YouTube as a Qualitative Research Asset: Reviewing User Generated Videos as Learning Resources

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Abstract

YouTube, the video hosting service, offers students, teachers, and practitioners of qualitative researchers a unique reservoir of video clips introducing basic qualitative research concepts, sharing qualitative data from interviews and field observations, and presenting completed research studies. This web-based site also affords qualitative researchers the potential avenue to share their reusable learning resources for all interested parties to use.

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YouTube, the video hosting service, offers students, teachers, and practitioners of qualitative researchers a unique reservoir of video clips introducing basic qualitative research concepts, sharing qualitative data from interviews and field observations, and presenting completed research studies. This web-based site also affords qualitative researchers the potential avenue to share their reusable learning resources for all interested parties to use. Key Words: YouTube, User Generated Content, Web 2.0, Qualitative Research, and Learning Objects

The other day Maureen Duffy, one of my co-editors with *The Qualitative Report*, and I were talking about incorporating video in the online qualitative research courses we were teaching. We discussed the pro's and con's of creating our own clips when Maureen noted there were some interesting qualitative research videos on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com) we might be able to use. Knowing how well Maureen knows YouTube and its plentiful resources I decided to check out what the online video sharing site had to offer qualitative researchers.

For those readers who are not familiar with this online phenomenon, YouTube is a video hosting service that features user generated content or in other words, it is a site where registered users (i.e., anyone who creates an account with YouTube) can upload files containing video and unregistered users (i.e., anyone with a connection to the Internet) can view the videos. From most figures I have seen YouTube hosts millions of videos and users: "In January [2008], nearly 79 million viewers, or a third of all online viewers in the U.S., watched more than three billion user-posted videos on YouTube, according to comScore's latest report" (Yen, 2008, ¶9). With this huge reservoir of digital resources I was hopeful to find some interesting and useful qualitative research videos.

Having scoured YouTube the last few days I did find some useful videos teachers and students of qualitative research could use to further their basic understanding of these methodologies and associated procedures as well as some intriguing examples of research findings presented in video form. In the following mini-reviews I discuss a number of clips worth viewing. I have organized this presentation in four general categories of videos: Introductory Overviews and How To's, Data Generation and Collection, and Study Results.

Introductory Overviews and How To's

I spent the most time looking for videos that offered quality lecture-type presentations that would help beginning qualitative researchers learn the basics of these methodologies. Although I did not find a large volume of these introductory clips I did

locate some I would feel comfortable incorporating into a course. Here are some I think deserve a look-see:

- Ian Robertson (http://robboian.googlepages.com/)
  Ian is a senior lecturer in education at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, and although he starts many of his clips with a disclaimer that he is not a researcher, I found his research presentations to be clear and accurate. The videos are primarily PowerPoint slides with his narration and although the audio quality could be improved, I thought his four research clips taken together formed a good introduction to social science research along with a very useful walkthrough of the steps need to go from interviewing to qualitative data analysis. Here are four of his videos and their highlights:
  - o Major Research Paradigms (5:45 minutes): He describes the differences between positivist, interpretive, critical, and post-modern and ends with two questions for the research – Where are you and your research located? http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srRYdpVYD2A
  - o Using Crotty's Framework (2:07 minutes): Ian discusses the distinctions Crotty (1998) made regarding epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and method. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpUEY7K_DHU
  - o Naturalistic or Constructivist Inquiry (10:06 minutes): He does a good job of presenting the main points of Guba and Lincoln's (1985) approach with a special emphasis on trustworthiness. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAXEBHuSNWk
  - o I've got some interview data! What next? (8:58): Ian walks us through a grounded theory study from data preparation, coding, and analysis to developing a grounded theory and ends the clip with an exercise. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em3dRhwQEAA

- Anthony G. Picciano (http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/edu/apiccian/piccian2.html)
  He is a professor in the graduate program in Education Administration and Supervision in the School of Education at Hunter College, CUNY, USA and has taught online since 1997.
  - o Introduction to Qualitative Research (2:10): This is a brief and concise introduction of qualitative research in which the methodologies are contrasted with quantitative approaches. The format used here is sometimes called a "talking head" or "vlog" because the clip focuses on the presenter's face as he or she speaks or blogs into a video camera. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkRz5YYmgTY

