

Focus Group Research as a Tool For Theory Development

Douglas A. Ferguson

Department of Radio-Television-Film

Bowling Green State University

Douglas A. Ferguson, Ph.D.
Department of Radio-Television-Film
322 West Hall
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403
(419) 372-6007

BITNET: ferguson@bgsuopie

Paper presented in the Research Division

of the Broadcast Education Association

Annual Meeting, April 1991

as part of the refereed panel entitled

"Nonquantitative Approaches to Media Research"

Running Head: FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of focus groups as a theory development tool for academic research on the mass media. Many other fields are now using this established technique. However, some broadcast researchers have a strong bias against the use of qualitative methods like case studies and focus group research. The introduction to the paper reviews the epistemological arguments against a rigid methodological worldview, whether such a bias aligns itself against qualitative **or** quantitative methods.

This paper contends that questions should drive methods, not the other way around. To illustrate, the author describes his research on whether television viewers are more selective in a new media environment. Respondents (N=50) were interviewed using two methods: focus groups and a computer-distributed self-selected sample. The qualitative data were examined by analyzing the various themes that emerged from the transcribed statements. The results indicated that people are using new media technologies to selectively view primetime television.

The paper discusses how qualitative methods such as focus groups are important to theory development. Finally, the paper concludes by suggesting ways that qualitative results could (and should) be shared in more academic journals, without diluting the rigor of published scholarship.

Focus Group Research as a Tool For Theory Development

This paper discusses the use of focus groups as a theory development tool for academic research on the mass media. Many other fields are now using this established technique. However, some media researchers have a strong bias against the use of qualitative methods like case studies and focus group research. Even when such methods are accepted, they are relegated to "exploratory research" status. Further, the use of the word "nonquantitative" by some researchers suggests that quantitative is the preferred method.

There are two threads presented in this paper: one is epistemological and the other is illustrative. The epistemological argument presents several reasons why focus group methods are not inherently inferior to quantitative research. The illustrative study that has employed focus groups demonstrates the utility of the method in media research. The paper concludes with a discussion of theory construction and offers some recommendations regarding qualitative research.

The Epistemology of Qualitative Research

Questions should drive methods, not the other way around. This section of the paper reviews the epistemological arguments against a rigid methodological worldview, whether such a bias aligns itself against qualitative **or** quantitative methods.

Many researchers are unaware of the assumptions under which they operate because their worldview is so ingrained by their previous training. According to Pearce, Cronen and Harris (1982), the process of knowing is not independent of the properties of either the knower or the known. All scientists are influenced by their assumptions, which in most mass communication research are connected to logical positivism. The assumptions of quantitative researchers (i.e., positivists) usually include the following: (1) the world is causally ordered,

(2) reality is knowable, (3) there is a theory-free empirical language, and (4) explanation requires precise tests. For positivists, explanation and prediction are the same process.

An alternative worldview that has gained popularity among media researchers in the past fifteen years is interpretivism, used by nonquantitative researchers. The qualitative (or naturalistic) researcher also operates under several assumptions: (1) meaning as seen by individuals is paramount, (2) meaning always occurs in a cultural context, (3) meanings are shared, and (4) meanings exist in a unique historical background.

The qualitative approach to research is often pitted against the more dominant quantitative approach of the positivists. Yet, there need not be an "either/ or" resolution to such conflicts. The simple reason is that methodology is inextricably linked to theory (Hawes, 1975; Pearce et al., 1982; Poole and McPhee, 1985). Pearce et al. (1982) advocated methodological pluralism, which requires commitment to a particular methodology on the one hand and openmindedness to alternatives on the other. ¹

