Essay

From Methodological Skepticism to Credibility: Advances and Debates Around the “Scientificity” of Qualitative Analysis

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From Methodological Skepticism to Credibility: Advances and Debates around the "Scientificity" of Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: In this essay we critically analyze the methodological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative data analysis. We develop the analysis taking into account the most popular approaches to qualitative analysis in academia and their theoretical implications, as well as criticisms sustained from neopositivist positions. Our thesis is based on the methodological and epistemological utility of the systematic skeptical approach as a critical and constant questioning of qualitative findings to certify the conclusions of qualitative research. We develop an epistemological-methodological analysis of the systematic skeptical approach and detail its value for the scientific legitimacy of largely qualitative studies, taking into account its relevance for evaluating the quality and validity of qualitative findings. We delve into key issues of qualitative analysis such as validity, reliability and objectivity. We discuss the challenges of demonstrating these qualities in a largely qualitative approach versus a quantitative one. We conclude by highlighting the importance of the systematic skeptical approach and how it is key to granting scientific legitimacy to qualitative data analysis.

Keywords: Systematic skeptical approach; Qualitative paradigm; Triangulation; Reliability; Intersubjectivity

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1. Introduction

Qualitative research has historically faced criticism regarding its lack of methodological rigor and its inability to generate objective and generalizable findings. Traditionally, emphasis has been placed on the researcher's focus on subjectivity and interpretation. However, adopting a systematic skeptical perspective can strengthen the scientific legitimacy and credibility of qualitative studies.

The present essay proposes a novel framework for addressing qualitative analysis from a systematic skeptical approach. Although this method is widely recognized in the Anglo-Saxon world, it has not had the same diffusion in the Hispanic-American context. Our intention is to help fill this gap by developing its epistemological and methodological foundations.

Through a critical analysis of key concepts such as validity, reliability, and objectivity, we will demonstrate how the process of systematically questioning qualitative findings allows for a meticulous evaluation of the results and certifies that the conclusions of the studies are directly derived from the obtained data.

An aspect that has generated controversy regarding qualitative research is its alleged lack of methodological rigor and its inability to prove that the results faithfully reflect the subject of study without the influence of biases. Our approach suggests that adopting a systematic skeptical perspective throughout the entire research process, from study design to the interpretation and discussion of findings, strengthens the empirical demonstration of the obtained inferences.

Through a detailed analysis of each stage, from data collection to information analysis, applying techniques that allow for a critical questioning of the procedures and results themselves, this perspective provides a renewed vision to improve the technical justification of qualitative studies. Our contribution consists of providing concrete clues to implement systematic skepticism that results in greater transparency and undeniable demonstration of the validity of the findings.

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With this proposal, we aim to raise the standards of quality, rigor, and certainty in the demonstration of inferences generated by qualitative research. With this theoretical and methodological framework that we propose, our main objective is to elevate the scientific status of qualitative research in the academic context of the social sciences. For a long time, this type of study has faced challenges in being fully recognized as a valid option for the generation of rigorous and verifiable knowledge. One of the limitations attributed to it is its supposed lack of objectivity and neutrality, by excessively valuing the subjective interpretation by the researcher.

However, we maintain that adopting a systematic skeptical attitude throughout the entire process allows one to navigate such criticisms. By subjecting the findings to constant scrutiny through self-evaluation and peer comparison, the reliability and certainty of the obtained results are strengthened.

Our central hypothesis is that by using tools that demonstrate the traceability of the investigative process, such as detailed logs, decision records, source triangulation, among others; it is possible to considerably raise the standards of validity, credibility, and transparency required of scientific research.

With this proposal, we aim to pave the way for full recognition of the potential of qualitative methodology to produce quality and useful knowledge in the social sciences.

2. Qualitative vs Quantitative? Naturalistic Scientificity or Verstehen?

Qualitative data analysis has become a fundamental tool in many social research disciplines. As stated in the interesting article by R. Roger (2018):

"(…)when carrying out qualitative approaches in social research, it is essential to make explicit the analytical system from which it is interpreted, and given that all methodology always supposes a theory, the methodological approach implies highlighting the general features and the coordinates of thought that lead to interpreting in one way -and not in another- the saying of the actors who are analyzed under certain qualitative social research techniques" R. Roger (2018:1).

