



Qualitative Content Analysis: The Core and the Periphery

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Starting point



- QCA widely used
- Yet: Many different versions and
- Much confusion: What exactly is QCA?

Overview



- Examining different types of QCA
- Comparison between these types
- Identification of a core and variations along several dimensions

Definition of QCA



- QCA is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. This is done by classifying sections of the material as instances of the categories of a coding frame.

Versions of QCA



- Structural content analysis
- Thematic analysis
- Formal content analysis
- Scaling through content analysis
- Evaluative content analysis
- Summative content analysis
- Content analysis by extraction
- Typological content analysis
- Explicative / contextual content analysis

Structural content analysis

(Kuckartz; Mayring; Schreier; Steigleder)



- Key idea: arriving at a systematic description / summary of the main themes in the material
- Most frequently used type of qualitative content analysis
- Corresponds to ‚thematic analysis‘ (Boyatzis)

Structural content analysis: Procedure



- Deciding on main categories / dimensions of the coding frame
- Segmentation: deciding on those parts of the material whose meaning is of interest
- Developing the subcategories of the coding frame
- Trying out and adjusting the coding frame
- Doing the main coding
- Interpreting the results / Answering the research question

Example: Peak experiences in wilderness settings (McDonald et al, 2009)



- Data from 39 participants who had visited an Australian National Park – free descriptions
- Coding frame to capture the various aspects of peak experiences in wilderness settings – seven themes:
 - Aesthetic qualities
 - Being away
 - Meaningful experience
 - Number of peak experiences
 - Oneness – connectedness
 - Overcoming limitations
 - Heightened awareness

Formal content analysis

(Mayring)



- Key idea: systematically describing a formal characteristic of the material, such as: type of argument used, different fonts, ways of combining textual and visual material, etc.

Formal content analysis: Procedure



- As in structural content analysis, except:
 - Formal units of coding most suitable
 - Subcategories often theory-based
 - Small number of subcategories

Formal content analysis: Example



- Ongoing own research
- Analysis of the argument structure in focus group discussions about prioritising in health care
- Every utterance analysed according to argument role:
 - Claim
 - Counter-claim
 - Simple affirmation
 - Simple disagreement
 - Argument in support of a claim
 - Counter-argument to a claim

Evaluative content analysis

(Kuckartz, Mayring)



- Key idea: systematic assessment, classification, or evaluation of content, often along an ordinal scale, ranging from low to high values (Kuckartz, 2012, p. 98)
- Equivalent to scaling through content analysis (Mayring)
- Builds upon structural content analysis, i.e. evaluation is carried out based on prior coding of content
- Coding unit is usually the case, i.e. category is coded only once per case

Evaluative content analysis: Procedure



- As in structural content analysis, except:
 - Unit of coding is the case
 - Subcategories correspond to points on (quantitative) rating scales
 - Small number of subcategories

Example: Responsibility for climate change (Kuckartz, 2012)



- Interview data concerning the perception of climate change from 30 participants
- Category designed to capture the extent of participants' own sense of responsibility
 - High
 - Medium
 - Low
 - Unclear

Summative content analysis

(Mayring; Kuckartz; Schreier)



- Key idea: arriving at a coding frame by paraphrasing, generalising, and gradually reducing relevant material
- Not so much a type of content analysis
- But: Specifies a particular strategy for developing a data-driven coding frame

Content analysis by extraction

(Gläser & Laudel)



- Key ideas: Introducing ‚extraction‘: deciding on main categories and extracting relevant information on this basis
- Not so much a type of content analysis
- But: Specifies a particular strategy for developing a coding frame that starts out from conceptual considerations

Typological content analysis

(Kuckartz, Mayring)



- Key idea: grouping of cases into types based on the similarities and differences between them on several dimensions
- Typically builds on structural or evaluative qualitative content analysis for describing each case on the relevant dimensions
- Employs two methods: qualitative content analysis and typology construction

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Typological content analysis: Procedure



- QCA nested into typology construction
 - Identify relevant dimensions for typology construction
 - Conduct qualitative content analysis for each case on each of the dimensions
 - Continue with typology construction, classifying and describing all cases based on their place in the resulting typology
- QCA followed by typology construction
 - Conduct QCA
 - Follow by typology construction, selecting the dimensions from among the main categories used in QCA

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Typological content analysis: Example (Gurski, 2009)



- Analysis of 45 syllabi from multicultural teacher education courses
- QCA followed by typology construction
- Main categories used for typology construction: awareness of and respect for diversity, type of language, degree of cultural diversity, etc.
- Five types of teaching:
 - Focus on the other
 - Cultural sensitivity
 - Multicultural competence
 - Within a socio-political context
 - As counter-hegemonic practice

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Explicative / contextual content analysis (Mayring)



- Key idea: making use of additional material (context) to clarify the meaning of a given passage
- Two types:
 - Narrow contextual content analysis: material used is from the same text as the passage to be clarified
 - Wide contextual content analysis: material used taken from other sources than the passage to be clarified

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Explicative / contextual content analysis: Procedure