Focus Group Methods

Focus group research involves a qualitative approach to data-gathering and analysis. For the most part, the technique has not had widespread applications in media research. Ironically, focus groups began as broadcasting research. Merton (1990) recounts how he observed Paul Lazarsfeld at the Office of Radio Research in November 1941. One of Lazarsfeld's assistants was recording the reasons for the test groups choices made by the Lazarsfeld-Stanton program analyzer. Merton complained to Lazarsfeld that interviewer was guiding the responses instead of focusing on what they wanted to say. Lazarsfeld permitted Merton to show how it should be done and the "focussed group-interview" was born. Later, Merton taught the same technique to Hovland's associates at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. Hovland was convinced that the method was a necessary complement to the experiments he had designed. Unaccountably, the focus group method

drifted away to marketing (e.g., Cox, Higginbotham, & Burton, 1976) and non-mediated communication research (e.g., Byers & Wilcox, 1991) over the years.

The method is fairly established by now, with some slight variations (Calder, 1977; Goldman & McDonald, 1987, Greenbaum, 1988; Krueger, 1988; Merton, 1990; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Byers and Wilcox (1991, p. 64) defined a focus group as a "discussion group that concentrates on a particular topic or topics, is facilitated by a trained moderator and typically consists of eight to twelve participants." They pointed out the following advantages of focus groups: (1) rich details of personal experiences, (2) a wide range of responses, (3) more flexibility than a solitary interview, (4) greater facility to handle contingencies, (5) easier to interpret, less time-consuming, and a "valuable source of exploratory information" (p. 6). This final objective seems to be the strongest reason for using focus groups. The researcher is better able to test hypotheses based on true audience behavior: "Focus groups may provide a more human side and perspective to a purely quantitative study thereby bringing out variables that otherwise might be missed" (Byers and Wilcox, 1991, p. 64).

The focus group research shares many of the assumptions of uses and gratifications researchers. Lederman (1990) identified the following: (1) people are a valuable source of information about themselves, (2) people can articulate their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, (3) people have a desire to be honest, and (4) there is sometimes a discrepancy between perceived and actual behavior. Morley (1989) agreed with the connection between depth interviewing and the uses and gratifications perspective, but noted that the latter was "severely limited by its insufficiently sociological or cultural perspective, in so far as everything is reduced to the level of variations of individual psychology" (p. 17).

Focus groups are an excellent way of uncovering patterns of behavior. However, there is considerable difficulty in explaining the results of focus group research, especially to a

skeptic. Cappella (1990) makes some strong arguments against the use of case studies as proof. At the root of the problem is the idea of emergent themes: For some classically trained mass media researchers, there is too much interpretation to qualitative data analysis. When they read about how "several themes have emerged from the data," these researchers (sometimes faceless blind-reviewers) wonder how the interpretation can be verified.² This is an important issue, but no more than it is with quantitative data based on imperfect samples with narrow findings.

In fairness to the inventor of the technique, Merton (1990) wrote clearly that he did not consider the focus group method as a substitute for quantitative research. Nevertheless, he would be equally adamant that the technique is not the kind of sloppy research as sometimes portrayed. When research is grounded in the interpretations of the researcher, the instrument is the researcher. To claim that instruments must always be objective (i.e., impersonal) is to beg the question, because bias results with the way a tool is used, not within the tool itself.

Part of the difficulty with focus groups lies in claims of validity and reliability (Fern, 1982; Nelson & Frontczak, 1988). There also remain the problems of generalizability. The group moderator can minimize biased results, however, by using the careful procedures outlined below. Generalizability is problematic for all social science research, both qualitative and quantitative. But it becomes less important for studies designed to generate hypotheses for future research.

Not all qualitative researchers are comfortable with limiting focus group techniques to exploratory and theory-generating purposes. Reynolds and Johnson (1978) have questioned the warnings placed on focus group research. They identified several problems with the validity of quantitative studies and proposed qualitative information as a double check. Perhaps with a sense of irony, they even suggested a disclaimer for questionnaire surveys —

"Warning: This study was purely quantitative. Findings should not be considered conclusive without confirmation from focus groups." (p. 24)

Similarly, some qualitative researchers question the common use of sophisticated statistical analyses of unsophisticated samples. This emerges as a reverse argument in favor of the use of focus groups. Focus groups are often comparable to larger convenience samples of students, which commonly have been the basis for basic media research in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps this layer of numbers placed by quantitative researchers on convenience samples is a case of "gilding the dandelion." Of course, focus group researchers are sometimes guilty of the same approach (e.g., in marketing research) when they overuse content analysis techniques to measure the results of focused group interviews (Greenbaum, 1988).

