Community Validation as a Method to Establish Trustworthiness in Qualitative LIS Research

AUTHORS

Salzano Rachel   Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom | r.salzano@napier.ac.uk

Hall, Hazel   Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom | h.hall@napier.ac.uk

Webster, Gemma   Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom | g.webster@napier.ac.uk

Brazier, David   Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom | d.brazier@napier.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

A core aspect of the scientific process is the verification of the credibility of findings. In research with a qualitative and mixed methods approach, there is ongoing discussion on the most effective method to validate results. Discussed in this poster is the efficacy of community validation as a novel method to determine trustworthiness of research findings. This involved research with 'not-yet-participants' to explore the accuracy of researcher findings from analysis of interview data collected in an earlier exercise from a different, but related, community of informants. The use of community validation here resulted in increased interpretive power of initial results, and of new results to develop understanding of the topic. It is concluded that community validation expands upon current methods of determining trustworthiness in research with a qualitative approach. It is particularly useful for research with participants who are not the population of direct interest, but informants who supply data based on their own observations of the members of the target population, such as Library and Information Science (LIS) practitioners.

KEYWORDS

research methods; validation; qualitative research; library and information science

INTRODUCTION

Validity in research can be understood as a measure of the trustworthiness of reported findings (Candela, 2019). The ways in which validity is determined differ across quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research (e.g., Pickard, 2013 p. 20). In qualitative and mixed methods research, there is ongoing debate on the best ways to establish trustworthiness of results (e.g., Morse, 2015). While strategies such as systematic approaches to data collection and analysis (e.g., Patton, 2015), triangulation (e.g., Flick, 2018a), and member checks (e.g., Candela, 2019), are readily deployed, whether such validation techniques adequately address trustworthiness is still questioned. The poster evaluates a novel form of determining trustworthiness for qualitative and mixed methods research with reference to a study into the adoption and use of public library services by forced migrants completed in 2022 (Salzano *et al.*, 2022a; Salzano *et al.*, 2022b; Salzano, 2023 [forthcoming]). This is 'community validation' – a technique that combines the benefits of two existing approaches: triangulation and member checks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a critical analysis of multiple strategies utilized in qualitative research to demonstrate trustworthiness, Morse (2015 p. 1219) concludes that strategies often cited as indicators of validation are not all appropriate for the task. Despite wide use, two common methods - triangulation and member checks - are insufficient (pp. 1215 – 1216).

Triangulation is the use of multiple methods to explore the same research question to gain a more complete understanding of phenomena (Flick, 2018a). It is frequently used in Library and Information Science (LIS) research (e.g., Rene, 2022). First conceptualized as a distinct method by Denzin in the 1970s (Flick, 2018b p. 444), triangulation is criticized for the implicit assumption that there is a single truth to be uncovered through the implementation of multiple methods (Flick, 2018a). Morse (2015 p. 1216) and Torrance (2012 p. 114) have also identified that the use of multiple methods, or data, to answer a single question may result in conflicting results. In such situations researchers need to decide the allocation of precedence to the research methods deployed. Member checks utilize participant feedback to ensure credibility of researcher conclusions (Thomas, 2017 pp. 23-24). They are often used in LIS research on public library use (e.g. Detlor *et al.*, 2022). Member checks are also criticized as a technique for determining trustworthiness. For example, Hallet (2013 p. 29) notes that they are often conducted without consideration of the theory behind the method. This may result in inaccurate claims of trustworthiness (Hallet, 2013 pp. 33-34). In addition, and as in the case for triangulation, where disagreement is identified, a decision is required on the narrative assigned precedence (Morse, 2015 p. 1216).

The limitations of these methods indicates that they are not entirely fit for purpose and cannot be regarded as equivalent to those for the determination of validity in quantitative research. Indeed, Morse (2015 p. 1220) argues that there is a need for the development of new practices to determine trustworthiness in qualitative research.

METHOD

The community validation method undertaken in this case included components of triangulation and member checks. Three data sets were assembled: 141 government documents that held information on services for forced migrants; and semi-structured interview data from two populations: 30 information gatekeepers for forced migrants and 6 forced migrants. Data collection was conducted sequentially so that members of the forced migrant community could respond to the findings from the gatekeeper interviews about perceptions of adoption and use of public library services by forced migrants. The sequential data collection, and the specific purpose of the second set of interviews, differentiates the community validation method as a validity check. This recruitment of 'not-yet-participants' to determine the accuracy of initial researcher conclusions drawn from the analysis of the earlier data set is a novel method of establishing trustworthiness.