- Andrew Hickey and Jon Austin
  (http://web.mac.com/hickeya/Andrews_Web/Welcome.html) and
  (http://apps.usq.edu.au/usqwebsite/aspnet/staffsearch/default.aspx?action=stafflookup)
  Andrew is a Lecturer in Cultural Studies and Social Theory at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia and Jon is an Associate Professor in the Faculty

of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Australia. As part of their Education Theory Collective, Andrew and Jon offer a two-part video. Their style is quite unique in that it involves the juxtaposition of PowerPoint slides and pictures of the two of them while the audio consists of their conversation with some funky music playing in the background.

- o Qualitative Research Repository: Ethnography Part 1 (4:23 minutes): This clip consists of a brief definition of ethnography with an emphasis on the notion of "cultural milieu."
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HU7aj0nJdDc
- o Qualitative Research Repository: Ethnography Part 2 (8:54 minutes): This presentation focuses on the development of ethnography within the context of anthropology with contrast across the different periods.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei50Ysm2CI0
- o Digitally Enhancing Ethnography Seminar Part 1 (8:20 minutes): This clip is an excerpt from a presentation Andrew and Jon gave on how to apply digital technology to enhance ethnographies.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tzndIyaiJY

- Hyo Jin Kim and Sally McMillan
  (http://www.educ.ttu.edu/edse/faculty/SallyMcMillan.php)
  Hyo is a graduate student in mass communication at Texas Tech University (TTU) and Sally is an Associate Professor in TTU's College of Education. These two clips are from Hyo's series of podcasts featuring PowerPoint slides with narration done by Hyo. Sally provides excellent explanations throughout the podcasts.
  - o Second Podcast: Grounded Theory (6:43 minutes): Sally's video cameos are the highlight of this podcast especially how she explains constant comparison and triangulation.
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtyNe9w5Pb4
  - o Third Podcast: Qualitative Research Terms (5:22 minutes): This clip consists of a series of juxtaposed segments by Hyo and Sally. They cover the researcher as instrument and trustworthiness.
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eirj9bwDGog

The overall tone of these introductory videos is fairly staid, but I did find two clips that effectively used humor to convey their lessons:

- Nathan Bennett's Using Wikis to Conduct Qualitative Research (6:46 minutes): Nathan utilizes a creative style that incorporates funny voices, animation, video images all used to get his points across.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwfceBwNmuk

- DeepRat's Get A Research Method (1:55 minutes): Comedian DeepRat uses the "I'm a PC and I'm a MAC" advertising routine to lampoon both qualitative and quantitative research and researchers.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDo7jwikqqI

Data Generation and Collection

There are scores of videos on YouTube that consist of recorded research interviews and field observations. Many of these clips are also collected along with findings presented in other associated videos. I liked the following three videos because they effectively demonstrated how qualitative methods and procedures are used in business and marketing research.

- Motorola Research: Assisted Shopping (2:41 minutes): In this data collection approach the researcher goes along with customers who then describe how they shop. Besides showing the technique, the clip can be used as a data set with which students can practice their qualitative analysis and results reporting skills. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8eWqdIVOlM

- Point of Sale Ethnographic Research Video (7:06 minutes): This style of data collection focuses on how the salesperson and the customer complete a sales transaction.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbx739sIS00

- Focus Group Research: Salsa (4:42 minutes): This clip effectively demonstrates this popular data collection method. I especially liked this among the many available on YouTube because of the use of captions to present the content of the participants' talk and the group members' efforts to open and pour the salsa also helps the viewers remember the importance of collecting non-verbal data too. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HM4uADm7agk

There are also many videos showing classroom interaction data and others showing the results of student research projects. Of this latter group doing laundry in public places seems to be a popular research topic for students. The following clips present interview excerpts and shots of people doing their laundry. Some of the videos order their clips in categories so these videos also show some results. The multiple examples of this fieldwork could be used to give students practice comparing and contrasting different data sets and different ways of analyzing the data.