In any event, focus group techniques have been used successfully in media research, particularly for broadcasting topics. The National Association of Broadcasters offers publications (Elliot, 1980; Fletcher & Wimmer, 1981) on the use of focus groups in applied research. Crane (1985) has studied the offerings of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Lometti and Feig (1984) examined the effects of a television on children by using focus groups.

Illustrative Study

The author of this paper conducted focus group research on whether television viewers were more selective in a "new media environment" (Webster, 1986). Respondents (N=50) were interviewed using two methods: focus groups and a computer-distributed self-selected sample. The qualitative data were examined by analyzing the various themes that emerged from the transcribed statements. The results indicated that people are using new media technologies to selectively view primetime television.

This study conducted three focus group sessions lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. Each group consisted of eight participants enlisted from a cross-section of college

students and faculty. Sessions were moderated according to the guidelines as suggested by Axelrod (1975): (1) clearly defined objectives; (2) group homogeneity; (3) good recruiting; (4) relaxed environment; (5) a moderator who mostly listens; (6) unstructured but planned agenda; (7) honest, open, free-flowing dialogue; (8) restrained group influence; (9) careful qualitative analysis; and (10) control of details.

Participants were recruited through networks with colleagues and classroom students: eight were undergraduates, five were on faculty, and eleven were graduate students. Equal numbers of males and females were achieved, though not by design. Focus groups need not represent a generalizable cross-section of the population. It should be noted that the group of eight undergraduates comprised a single focus group.

Each participant received an offer of free food in exchange for two hours in a research project. Appointments were made with those qualified subjects who responded earliest to limit the size of each group. The focus group setting was a classroom television studio equipped with comfortable couches and an unobtrusive microphone to record the proceedings with the group's consent. The studio setting served as a reminder of the topic.

The moderator used a television set connected to a VCR as a prop to stimulate discussion of viewing behavior, by asking the viewers about their methods and motivations for television program selection. Analysis of the complete transcriptions from both sessions enabled an interpretation of the meanings attached to the viewing experience from each actor's point of view. A colleague familiar with the new media environment also analyzed the transcripts to cross-validate the results.

Research using the focus group technique needs a list of questions suggested by past theory and research. In order to probe the topic of audience behavior in the new media environment, the following questions guided the focus group procedure:

1. How would you describe the experience of watching television?

2. When you watch TV, do you do other things? What?
3. How often do you watch alone? How often in groups of more than two? How do you decide what to watch when there's a conflict?
4. When you watch TV, do you watch particular programs or do you watch TV as an act in itself? What factors affect your decisions?
5. If you watch a program at a particular time, is there a tendency to stay with the same channel throughout the remainder of your viewing?
6. Do you have cable TV? Why? Has cable changed the way you watch TV?
7. In what ways do you use your VCR?
8. What are the main advantages of having a VCR? Main disadvantages?
9. Do you know how to program the timer on a VCR? What types of shows do you record?
10. Do you "zip" or "zap"? Do you use the remote control to flip back-and-forth through several programs? How often? Why?
11. How often do you rent tapes? What types?
12. How large is your personal library of shows? What kind of programs do you keep? How long?
13. Does your use of the VCR change the amount of news programs you might otherwise watch?
14. Do you sometimes feel that the TV set is using you, instead of the other way around? How?
15. Do the programs you choose reflect your personality and beliefs? How?
16. When the VCR is unavailable, for whatever reason, do you watch TV differently?
17. Are there times when you feel more "involved" in watching TV? When?