However, although mostly qualitative studies have played an increasingly important role in social sciences and applied research in recent decades, the epistemological question of their “scientificity” remains. It seems that qualitative social researchers in the 21st century are still living in the aftermath of the French Revolution and have to face the criticism of old positivism and its epistemology that insists on emphasizing the necessary “similarity” between the scientific method of the social sciences and that of the natural sciences. It is evident that, even today, due to their emphasis on non-experimental methods and interpretive data analysis (Flick, 2014), qualitative studies constantly have to defend their scientificity and validity against more traditional quantitative approaches. This is because qualitative studies lack the “desired scientificity” that quantitative methods provide (Smith, 2020).

Defending the scientific legitimacy of qualitative studies has not been an easy task. Over the years, various strategies have been proposed to strengthen methodological rigor and transparency in qualitative research. However, important philosophical differences persist regarding criteria such as objectivity, generalizability, and reproducibility of results. Although strategies have been proposed to strengthen methodological rigor, such as the use of computer tools for qualitative data analysis (ATLAS.ti, 2019), philosophical differences persist regarding criteria such as objectivity and generalizability.

Computer programs such as ATLAS.ti have effectively helped to systematize tasks such as qualitative data analysis and coding. However, such tools alone fail to overcome the deeper epistemological objections of those who question the scientific nature of qualitative approaches. The intrinsic validity of interpretive methods, the subjectivity of the researcher, and the difficulty of establishing causal relationships remain controversial issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

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In short, the tension between qualitative and quantitative paradigms persists. While qualitative ones seek to be recognized on their own terms, attempts to emulate quantitative criteria such as absolute objectivity or statistical generalization have rarely succeeded in convincing skeptics.

Defending the scientific nature of qualitative studies from conference papers, books, and articles becomes more complex. Their methods, which include techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis, have very different characteristics from the standardized protocols and statistical tests typical of quantitative methods. However, qualitative researchers argue that their methods allow us to understand social phenomena and human experiences in a richer and more nuanced way, by prioritizing the perspective and context of the participants.

Beyond the specific methods, the epistemological premises underlying qualitative approaches have also been the subject of debate. Concepts such as subjectivity, researcher reflexivity, and understanding versus causal explanation have raised doubts about the possibility of reaching valid conclusions and even generalizing results in this type of studies. Validity has been one of the most debated aspects, since qualitative findings cannot be evaluated under internal and external validity criteria as in quantitative research (Leung, 2015).

However, as Flick (2014) points out, the methods and epistemological premises underlying this qualitative approach have been widely debated in recent decades, which has allowed for the development of more rigorous criteria for assessing the validity and reliability of this type of research. Even so, defending the scientific nature of qualitative studies remains a constant challenge for its practitioners.

2.1. The Qualitative Methodological Tradition

There are different traditions in qualitative analysis such as grounded theory, thematic analysis, phenomenology and critical analysis among others (Lyons & Coyle, 2016; Nowell, 2017). Each approach carries different assumptions regarding the nature of reality and knowledge (Morgan, 2007; Flick, 2014). In other words: "An object of social study can be approached from different forms and procedures, different perspectives, etc. And to approach that piece of reality and ask it questions, it can also be approached with an endless number of tools. The researcher must decide which one. He must explain why that or those techniques and explain how he did it. He must do it consciously" (Ibáñez cit. by R. Roger, 2018)

These approaches are well known to researchers, but in this essay, we will not focus on them: we will explore alternative proposals and areas for future improvement to strengthen the rigor of qualitative analysis. Recent authors propose approaches such as triangulation, detailed description of the process, and organized skepticism to increase the validity and reliability of the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In our essay, although we will focus on another approach, we will emphasize the methodological and epistemological utility of the third (and unfortunately less known in academia): organized skepticism.