A purposive, snowball sampling method was utilized to recruit participants for the community validation exercise. The interview schedule related to themes from findings generated from the gatekeeper interviews. Each theme took the form of a sentence on which forced migrants were asked to reflect. Before sentences were shared with participants, it was explained that they were based on findings from the gatekeeper interviews. Four interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, and two in-person. Interviews lasted 17-67 minutes (average 50). The data were manually coded using paper notes and copies of interview transcripts. Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p. 175) followed. Codes were data-derived to capture participant perspectives (p. 207), with complete coding to allow for deep analysis. Relevance to the confirmed themes of the gatekeeper interviews was important in this coding process. A total of 24 codes generated 21 initial candidate themes, which were further refined to 15.

RESULTS

The analysis demonstrated that the forced migrants had views in line with seven gatekeeper themes, with additional nuance in three cases. This indicated the trustworthiness of the research findings. The additional information provided by participants acted as a form of triangulation and shone additional light on the previously identified themes that would otherwise have been left uncovered. However, for eight themes, the views expressed by the two populations were in opposition to one another. At interview, when participants expressed views that contradicted the gatekeeper themes, they often discussed the reasons for this. In these cases, as the participants undertook additional self-reflection, the interpretive power of the research was increased. Contradictions not only resulted in the identification of differences of opinion between related populations (which is of value to future policy related to the delivery of services for forced migrants), but - as a form of community validation - led directly to the identification of areas of future research that might otherwise not have been revealed.

DISCUSSION

Both triangulation and member checks face criticism as methods for determining the trustworthiness of research findings. This is due to possible discrepancies in results generated through the deployment of different methods, or in opinions of participants and researchers (Morse, 2015 p. 1216; Torrance, 2012 p. 114). The community validation method deployed here uncovered both agreements and disagreements between two participant populations. However, the purpose of community validation in this case was not simply to confirm the accuracy of the findings derived from the analysis of gatekeeper interview data. It was also meant to illuminate areas of disagreement to gain a more nuanced understanding of the multiple contexts at play, a focus that differentiates this particular method from triangulation and member checks. Community validation, therefore, can be considered an expansion of current methods to determine trustworthiness by highlighting both results that are confirmed by participants, and areas that require additional investigation. This establishes credibility through the generation of nuance to initial results. Community validation is a reliable approach since it addresses the criticisms of triangulation and member checks, and enhances the interpretability of research findings. In addition, it is an inclusive method that allows communities that are 'spoken about' to contribute their perspectives to the phenomena under investigation.

CONCLUSION

The community validation method combines aspects of triangulation and member checks through the use of not-yet-participants to verify the accuracy of findings. This combination is not found in extant LIS research, nor in the broader qualitative literature, and provides a novel form of credibility to the results. Through the illumination of agreements and disagreements, the method generates deeper understandings of phenomena and identifies topics that need further exploration. In future, researchers should consider the use of community validation for qualitative research, particularly in cases when participants are not the main population of interest, but informants on that population. Community validation may be especially useful for research with practitioners as it allows for inclusivity of the perspectives of the communities that are served by the professional group in question.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners. Sage Publications Ltd.

Candela, A.G. (2019). Exploring the function of member checking. *The Qualitative Report, 24*(3), 619 – 628. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2019.3726

Detlor, B., Julien, H., La Rose, T., & Serenko, A. (2022). Community-led digital literacy training: Toward a conceptual framework. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology, 73*, 1387 – 1400. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24639

Flick, U. (2018a). *Doing triangulation and mixed methods*. Sage Publications Ltd, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716634

Flick, U. (2018b). Triangulation. In Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 444 – 461). (5th Ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.

Hallet, R.E. (2013). Dangers of member checking. In Midgley, W., Baguley, M., & Danaher, P.A. (Eds.), *The role of participants: Ethics, epistemologies and methods* (pp. 29 - 39). Routledge.

Morse, J. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research, 25*(9), 1212 – 1222. 10.1177/1049732315588501

Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (4th Ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.

Pickard, A.J. (2013). Research Methods in Information (2nd Ed.). Facet Publishing.

Rene, J.E. (2022). Exploring the information experience of the immigrant towards public libraries in New York City. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee]. https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/2934

Salzano, R. (2023 [forthcoming]). *The influence of culture on perceived use of public libraries by forced migrants in Scotland and England* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Edinburgh Napier University.

Salzano, R., Hall, H., Webster, G., & Brazier, D. (2022a). Is the public library included? An analysis of local government documentation on the integration of forced migrants in Scotland. *Information Research, 27*, https://doi.org/10.47989/colis2218

Salzano, R., Brazier, D., Hall, H., & Webster, G. (2022b). What are public libraries for? Culture as a determinant of conceptualizations of public library services for forced migrants. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology, 59*(1), 276-286. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.752

Thomas, D.R. (2017). Feedback from research participants: Are member checks useful in qualitative research?. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 14(1), 23 – 41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2016.1219435

Torrance, H. (2012). Triangulation, respondent validation, and democratic participation in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 6*(2), 111 – 123. 10.1177/1558689812437185