These questions were only a guide. Adjustments to the moderator's agenda followed when the group raised unanticipated issues which were related to the topic.

The questions were also administered verbatim to a nationwide group of television enthusiasts connected by an electronic bulletin board computer network. Replies were received from various sites (e.g., Baltimore, Palo Alto, Berkeley, Austin, Boulder, Ottawa, and Boston). This self-selected sample of 24 respondents gave detailed responses which provided a source of similar data for comparison purposes.

Results

A careful textual analysis of the transcripts from the focus groups and the typed responses to the electronic survey produced several dominant themes spanning categories which emerged from the data. The method involved cutting apart the transcripts into separate segments of text. The segments were sorted into groups representing many categories, some of which became the dominant themes. All quotations presented below are verbatim.

The most common theme expressed was that watching television is a purposeful and selective activity. This was true even for those who reported the general experience of television use as a passive or a source of background noise. When VCR use was specifically addressed, everyone was quite certain that their behavior was more than mere happenstance. For example, two respondents in different groups each insisted that TV was merely a backdrop:

It's just there. Half the time I know what they're doing and half the time I don't. (Person H)

I like to watch it because it's got noise. I don't have enough noise in my house . . . I like to watch people. I watch some pretty bad television, just for the people moving and noise. (Person W)

Yet, Person H admitted renting a tape for her VCR once every two weeks: "I have a friend who also likes old musicals and we have a girls' night where we make popcorn and everything." Similarly, Person W plans her VCR use: "I do a lot of time-shifting. When I'm in school, I'll tape every night between 9 and 10. And I tape The Jetsons. I have 20 tapes." Most importantly, almost everyone acknowledged their planned use of the fast-forward button to avoid watching commercials. These same people often denied being influenced by lead-in program, e.g. tuning away during the weaker program between Cosby and Cheers on NBC.

The subject of TV-as-noise was more common than anticipated. It emerged as the second theme. Some of the comments included:

I don't like the house quiet, so I'll usually turn the TV on. (Person B)

I turn on the TV just for noise, even though I don't know what to watch. (Person N)

I always do homework with the TV or the radio on; the constant noise, a dull hum. I don't understand what they're saying; it's just the fact that there's something there helps me concentrate on what I'm doing. (Person V)

I have Headline News on all the time. Even though they repeat the same stories, it's noise in the room. It's accompaniment. (Person S)

However, others saw their personal involvement with the act of watching television as a dominant mode of consumption.

In fact, active selectivity in general received two unsolicited acknowledgements:

The VCR allows people to be more selective . . . I know that I'm more selective because of the clicker. You can just flip around or watch CNN for a half an hour. (Person B)

The VCR and cable definitely makes you more selective. It makes me more selective. (Person E).

Another participant in a different session said:

TV is something I'm actively involved in when I'm watching. The time just flies by. When you're doing something you don't like or where you're not actively involved in, I find so slow. Even when I'm watching something that's boring, time just shoots right by.

(Person X)

Boredom itself was a frequent topic of discussion among the participants and emerged as the third theme.

The boredom variable was not unexpected, based on a study on the use of television to alleviate boredom and stress by Bryant and Zillmann (1984). However, no one in the three focus groups mentioned stress or any similar affective state. The closest emotion was frustration, which was often cited as an outcome rather than as an antecedent condition:

[The experience of watching television] is frustrating for me, because I don't always find

something that I feel is worth my time to watch. Even with cable, I am real frustrated finding anything I really want to watch. (Person S)

When I watch TV, there's usually nothing on worth watching, so I feel frustrated . . . [when I flip around and can't find a better show] I feel frustrated. (Person V)

The only other reference to stress could be implied by the frequent mention of relaxation as a motive for viewing.

Channel flipping was a fourth dominant theme, partly because of a direct question by the moderator. The fifth overall theme concerned the respondents' sense of interruption.