3. Qualitative Analysis: Is It "Objectively" Scientific or Pure Epistemological Discourse?

Qualitative data analysis has gained prominence in the social sciences, positioning itself as a valid and necessary methodology for understanding contextual phenomena. However, there are still positions that question its scientific legitimacy by evaluating it through positivist lenses. The scientific nature of qualitative methods has been the subject of debate since their origins (Flick, 2014). While for some they are indispensable for understanding social phenomena in a nuanced way (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), others question their ability to generate valid and generalizable knowledge (Smith, 2019). From this perspective, only knowledge that comes from quantitative, replicable and objective means is knowledge.

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Even today, there is a lively discussion among neo-positivist and neo-Weberian social scientists about whether qualitative analysis can be considered "objectively" scientific or is reduced to a mere epistemological discourse (Madden, 2017).

Proponents of qualitative analysis argue that it allows us to understand the world from the perspective of participants in ways that other approaches fail to do (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). However, critics point out that its subjectivity makes it difficult to achieve objective and reproducible results (Johnson et al., 2014). Some argue that, rather than claiming absolute objectivity, qualitative studies should be evaluated on their own terms—understanding vs. causal explanation— (Madden, 2017). However, others claim that epistemological discourse hides a lack of scientific rigor (Smith, 2019).

Neo-positivists argue that to be considered legitimately scientific, qualitative analysis should satisfy criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity similar to those used in quantitative research (Flick, 2018), which is difficult to demonstrate with this type of methodology.

In conclusion, the tension between both positions persists given the diversity of elements at play, such as validity criteria, the role of the researcher or generalization of findings. Resolving this debate requires conceptual flexibility and dialogue between paradigms, a task that is too broad for a short essay and that goes beyond our objectives.

The qualitative approach is based on the premise that knowledge essentially arises from social and historical processes, so claiming absolute objectivity would be naive. Knowledge is socially constructed in a particular context, so it is impossible to separate it from these influences. Another central premise is that researchers are not mere passive observers of reality, but actively participate in the interpretation and production of meanings through their interaction with the subjects of study. Qualitative knowledge is therefore intersubjective rather than absolutely objective (Denzin, 2009).

Furthermore, this approach recognizes the multidimensionality and complexity of social phenomena, which is why it is only possible to understand them through holistic views that integrate different perspectives (Flick, 2014). Qualitative knowledge seeks to understand meanings from the perspective of the actors themselves rather than establishing causal laws. In this way, the epistemological premises of the qualitative method support its scientific validity, although from postulates different from positivist objectivity.

Neo-Weberians, for their part, argue that qualitative knowledge emerges from social and historical processes, so it is naive to claim absolute objectivity (Denzin, 2018). They argue that qualitative analysis produces legitimate sociological knowledge as long as it is capable of understanding the meaning of actions and experiences from the perspective of the actors themselves (Charmaz, K., & Thornberg, R, 2021). This controversy remains current in the methodological debate around the ontological and epistemological conceptions underlying qualitative knowledge and its validity criteria (Flick, 2014).

Therefore, ignoring the nature of the qualitative method leads to conceptual errors. Unlike the quantitative method, the qualitative method does not seek to generalize statistical results, but rather to investigate particular experiences in depth through subjectivity. Trying to measure its validity with criteria of statistical representativeness or replicability ignores its comprehensive purpose.

Likewise, positivity ignores the fact that interpretation is inherent to the method, since researchers are not passive observers but actors who intervene in the production of meanings. Therefore, qualitative findings are not absolutely objective but intersubjective.

Rather than determining its scientific nature, it is appropriate to assess qualitative quality through lenses that are in line with its epistemology, such as plausibility, internal coherence and methodological transparency. This allows its rigor to be established without depriving it of what makes it unique: a deep understanding of the human being in its context.

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3.3. Epistemological Premises Necessary for Qualitative Research

The debate on the validity of qualitative analysis has generated important discussions about how to strengthen its rigor without neglecting its interpretative and comprehensive foundations. As Flick (2014) points out, a key aspect has been to establish criteria that allow the quality of this type of research to be evaluated in a transparent manner.

Two strategies that have gained relevance in this regard are the detailed description of the data collection and analysis process, as well as methodological triangulation. A rigorous description of the method allows the reader to understand the researcher's decisions and the possible subjectivities involved. For its part, triangulation, which consists of combining and comparing different approaches to study a phenomenon, helps to validate the findings (Flick, 2014).

