Something Very Practical:
Tips About How to Publish Your First Qualitative Research Article

Something Very Philosophical:
What Is Interpretive Research and What Is Positivist Research?

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Seminar with students of Hengwei (Rachel) Zhang, Assistant Professor
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Hi Allen,

Thank you so much for agreeing to give a guest lecture – I'm really looking forward to it! And thank you, Yan, for making the introduction.

Allen, I definitely remember meeting you at CGU and truly appreciated the opportunity to learn from you during your visit. It was a great experience and left a strong impression on me and peers.

For this upcoming session, many of my students are interested in general qualitative research. They are especially eager to learn how to approach their first **qualitative research publication** – from getting started on a study to navigating the writing and publishing process.

If you're open to it, I think they would benefit greatly from hearing about practical strategies and advice on these topics.

Please let me know if you'd like to discuss this further, or if you have any questions about the class and students. Happy to coordinate in whatever way is easiest for you!

Looking forward to your session!

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🔴 **Claremont Graduate University**

First, my own personal story about how I've done research.

- **What is unique to me and what do I want to contribute to the information systems research community?**

- **How do I speak the language of the research community so that it understands the unique contribution that I want to make?**

Something Very Practical:
Tips About How to Publish Your First Qualitative Research Article

To publish your first qualitative research article, think in terms of the qualitative research <u>genre</u>.

Some popular, overlapping genres of qualitative research:

- **case study**
- **ethnography / participant-observation**
- **grounded theory**
- **action research**
- **...**

- **case study**

  ... is the study of a single case. Example: the study of the implementation of a new information technology in a single organization.

  two classic references to trigger your imagination:

  Yin, R. K. (with Campbell, D. T.). (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (Sixth edition.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

  Walsham, G. (1995). Interpretive case studies in IS research: Nature and method. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 4(2), 74–81.

- **ethnography / participant-observation**

  ... is the long term study (typically, at least a year) where the researcher immerses himself/herself in the community or organization of the people being studied, where this is modeled on the anthropological study of "natives" in a "village"

  two classic references to trigger your imagination:

  Gearing, F. O. (1970). *The face of the fox*. Aldine Pub. Co.

  Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. Basic Books.

- **grounded theory**

  The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines grounded theory as follows (Scott 2015): "…the grounded approach argues for inductive theory-building: that is, developing theoretical ideas from observations of the data themselves."

  The idea is that the theory emerges from the data.

  two classic references to trigger your imagination:

  Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing.

  Orlikowski, W. J. (1993). CASE tools as organizational change: Investigating incremental and radical changes in systems development. *MIS Quarterly*, 17(3), 309–340.

- **action research**

  ... performs both scientific research and practical problem solving in a real-world setting, involving the five stages of (1) diagnosing, (2) action planning, (3) action taking, (4) evaluating, and (5) specifying learning, where the practical problem is resolved/improved and scientific theory is advanced

  two classic references to trigger your imagination:

  Susman, G. I., & Evered, R. D. (1978). An assessment of the scientific merits of action research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23(4), 582–603.

  Baskerville, R. L. (1999). Investigating information systems with action research. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 2, 1999.

a good general reference on qualitative research:

Myers, Michael D. (2009). *Qualitative research in business and management*. SAGE.

How do I publish my first qualitative research article?

Some practical tips:

- **Look inside yourself.**
  - **What passion has been motivating you to get a PhD in the first place?**
  - **Based on that, what do you want to say in the article?**

- **Look outside yourself.**
  - **Why should your audience (the reviewers and editors) "buy" what you want to "sell"?**
  - **Can you speak of language of your audience?**
  - **What are some published articles that you really like and that you could model your own paper on? Be sure to look up articles that (1) are in your qualitative-research genre and (2) are in the information systems discipline.**
    - ➢ **Search for papers by famous authors that your article can cite.**
    - ➢ **Search for award winning papers (e.g., AIS-ICIS best papers, other conferences' best papers, journals' best papers) that your article can cite.**
    - ➢ **Do a library search.**

- **In your article itself, include a list of <u>validity/assessment criteria</u> and an explanation of how your qualitative research satisfies them. If you don't provide these criteria, the reviewers and editor will make up their own (not a good idea!). Example: see Table 3 in Vaast, E., & Pinsonneault, A. (2022). Dealing with the Social Media Polycontextuality of Work. *Information Systems Research*, 33(4), 1428–1451.**

Some notes for using Academic Search Complete / EBSCOhost to search
the AIS **Senior Scholars' List of Premier Journals**

Journal name	ISSN
MISQ	02767783
ISR	10477047
JMIS	07421222
JAIS	15369323
JSIS	09638687
EJIS	0960085X
JIT	02683962
ISJ	13501917
DSS	01679236
IO	14717727
IM	03787206