Many of the respondents claimed a desire to be alone:

I prefer to watch TV alone. One of my biggest pet peeves is when people make a comment or ask a question about anything that happens, like a football game. When I'm watching TV, it's like I'm in my own little world; I just have tunnel-vision to the TV and I don't like people invading that. (Person X)

Watching TV is a time of peace. If there's any conflict at all, I'll get up and leave the house and find some place else. I do not want that conflict. I gotta get away from it. I'll go watch the other TV. I have ten brothers and sisters and 35 nieces and nephews. I want to be left alone. Peaceful. (Person T)

Another person also wanted to watch alone. However, all three assertions were in response to a question on group viewing.

Several participants admitted to fighting over the remote control:

My roommates and I fight over the remote. When we leave the room we hand it off to another guy to make sure someone else doesn't get it. Sometimes we'll hide it. Reminds me of people who call the remote God [because it] controlled their life. (Person A)

The element of control thus emerged as a sixth theme. Often this was related to the a sense of frustration at the person who controlled the remote control:

My dad is a cruiser. He'll flip it back and forth and it gets real irritating. (Person I)

My dad does that, just something fierce. It makes me so mad. Cause I'll sit down and he'll be watching something and I'll watch it and just at the point--I don't know how he does this--just at the point when I'm getting in to it, he'll flick it to something else. Then I'll watch that, and I'll just be getting in to it, and he'll flick to something else. Everyone gives him a hard time, but he thinks they're kidding him. (Person K)

Most of the laughter generated in the focus groups resulted from comments made about remote control use, both for channel changing and avoidance of commercials.

Another kind of control was sensed by one of the more addicted television users:

I tape a lot of entertainment shows. TV dictates part of my life now, because of my VCR.

Whereas before, I used to dictate TV: now TV is dictating my life. (Person E)

He described an almost compulsive routine of VCR time-shifting behavior.

An unexpected finding was the frequent admission that viewing was more satisfying through the VCR, even when the shows could have been watched live. The convenience of being able to fast-forward through commercials and unwanted program material was often given as a reason. Five persons, representing no more than two per group, confessed to using their two VCRs to pirate copies of rented movies. Although guilt regarding viewing was otherwise frequently expressed, the exclusive response to video software theft was laughter.

Another surprise was the occasional response that watching live programs through the VCR afforded the opportunity to exploit the remote control channel changer to "graze" or "cruise" through several programs at once. Although many reported a separate remote control unit for their television, this finding points to an even more rapid diffusion of "clickers." Indeed, a common response concerned occasional confusion over which remote control had been picked up.

Some other focus group findings were interesting. The verb want was mentioned five times as often as need. The verb hate was used twice as often as love. The word movie (in reference to videotape rental) appeared more frequently than any other noun, including news. Only four references to PBS or educational were spoken, except in the individual electronic surveys.

A comparison of the two methods of data collection pointed to clear differences in the amount of response bias. The faceless responses via computer mail were rarely punctuated with expressions of guilt over either the amount or type of television watched. In stark contrast, the focus group respondents frequently prefaced their descriptions of personal VCR use with phrases such as: "I guess", "I feel somewhat guilty because", "I'm almost embarrassed to admit this," and "I feel like I'm spilling my guts."

Another verbal cue used in the focus groups was the sentence-beginning "I find myself [doing something]." This seemed to be a way for the respondents to put distance

between admitting something and saving face. This phrase was totally absent from the written responses to the open-ended survey.

A comparison of the six major themes found that the self-selected sample shared a sense of purposeful and selective use, need for control, channel flipping, and an attention to noise, boredom, and interruption. However, the need for control and concern for interruption was somewhat less pronounced than in the focus groups. Minor themes which coincided with the focus groups included the desire to be entertained and the realization that new media technologies produced increasing viewing. Several people mentioned that they watched more than before: "I think I am watching more TV with the VCR than without it."