Strengthening the methodological rigor of qualitative studies without losing their comprehensive approach is a constant challenge. One suggestion in this regard is to improve transparency by describing each stage of the research process in detail (Nowell et al., 2017). In this way, other researchers can replicate and audit the study.

This involves precisely explaining aspects such as the research design, the selection and collection of data, the analysis and triangulation of information, the generation and interpretation of categories and findings, as well as the discussion of the results. The clarity and thoroughness in the description of the research itinerary allows the validity and reliability of the qualitative research to be evaluated.

As Nowell and colleagues (2017) point out, a transparent methodological narrative is essential for readers to understand and eventually replicate the study. This is important given that the subjectivity inherent in the qualitative approach has been the subject of criticism. Ultimately, improving the traceability of the research process is key to answering questions about the scientific rigor of this type of approach.

Another important line proposes combining techniques that allow a more comprehensive approach to the object of study. Triangulation, understood as the use of multiple sources and methods to study a phenomenon, is a valuable alternative. It allows the triangulation of primary and secondary sources of information, as well as theoretical approaches and analytical methods (Flick, 2014). This provides a richer and more nuanced view that makes the analysis more complex, avoiding hasty conclusions and possible biases. By crossing perspectives, triangulation recognizes the multidimensional nature of social phenomena. It improves internal validity by interpreting findings from different angles, which strengthens construct validity.

Both detailed description of the methodological process and triangulation of sources and perspectives have proven to be useful strategies for responding to criticisms about the validity of qualitative studies. By exploring phenomena from multiple angles and transparently narrating each step in the research, these techniques improve the traceability and understanding of the study.

However, for some skeptics of qualitative approaches, these strategies fail to fully satisfy the criteria of an "objective" and replicable inquiry. Doubts persist regarding the subjectivity of the researcher when interpreting data and drawing conclusions. Given this epistemological tension between paradigms, a constructive dialogue is required to overcome these underlying disagreements.

An interesting alternative is the use of a systematic approach to skeptical analysis in qualitative research. This consists of subjecting each finding and conclusion to critical scrutiny, questioning the premises themselves and looking for conflicting evidence. In this way, the analysis becomes more complex, avoiding simple or partial interpretations, which could bring together the defenders and detractors of qualitative scientificity.

4. The Systematic Skeptical Approach as Salvation for Qualitative Scientificity?

In recent years, the use of a systematic skeptical approach to qualitative analysis has been promoted, which allows for strengthening its comprehensiveness and self-criticism in a significant

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way. This approach proposes that researchers constantly question their own findings and interpretations, questioning them and trying to refute them (Charmaz, 2014).

The systematic skeptical approach to qualitative analysis has its roots in the debates in the social sciences about the subjectivity and validity of scientific knowledge that developed in the mid-twentieth century. In the 1960s, criticisms of quantitative methods emerged from the Chicago School, which proposed an interpretive epistemology focused on understanding meanings. This led to a qualitative turn in the social sciences.

In the 1970s, authors such as Glaser and Strauss presented the grounded method as a way of generating theories anchored in reality from the inductive analysis of data. This introduced internal validity criteria such as triangulation and the search for discrepant evidence (Strauss & Corbin, 2019).

In the 1980s, initiatives such as Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) and Action Research emphasized flexible data collection, open analysis, and contrasting findings with the voices studied. More recently, Flick (2014) and Denzin (2018) propose a constructivist perspective where knowledge is shaped interactively between participants and researchers, through systematic critical reflection on underlying biases and perspectives.

From this perspective, the researcher must make a deliberate effort to critically verify the conceptualizations that emerge from the analysis, systematically review the patterns identified and look for evidence that is inconsistent with the categories and hypotheses generated. The main objective is for the researcher to adopt a skeptical attitude regarding his or her own inferences about the phenomenon under study (Flick, 2014).

This skeptical approach involves actively contrasting the different interpretations that can be given to the data through strategies such as seeking out dissenting informants, triangulating sources, or constantly confronting emerging conceptions and data (Flick, 2014; Nowell, 2017). It is a rigorous and careful approach that allows for systematic nuance, enrichment, and, where appropriate, modification of interpretations.