(AB "case stud*") AND IS (02767783 OR 10477047 OR 07421222 OR 15369323 OR 09638687 OR 0960085X OR 02683962 OR 13501917 OR 01679236 OR 14717727 OR 03787206)

(AB "ethnograph*") AND IS (02767783 OR 10477047 OR 07421222 OR 15369323 OR 09638687 OR 0960085X OR 02683962 OR 13501917 OR 01679236 OR 14717727 OR 03787206)

(AB "grounded theory") AND IS (02767783 OR 10477047 OR 07421222 OR 15369323 OR 09638687 OR 0960085X OR 02683962 OR 13501917 OR 01679236 OR 14717727 OR 03787206)

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Something Very Practical:
Tips about How to Publish Your First Qualitative Research Article

Summary of Some Important Points

- Don't give the editors and reviewers only what they want and think is important; also give them what <u>you </u>want and think is important.

- From the beginning of your research process, think in terms of a particular qualitative research genre (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded theory, action research) <u>and</u> the validity criteria it will require you to satisfy.

- Find examples of published research you can model your own research on!

Something Very Philosophical:
What Is Interpretive Research and What Is Positivist Research?

"Positivism," a term well used in information systems research, is a concept that falls under "naturalism," a term as yet unknown in information systems research. "**In the social sciences, naturalism describes the position that social science is or should be a natural science, devoted to the same goal of determining positive laws (in this case about social behavior), and drawing on the same methodologies of experimentation, prediction, verification, and so on**" (Source: (2002). naturalism. In *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 31 Mar. 2025, from https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715-e-1144.).

In other words, in naturalism, social-science research should be conducted just as natural-science research is conducted. Positivism falls under naturalism.

"Interpretivism" departs from the belief that social science is or should be (like) a natural science. In interpretivism, the focus is on the **meanings** that human beings have of each other and of the things in their world – such as the **meanings** that managers and clerks have of each other and of the new enterprise resource planning system that has been implemented in their company and that they are being forced to use. The interpretive researcher **interprets** these **meanings**.

"The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist - social reality - has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it." (Source: Schutz, Alfred. (1962). "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," in *Alfred Schutz: Collected Papers 1*. Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 48-66.)

	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Positivist Research	commonly practiced	less common, but has been done successfully
Interpretive Research	?	commonly practiced

	Theory Testing Research	Theory Building Research
Positivist Research	commonly practiced	?
Interpretive Research	less common, but has been done successfully	commonly practiced

- **Are you doing positivist research?**

  Are you following the "natural-science model" of research? Do you believe you must use the methods of natural science?

- **Are you doing interpretive research?**

  Are you observing and interpreting the **meanings** that the people in the local setting (such as an organization) have of each other and of the information technology?

- **Are you doing neither, or are you doing both?**

- **Might you be doing qualitative design research?**

	Sciences that study the physical world	Sciences that study the world of people and their institutions
Sciences that describe or explain what exists or has existed	physics, chemistry	anthropology, sociology, history
Sciences that describe or explain *how to create* what does not now exist or has not yet existed	engineering	business, social work, education, law, public policy

Lee, A. S. (2014). Theory is king? But first, what Is theory? *Journal of Information Technology*, *29*(4), 350–352.

Sciences that describe or explain what exists or has existed	← **almost all past qualitative research (positivist & interpretive)**
Sciences that describe or explain *how to create* what does not now exist or has not yet existed	← **action research / qualitative design research**

Examples of the latter:

Sein, M. K., Henfridsson, O., Purao, S., Rossi, M., & Lindgren, R. (2011). Action design research. *MIS Quarterly*, *35*(1), 37–56.

Thomas, M. A., Li, Y., & Lee, A. S. (2022). Generalizing the information systems artifact. *Information Systems Research*, *33*(4), 1452–1466.

**Something Very Philosophical:
What Is Interpretive Research and What Is Positivist Research?**

Summary of Some Important Points

- There are many different descriptions and definitions of positivism and interpretivism. Be conversant with them, but come up with descriptions and definitions *that work for you*.

- Don't overlook qualitative design research.

- Again, find examples of published research you can model your own research on!

A final note, on mixed methods:

Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative divide: Guidelines for conducting mixed methods research in information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, *37*(1), 21–54.

Page 24: "Although both qualitative and quantitative methods can arguably be used to address similar research questions, qualitative methods have typically been used more in IS and other social sciences for exploratory research in order to develop a deep understanding of a phenomenon and/or to inductively generate new theoretical insights (Punch 1998; Walsham 2006). In contrast, quantitative methods have typically been used more in IS for confirmatory studies, such as theory testing. We note that our statements refer to the typical situations in IS research. There are, of course, exceptions—for instance, Markus (1983) used a qualitative approach for theory testing."