All of the findings were validated by a colleague who studied the transcripts. He also uncovered another major theme: the unimportance of television as interpreted by the respondents. It has become so commonplace that viewers consider it a lazy or last resort activity. Similarly, he found the phrase "I only rent one or two tapes a week" curious, considering weekly movie attendance in the three decades of television before the VCR.

Discussion

The data clearly suggest that viewers are more selective in their new media environments. Yet, the use of television as noise was a common thread which sometimes ran counter to the active viewer model. The explanation for this contradiction most likely lies in the varying contexts in which different viewers create meaning. Anderson and Meyer (1988) summarized this interpretive myriad of meaning levels by noting that television "means many different things" (p. 251).

Zillmann and Bryant (1985) also anticipated this contradiction in audience activity and would argue that TV as noise violates the "primary perceptual activity" requirement discussed in their research. Nevertheless, the distinction is being ignored by the usual methods used to measure television audiences. The data in this study suggest that audience

ratings which disregard the involvement of the viewer may misrepresent the true number of persons viewing a sponsor's commercials.

The fact that noise is the one theme that does not fit the remaining five also confirms that viewers watch television in two different modes: active and passive. One important finding that may mitigate this apparent contradiction is that the new media environment elicits more active modes than passive ones. On a theoretical level, this suggests that viewers are interacting more than ever before. The traditional exposure model has portrayed television as hapless couch potatoes who react to stimuli with little resistance. Statistical methods which support the traditional model may prove less useful in explaining and predicting a world where the viewer behaves more independently and selectively.

This study finds support for several ideas found in a review of related literature. The theme of interruption as it concerns viewers' watching alone ties in with the recent idea from Gunter and Levy (1987) that viewers are increasingly individualistic. The active/ passive viewing contradiction had been foreshadowed by the work of Blumler (1979).

One significant limitation of this study is that all the respondents had strong mass media interests. The data do not necessarily represent the patterns of media use among mainstream viewers. Future research needs to address more diverse groups. In addition, the findings are subject to subtle response biases associated with self-report data. A related problem is that once someone in the group suggests a hypothesis for how viewing takes place, other group members may depend on their own theories of how they view television rather than on their memories of how viewing actually takes place (Ericsson & Simon, 1980, 1984; Nisbett & Bellows, 1977; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson & Nisbett, 1978).

Perhaps the most important implication for further research is the decreasing utility of traditional program strategies used by television programmers. This study found strong qualitative support for the hypothesis that standard measures of network program flow are

less useful as predictors of viewership. New models need to be forthcoming based on additional research, both qualitative and quantitative.

Theory Development

As explained early in this paper, there is a close relationship in social science between the researcher's worldview and the theory he chooses. Likewise, theory is often related to the paradigm under which the researcher received training. This has an impact on methods and interpretation of data, as well as the kinds of conclusions reached. Observations are not theory-free; operationalizations and methods are tied to the investigator's assumptions. Furthermore, the types of prescriptions the researcher may apply to real world situations is rooted to presuppositions about the world.

Qualitative methods such as focus groups are important to theory development. Most importantly, the data and emergent themes produce constructs and analogues that are rooted in the respondents' views of the world. Focus group research allows a more complete view of the patterns that comprise a process, as in the case of television viewing in the illustrative study presented above. For example, the respondents' desire for control and pervasive feelings of frustration are motivations that deserve more attention in future research.

Recommendations

Although there has been a shortage of published qualitative studies in the mainstream journals, there are some encouraging signs. Recently, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media included articles in which qualitative methods were used (e.g., Alperstein, 1991). Similarly, Blumler and Spicer (1990) presented a study in Journal of Communication based entirely on interviews with media practitioners.

There are several ways that qualitative results could (and should) be shared in more academic journals, without diluting the rigor of published scholarship. One step would be for reviewers to place greater trust in the findings of qualitative studies. Very often, the data

collection and analysis is more exacting and time-consuming than a "quick and dirty" study that uses statistical laws to ensure validity and reliability. Unfortunately, the scientific method alone is only a partial safeguard against bias.