In short, the adoption of a systematic skeptical position has positioned itself as a qualitative strategy that considerably strengthens the comprehensiveness, methodological transparency and self-criticism of the analytical process.

The aim is to actively contrast the different interpretations that can be given to the data, incorporating alternative or dissenting voices that question the initial approaches. For example, the aim is to intentionally identify evidence that contradicts the categories and explanations emerging from the analysis, in an exercise of critical reflection (Nowell et al., 2017).

The systematic skeptical approach actively promotes the contrast of different readings and interpretations that can be derived from the data collected. To do so, the researcher deliberately incorporates alternative voices and dissenting positions in order to test and question initial approaches and conclusions (Nowell et al., 2017).

This involves an intense exercise of critical reflection in which the researcher intentionally seeks conflicting evidence capable of refuting or qualifying the emerging findings. For example, an attempt is made to identify data that contradict the analytical categories, explanatory hypotheses or interpretive patterns that are formed throughout the process (Flick, 2014).

The systematic inclusion of dissident informants and the planned search for relevant exceptions allows for active confrontation of different angles of analysis (Denzin, 2018). In this way, the researcher exposes his conceptualizations to rigorous scrutiny, in an effort to broaden his vision beyond first impressions (Charmaz, 2014).

This critical approach enables a constructive dialogue between perspectives that enriches the researcher's ability to nuance, complement and, where appropriate, reconsider his or her initial interpretations. This type of "organized skepticism" (Flick, 2014) encourages an ongoing dialogue between established findings and new ways of interpreting the reality studied. In this way, researchers can nuance, enrich and, where appropriate, modify their conclusions in light of conflicting views.

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Interestingly, several theorists have compared the systematic skeptical approach and methodological triangulation. Nowell performed a conceptual analysis of both approaches, noting that “triangulation would benefit from a more systematic skeptical component, while the skeptical approach could be expanded by incorporating the comprehensive view provided by triangulation” (Nowell et al., 2017: 254).

Other authors such as Heale and Forbes (2013) have compared both approaches more broadly. They point out that "triangulation offers a richer but less rigorous perspective, while systematic skepticism provides greater precision but at the risk of losing perspective" (p. 45). They recommend applying both in a combined and sequential manner.

Finally, Flick (2018) conducted an in-depth epistemological analysis. He argues that "triangulation allows for convergence and diversification of findings, while systematic skepticism adds the critical evaluation necessary to strengthen validity" (Flick, 2018:120). He proposes implementing the latter as part of the triangulation design. In this way, these authors have compared both approaches conceptually and methodologically, pointing out their complementarities and respective contributions to research work.

But does the systemic approach really have any methodological advantage over triangulation? This deserves an analysis, even if it is brief and a bit didactic.

Some advantages, roughly speaking, that the systematic skeptical approach to triangulation could have would be:

- It is more explicit in its skeptical and questioning approach. It actively seeks to identify possible fallacies, biases, and alternative explanations.
- It provides a more structured analytical framework and process, with clear stages of collecting, critically analyzing and verifying evidence. This can provide more methodological rigor.
- Systematic skepticism can guide data collection and analysis from the outset, rather than supplementing findings already obtained.
- It allows a more in-depth assessment of the quality and validity of each method and source of evidence separately, before integrating them.
- It promotes the explicit articulation of assumptions and research questions, facilitating continuous confrontation and verification.
- The findings of systematic skepticism could be made more robust by undergoing a more comprehensive analytical and critical process.

However, triangulation also has strengths such as the holistic integration of perspectives. The ideal then is to leverage the advantages of both approaches in a complementary way, using systematic skepticism to collect and analyze the evidence from each method separately before triangulation.

Table 1. ABOUT HERE. Systematic skeptical approach. Source: self-elaboration based on the epistemological analysis of previous research.

Overall, the systematic skeptical approach emerges as a valuable qualitative strategy that allows for a greater degree of self-assessment and interpretive humility. By subjecting findings to a critical and questioning analytical process, this favors the identification of limitations and biases inherent to research, thus contributing to the production of more complete and less biased knowledge.