- Laundry Project: Ethnographic Research Video (5:19 minutes)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enmbQpJspq0
- Public Laundry Research: Observing the Process (2.33 minutes)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Jydtrbk55U
- Public Laundry Research: Interviews (7:02 minutes)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UJOAEtWJ3M

Study Results

I looked at quite a few videos that contained the results of qualitative research studies, but many of them only showed category headings and then clips of the exemplary interview or field observation excerpts without sharing the research question

or method being used to organize and manage the study. The following two videos were excellent contrasts to this practice.

- Ethnography - Field Study in Orissa (5:11 minutes): In this Red Cross video, the use of a non-verbal assessment tool is used to identify the psychological well-being of participants preparing for or recovering from natural disasters. The production value of the video is excellent and the clip takes you backstage as the investigators share their decision making process and the results of their work. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnyeMLtU5fo

- An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube (55:33 minutes): Michael Wesch is an Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Digital Ethnography at Kansas State University, USA. As part of their Mediated Cultures project (http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg), Michael and his students have conducted a series of projects exploring YouTube and the medium's effect on human relations. This video is a recording of a presentation he gave at the US Library of Congress. His work really helps to show how technology can be used to conduct and present qualitative research effectively and aesthetically. It is also a great place to start if you are unfamiliar with concepts like mediated culture and identity, Web 2.0, social networking, and of course YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4_hU

My sojourn across the YouTube virtual landscape helped me to see the great potential in producing and sharing reusable resources such as these videos. Viewing these clips in the context of teaching qualitative research courses also encouraged me to think about re-engineering these videos into learning objects that can be plugged into a module (see Barritt & Alderman, 2004; Chenail et al., 2006). By learning objects I mean self-describing, self-contained small chunks of learning that accomplish a specific learning objective" (Chenail, 2004, p. 113) that can be used and reused to support learning. In the case of these video clips, Maureen and I can take one such as the Red Cross' ethnography from Orissa, add plug it into the appraising qualitative research graduate certificate course we are constructing and use it as part of an exercise in which we ask students to demonstrate their competency to appraise the quality of a variety of qualitative research products utilizing criterion-based rubrics and assessment tools. With the video as the module content we can ask students to use an assessment tool such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme's (CASP) *Making Sense of Evidence Tool: 10 Questions to Help You Make Sense of Qualitative Research* instrument (http://www.phru.nhs.uk/Doc_Links/Qualitative%20Appraisal%20Tool.pdf) to critique the research presentation and to identify strengths and weaknesses. All we need to next would be to add a learning assessment tool such as a criterion-based rubric that would allow us to evaluate students' performances on the activity and to provide feedback for them to improve their learning outcomes.

The ease at which users can upload and download their original videos to YouTube makes it more possible today for this sharing and reusing of quality resources to become a reality. I have often dreamed of an EPCOT-like virtual research park where

we can share these learning resources to help improve how we learn and teach qualitative research:

> Whereas EPCOT's Future World is that part of the park where the latest innovations in transportation, energy, and technology are explored, [Research Park Online] RPO's Methods Commons would be where the qualitative research methodologies would be developed, explored, and researched. It would be a commons for all park goers to meet and to work collaboratively and cooperatively. The various universities that would partake in the RPO would maintain their own pavilions which would be situated in University Communities, as is the case with the different country pavilions in EPCOT's World Showcase. In the scenario of one university having its own RPO, the various colleges, departments, and institutes would be arrayed as the nation pavilions are organized. The goal of this structure would be to encourage members of the different departments or universities to retain their own unique cultures in University Communities and, at the same time, recognize their common needs and interests, that is, research in Methods Commons. By connecting Methods Commons with University Communities, park goers would be encouraged to learn from each other's ''nation–states'' as they explore how each approaches the world through their own discipline-driven perspectives. Concurrently, the connectivity of the RPO's major sections, Methods Commons and University Communities, would encourage interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary inquiries, knowledge creation, and technology development. (Chenail, 2004, pp. 111-112)

If we access assets places like YouTube and MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching; http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm) afford and use them cooperatively we can create such a qualitative research commons. This future might already be taking place when you consider that the REQUALLO or Reusable Qualitative Learning Objects project to develop resources to support the learning of methods of qualitative data analysis in the social sciencesis already up and running in the United Kingdom (http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/REQUALLO.php). Gee, maybe one day soon they will make a video of their project and upload it to YouTube!

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