Certainly, there should be less reliance on "special issues" of qualitative research among the communication journals and more on-going integration of such findings into the mainstream of quantitative media research. When a field apologizes too often for a type of method, it is not only the method that suffers. Theory and method are intertwined. With fewer methods there are fewer theories. With more imaginative tools there are richer theories.³

With or without the contributions of mass media researchers, focus groups will continue to grow in popularity in the future. Greenbaum (1990) cited several areas of growth for focus group research in the 1990s. First, he predicted that focus groups would be used to explain quantitative data, rather than the other way around. Second, he saw an expansion into industries that had not previously used focus groups. Finally, he foresaw the following changes in the way focus groups would be conducted: increased professionalism, new techniques, escalating costs, fewer verbatim reports, more attendance by research clients, and better facilities.

Endnotes

1. Meyrowitz (1985) has pointed out that the use of jargon has tended to separate the qualitative and quantitative camps (p. 78fn). Thus, there is a sometimes a frightening lack of awareness among some recent PhDs about the most basic reportage of statistical findings, which perpetuates the feeling that nonquantitative researchers are afraid of numbers. On the other hand, there is also a similar lack of awareness among some recent doctoral graduates who specialize in quantitative research regarding interpretive and naturalistic methods. What the sub-fields of mass communication research need are some kind of standards for doctoral students so that they may not be allowed to learn only one approach, be it quantitative or qualitative.

2. If one looks at the many studies done on violence and children's television, it is difficult to find a "smoking gun." But viewed as a whole (not the sum of the variables), the studies have an emergent theme that points to a problem with violent content (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988).

3. I am not arguing against quantitative research here. Most of my work is grounded in statistics, and I expect to continue using quantitative methods. But I am arguing for nonquantitative approaches to media research. This support is not some watered-down call for method triangulation, either. If the proof is in the pudding, there is an overabundance of excellent pudding out there, waiting to be accorded equal status in mainstream media research.

References

- Alperstein, N. M. (1991). Imaginary social relationships with celebrities appearing television commercials. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 35, 43-58.
- Anderson, J. A., & Meyer, T. P. (1988). Mediated communication: A social action perspective. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Axelrod, M. (1975). 10 essentials for good qualitative research. Marketing News, 8, 10-11.
- Blumler, J. G. (1979). The role of theory in uses and gratifications studies. Communication Research, 6, 9-36.
- Blumler, J. G., & Spicer, C. M. (1990). Prospects for creativity in the new television marketplace: Evidence from the program-makers. Journal of Communication, 40(4), 78-101.
- Bryant, J., & Zillmann, D. (1984). Using television to alleviate boredom and stress: Selective exposure as a function of induced excitational states. Journal of Broadcasting, 28, 1-20.
- Byers, P. Y., & Wilcox, J. R. (1991). Focus groups: A qualitative opportunity for communication researchers. Journal of Business Communication, 28(1), 63-77.
- Calder, B. J. (1977). Focus groups and the nature of qualitative marketing research. Journal of Marketing Research, 14, 353-364.
- Cappella, J. N. (1990). The method of proof in interaction analysis. Communication Monographs, 57, 236-242.
- Christians, C. G., & Carey, J. W. (1989). The logic and aims of qualitative research. In G. H. Stempel III & B. H. Westley (Eds.), Research methods in mass communication (pp. 354-374). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Cox, K. K., Higginbotham, J. B., & Burton, J. (1976). Applications of focus group interviews in marketing. Journal of Marketing, 40(1), 77-80.
- Crane, V. (1985). Student uses of the Annenberg/ CPB telecourses in the Fall of 1984. Washington, DC: Corporation for Public Broadcasting. ERIC: ED264822