However, the skeptical approach alone does not exhaust the possibilities of qualitative work. It is important to recognize its dialectical relationship with the rest of the methods, especially with methodological triangulation. While systematic skepticism provides a necessary dose of analytical rigor and questioning, triangulation complements this critical vision with a more integrative perspective. By combining results in a convergent way, it allows an understanding of the phenomenon from complementary dimensions.

In this way, the judicious integration of both approaches enhances the best of each strategy. Where skepticism would refine the particular analysis of each method separately, and the subsequent triangulation would provide a richer interpretation by articulating such findings together. This is in

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favor of the construction of an apprehension of the object of study that, although humble, is at least partial than each isolated approach. For all of which, in qualitative practice both models complement each other dialectically.

It is illustrative to review some examples of qualitative research in which a dialectical combination of a systematic skeptical approach and methodological triangulation has been applied.

We have the example of a study of masculinities developed in a small mining community (Pérez Gallo, Victor Hugo, 2010). An ethnomethodological study was carried out with the aim of understanding how men construct their masculinity through everyday practices and interactions. To do so, a systematic skeptical approach was adopted that significantly enriched the analysis.

First, extensive participant observations were conducted in different settings such as work, home and sports. This allowed the diversity of methods that men used for gender performances to be captured. Furthermore, during the conversational analysis, they detected moments where the subjects questioned dominant discourses, which enriched the discussion.

Once tentative analytical categories such as "being a provider" or "being competitive" were identified, they were continually tested by carefully searching for exceptions and variations. The data collected was also triangulated with an analysis of cultural materials that revealed alternative discourses.

In writing up the results, the researchers explicitly explained the limits and nuances of the conceptualizations, incorporating dissenting voices through interviews with dissenting subjects. Finally, preliminary findings were discussed with focus groups of men to gather critical assessments. The conscious use of a skeptical approach considerably enriched the understanding of the diversity and complexity of masculinities.

Another clear example was the study of the ritual construction of gender identity in childhood (Pérez Gallo, Victor Hugo, & Espronceda Amor, María Eugenia (2017). In the ethnographic study carried out on the ritual construction of gender identity in childhood, a systematic skeptical approach was adopted that was enriching.

During participant observation in kindergartens, the researchers intentionally sought out scenarios where boys and girls did not reproduce stereotypical roles. This allowed them to identify that some gender rituals were negotiated in a hybrid way. When analyzing the recordings of playful workshops, they explicitly sought out fragments where they expressed preferences or behaviors that qualified the researchers' first impressions. This showed that identities are not a linear process but rather multifaceted.

By generating categories such as “reproduction of stereotypes” or “adoption of traits of the other sex,” the research duo systematically subjected them to contrast with discrepant episodes. For example, when boys acted sweetly or girls showed physical agency. Interviews with caregivers with nontraditional orientations were also incorporated, whose accounts enriched the analysis with alternative views on gender flexibility in childhood.

Finally, the questions received during the dissemination of results were openly exposed. This qualified the conclusions to recognize the complexity of the topic beyond dichotomous conceptualizations.

Castro and Camargo developed a study of social representations of old age on social media. The authors conducted a systematic and skeptical content analysis of social media posts before triangulating with focus groups and contrasting conclusions (Castro & Camargo, 2017).

The study by Lara-Garrido (2022), experiences of gay and lesbian students in educational environments explored experiences of school bullying by applying a double strategy: in-depth personal interviews with a critical focus and subsequent triangulation with peer discussion groups.

Table 2. ABOUT HERE. Key methodological guidelines for developing the systematic skeptical approach in qualitative analysis. Source: Own elaboration.

These and other strategies seek to ensure that the researcher's subjectivity does not invalidate his or her contributions, but rather is assumed in a reflexive manner. This allows for a critical

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assessment of qualitative results as situated knowledge, without underestimating their potential to decipher social complexities from a humanizing perspective.

Evidently, systematic skepticism entails challenges related to analytical complexity, communication of findings, and expectations of certainty in certain academic and social contexts.

5. The Necessary Balance Between Objectivity and Subjectivity in the Methodological Process

One of the most significant challenges is finding the right balance between objectivity and subjectivity. By systematically subjecting all findings to a critical process of questioning, there is a risk of falling into extreme skepticism where nothing can be affirmed. This would make it difficult to build knowledge. It is therefore necessary to set limits to skeptical analysis so that it does not inhibit interpretation.

