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“Tackling the Difficult:” A Review of Janet Salmons’ Doing Qualitative Research Online

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Abstract

Researchers are increasingly utilizing online data in completing and broadening the scope of their work. Janet Salmons has authored a guide for novice researchers on appropriate methodologies, data collection, and analysis procedures for pursuing qualitative online research.

Keywords

Online, Qualitative Research, Academia and the Internet

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“Tackling the Difficult:” A Review of Janet Salmons’ *Doing Qualitative Research Online*

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Researchers are increasingly utilizing online data in completing and broadening the scope of their work. Janet Salmons has authored a guide for novice researchers on appropriate methodologies, data collection, and analysis procedures for pursuing qualitative online research. Keywords: Online, Qualitative Research, Academia and the Internet

Noted scholar Noam Chomsky once argued, “The internet could be a very positive step towards education, organization and participant in a meaningful society.” It is impossible to deny the connectivity of the Internet. Few people have no connection to the online world. In academia, the Internet poses challenges for accuracy in research as well as offering a new avenue to pursue inquiry. Janet Salmons has tackled the difficult subject of online qualitative research in a succinct yet admirable book - *Doing Qualitative Research Online*.

Divided into three parts, Salmons delves into the complex world of online research by framing three key concepts: the qualitative framework, ethical considerations when conducting online qualitative research, and collecting data. All three sections explain the purpose, process, and product of online qualitative research.

The first section of this study outlines the types of online data available to the qualitative researcher. Salmons states: “While many conventional methods can be adapted and adopted to research conducted online, new thinking and emergent approaches are called for that make use of the unique forms of exchange and data retrieval possible online” (p. 3). By clarifying what “conventional methods” are available to the researcher, Salmons presents a foundation to the reader to understand the opportunities for qualitative researchers to use online data to collect data.

Salmons adds to the foundation of online qualitative research she established in the first section of the study by elucidating how researchers must approach their work ethically. She writes “at its simplest research ethics can be defined as the responsibility of the researcher toward others, including society broadly, other scholars, and most importantly those whose attitudes, behaviors, and experiences we are studying” (p. 58). Importantly, Salmons distinguishes “internet research ethics” from “traditional” qualitative research as having unique demands on the researcher. These characteristics include: the protection of human subjects, informed consent, respecting a research site, and the protection of data and participant identities. While many academics may find common ground in their own “traditional” methods of collecting data, Salmon points out that an online medium demands enhanced protection of these things.

The last section of this study provides a series of methods of analyzing and utilizing data garnered from online sources. Salmons concludes with suggestions on how to analyze qualitative data gathered from the Internet as well as guiding the reader through situating their research among the existing body of literature. One might have wished for more systematical explanations of the different approaches to publishing research. However, this book provides a solid foundation for a first step.

Salmons’ work contributes to the growing body of literature on the use of the Internet as an avenue for qualitative research. She is correct in arguing that social media forums are drawing the attention of academics, but does little to expand on her arguments. Rather, she

defers to the expectation that most readers have a fundamental understanding of what the various social media platforms are comprised and their functionality. Altogether, Salmons contributes to the growing amount of interest among scholars about the uses and reliability of pursuing qualitative research through an online medium.

References

Salmons, J. (2016). *Doing qualitative research online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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