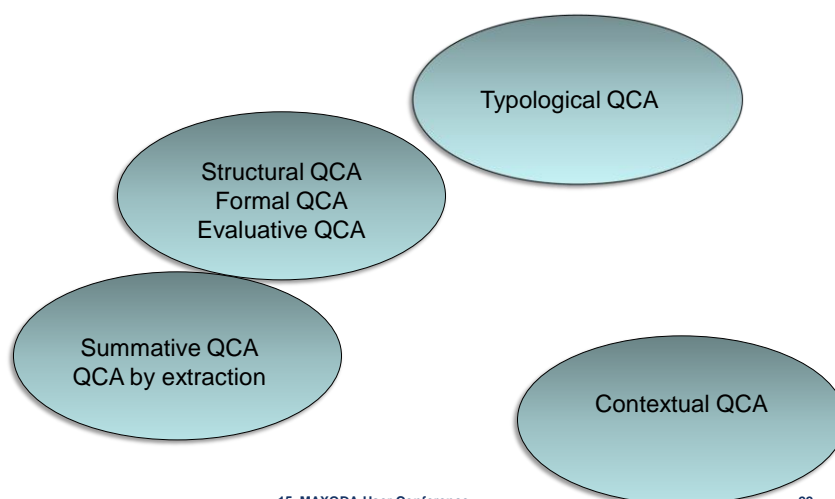
- Providing a first lexical definition of the passage
- Specifying the type and extent of material to be used for clarification
- Collecting additional material
- Re-phrasing the passage accordingly
- Checking whether this provides a sufficient definition

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Types of content analysis



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The relation between different types of QCA



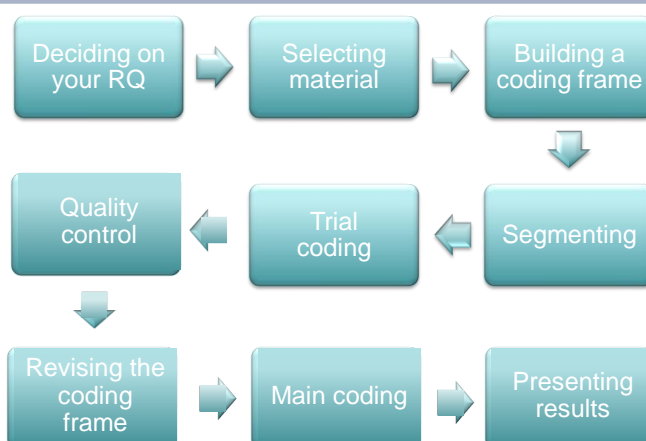
- Structural, formal, evaluative QCA: similar procedure, differ only in terms of the types of categories used / what is categorised:
 - Structural: themes
 - Formal: formal characteristics
 - Evaluative: assessments - scaling

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Steps in structural QCA



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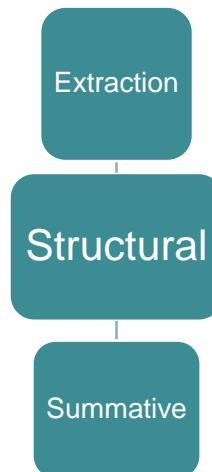
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The relation between different types of QCA



- Summative QCA and QCA by extraction specify **strategies** for arriving at a coding frame
- Strategies to be used **within** the framework of structural QCA



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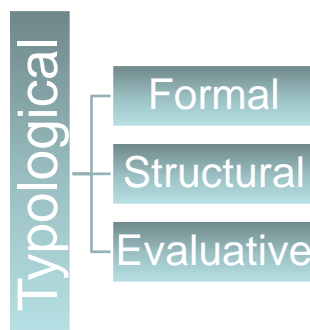
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The relation between different types of QCA



- Typological QCA **builds upon** structural, formal, evaluative types of QCA by adding another method: constructing typologies



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The relation between different types of QCA



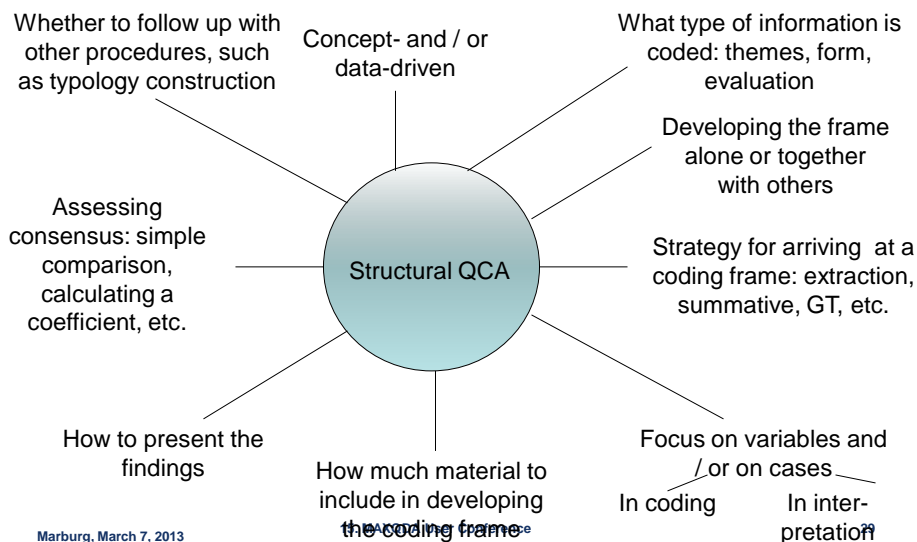
- Structural, formal, evaluative, typological QCA all share the same basic procedure
- Summative QCA and QCA by extraction fit into this procedure as specific strategies
- Contextual QCA: different procedure, different method: systematic exegesis

The core: Structural QCA



- Procedure of structural QCA underlying all types of QCA
- Within this core, there is room for variation concerning the details

Varieties of structural QCA



Conclusion



- Not many different types of QCA, but one core procedure (structural QCA) and many variations on this procedure
- Tool-box approach to QCA: Take what you need, as long as it is suitable for your research question

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