- Elliot, S. C. (1980). Focus group research: A workbook for broadcasters. Washington, DC: National Association of Broadcasters.
- Ericsson, K., & Simon, H. (1980). Verbal reports as data. Psychological Review, *87*(3), 215-251.
- Ericsson, K., & Simon, H. (1984). Protocol analysis: Verbal reports as data. Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books.
- Fern, E. F. (1982). The use of focus groups for idea generation: The effects of group size, acquaintanceship, and moderator on response quantity and quality. Journal of Marketing Research, *19*(1), 1-13.
- Fletcher, J. E., & Wimmer, R. D. (1981). Focus group interviews in radio research. Washington, DC: National Association of Broadcasters.
- Fortner, R. S., & Christians, C. G. (1989). Separating wheat from chaff in qualitative studies. In G. H. Stempel III & B. H. Westley (Eds.), Research methods in mass communication (pp. 375-387). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Goldman, A. E., & McDonald, S. S. (1987). The group depth interview: Principles and practice. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Greenbaum, T. L. (1988). The practical handbook and guide to focus group research. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Greenbaum, T. L. (1990, January 8). Focus group spurt predicted for the '90s. Marketing News, pp. 21-22.
- Gunter, B., & Levy, M. R. (1987). Social contexts of video use. American Behavioral Scientist, *30*, 486-494.
- Hawes, L. C. (1975). The pragmatics of analoguing: Theory and model construction in communication. Reading, MA: Addison-Westley.
- Krueger, R. A. (1988). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Lederman, L. C. (1988). When you want to know what they think, ask them: Three studies using the focus group interview technique. Paper presented at the meeting of the Eastern Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.
- Lederman, L. C. (1990). Assessing education effectiveness: The focus group interview as a technique for data collection. Communication Education, 38(2), 117-127.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1991). The qualitative study of media audiences. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 35, 23-42.
- Lometti, G., & Feig, E. (1984). "The Day After." Caring about children: The role of audience research. Television & Children, 7(1), 32-36.
- Lowery, S. A., & DeFleur, M. L. (1988). Milestones in mass communication research. New York: Longman.
- Merton, R. K., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P. (1990). The focused interview: A manual of problems and procedures, 2nd ed. New York: The Free Press.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moran, W. T. (1986). The science of qualitative research. Journal of Advertising Research, 26(3), RC16-RC19.
- Morgan, D. L. (1988). Focus groups as qualitative research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Morley, D. (1989). Changing paradigms in audience studies. In E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner, & E. Warth (Eds.), Remote control: Television, audiences, and cultural power. New York: Routledge.
- Nelson, J. E., & Frontczak, N. T. (1988). How acquaintanceship and analyst can influence focus group results. Journal of Advertising, 17(1), 41-48.

- Nisbett, R., & Bellows, N. (1977). Verbal reports about causal influences on social judgments: Private access versus public theories. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35(9), 613-624.
- Nisbett, R., & Wilson, T. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. Psychological Review, 84, 231-259.
- Pauly, J. J. (1991). A beginner's guide to doing qualitative research in mass communication. Journalism Monographs, 125.
- Pearce, W. B., Cronen, V. E., & Harris, L. M. (1982). Methodological considerations in building human communication theory. In F. E. X. Dance (Ed.), Human Communication Theory (pp. 1-41). New York: Harper and Row.
- Poole, M. S., & McPhee, R. D. (1985). Methodology in interpersonal communication research. In M. L. Knapp and G. R. Miller (Eds.) Handbook of Interpersonal Communication. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Reynolds, F. D., & Johnson, D. K. (1978). Validity of focus group findings. Journal of Advertising Research, 18(3), 21-24.
- Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. N. (1990). Focus groups: Theory and practice. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Van Maanen, J. (Ed.). (1983). Qualitative methodology. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Webster, J. G. (1986). Audience behavior in the new media environment. Journal of Communication, 36(3), 77-91.
- Wilson, T., & Nisbett, R. (1978). The accuracy of verbal reports about the effects of stimuli on evaluations and behavior. Social Psychology, 41(2), 118-131.
- Zillmann, D., & Bryant, J. (Eds.) (1985). Selective exposure to communication. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.