosing an approach made up of theories, ideas, concepts and definitions of the topic; therefore providing the basis of a critical activity consisting of making choices about the nature and character of the social world'.

Methodology, in epistemological terms, refers to how knowledge is discovered and analysed in a systematic way – it is a process. Methods are the research techniques used in the methodology process. Methods generally refer to the specific techniques in which data or information is gathered in research (for example: interviews, quantitative content analysis, questionnaires, focus groups, etc.) If eggs are *ingredients* in a *recipe* which create an omelette, *interviews* or *focus groups* are *methods* within a *methodology* which researches people's responses to a set question. In other words what you do, how you do it, where you collect information from and the logic behind all these decisions combine to create a methodology; a coherent rationale for selection, collection and analysis of data.

# KEY IDEAS

Your choice of method depends on a number of factors: what sort of data needs to be found? How will the data be produced and collected? How will it be analysed? How will the research be evaluated? What are the outcomes that will be produced and what is the role of the researcher?

It is best to start with the founding principles behind your own idea – who in your area has done something similar? What did they do and how did they do it? Did it work? This enables you to create your own logic that underpins your own research that is explicit and definable.

There are many different methodologies. The first stem is whether the methods chosen are qualitative and/or quantitative (in simple terms using words or numbers as your data root for research). Then the means of collection is sub-divided and defined by which stem it derives from. For example surveys allow for the counting of data and statistical analysis, interviews are more qualitative in nature and offer breadth and depth of response – but cannot be scientifically reproduced and so results cannot be generalised. Ethnography (sustained observation usually conducted over a reasonable period of time) generates qualitative results.

Interviews are one of the most popular and fundamental methods used to discover qualitative data. They enable researchers to obtain information that cannot be obtained by observation alone. Interviewing can be of a quantitative nature or of a qualitative nature, although they tend to be understood and elaborated as qualitative methods of research.

# KEY READINGS


**Bell, J.** (2014). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

**Berger, A. A.** (2014). *Media and communication research methods: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches.* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

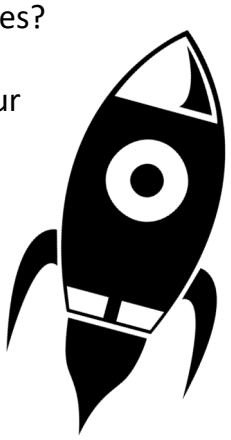
**Deacon, D. et al** (2007). *Researching communications: A practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis.* London: Bloomsbury.

**Hart, C.** (1998). *Doing a Literature Review.* London: Sage.


# ACTIVITIES

1. Return to the question of how you like your eggs – what results and possible data would different methods provide?
    i. Could you use a questionnaire?
    ii. Interviews?
    iii. Perhaps observation at a local breakfast cafe?
    iv. Is the method of cooling the egg dependant on any other circumstances? Time of day / location / additional ingredients / choice of chef?
    v. How would you develop the question to add breadth and depth to your research?

1. Imagine you are about to travel to the moon – what research would you need to do?
    i. Find a rationale for every method you can think of.
    ii. What are the pros / cons of each one?
    iii. What would you aim to discover?

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