Another challenge is to avoid drifting into forms of relativism where all positions are equal and valid conclusions cannot be drawn. Skepticism must preserve the possibility of well-founded assertions, even if only provisionally and flexible to new arguments. Likewise, too fragmented a questioning could excessively fragment the findings instead of achieving an integrated understanding of the object of study.

There is also a risk that the critical approach may generate an opposite dogmatism, where everything is questioned systematically and rigidly without openness to complexity. Similarly, the researcher must take precautions not to fall into his or her own biases, for example by avoiding skepticism that focuses primarily on the errors of others.

On the other hand, advanced analytical skills are required to correctly apply this approach, as well as to maintain receptivity towards dissonant approaches throughout the investigative process.

Therefore, the researcher must develop strategies to identify and mitigate biases in the systematic skeptical approach. One of the most important aspects is to develop self-awareness about one's own prejudices and limitations. The researcher must recognize his or her personal subjectivities and biases in order to proactively identify how they can influence his or her analysis.

Working in multidisciplinary teams throughout the process is also key, as the diversity of perspectives helps different points of view detect biases that might go unnoticed by a single analyst.

Another strategy is to contrast findings by triangulating them with different methods and sources, thereby balancing out any biases that a single approach may present. Similarly, it is important to keep a detailed record of each step of the process, making the underlying reasoning transparent.

It is no less important to submit the results to peer review, as other researchers can provide new perspectives that point out analytical gaps. Likewise, alternative explanations should be considered proactively and feedback should be open to revise conclusions if necessary.

In our thesis, the systematic skeptical approach can help to save the epistemology of qualitative analysis in the following way, since one of its central contributions is that it introduces an element of critical rigor that allows us to recognize the unavoidable subjectivity present in every knowledge process. In this way, it distances the qualitative method from pretensions of absolute objectivity so dear to positivism.

Another relevant aspect is that it promotes a justification of the findings of an abductive and fallibilist nature, based on the best possible explanation with the data available at a given time. In this way, qualitative analysis is protected from reductionisms typical of hypothetical-deductive approaches.

It also places interpretation at the centre by questioning both theoretical constructs and empirical evidence. In this way, it favours contextualised and complex understandings of phenomena, far removed from naturalistic and reductionist perspectives.

Recognizing the multiplicity of possible perspectives, it accepts the necessary flexibility and openness to review findings. This also differentiates this approach from the positivist claim to reach

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a single definitive truth, which in the end is one of the greatest biases that social research, in its broadest sense, can legitimize.

6. Conclusions

After presenting the theoretical framework and the methodological foundations of the systematic skeptical approach for qualitative analysis, it is possible to derive the following conclusions:

First of all, adopting a skeptical and self-evaluative perspective throughout the qualitative research process allows for the certification of the internal validity of the obtained results. By subjecting each methodological decision to critical scrutiny, the technical justification of the derived conclusions is strengthened.

Secondly, implementing strategies that demonstrate the traceability and auditability of the study, such as detailed logs, triangulation of informants and techniques, allows for the legitimization of the external validity of the findings. This is crucial to convince the scientific community of the potential generalization of the inferences.

Third, the systematic skeptical approach strengthens the scientific nature of qualitative research by requiring standards of demonstration of the logical chain between objectives, design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This helps to dispel criticism about their alleged lack of rigor.

This essay is important and relevant to the epistemological and methodological field of the qualitative paradigm because precisely its novelty lies in pointing out that the systematic skeptical approach constitutes a novel and relevant contribution to the field of qualitative research, as it allows overcoming limitations that have historically questioned its scientific validity.

By subjecting each stage of the process to critical scrutiny through self-evaluative reflection and peer comparison, this framework provides concrete tools to strengthen the reliability and validity of the obtained results. This is achieved through traceability and auditing provided by strategies such as meticulous decision logging, detailed logs, triangulation of informants and data, among others.

By raising the standards of empirical and logical demonstration that link objectives, design, collection, analysis, and interpretation; the systematic skeptical perspective allows overcoming criticisms regarding the supposed subjectivity and incapacity of qualitative research to generate objective and generalizable inferences.

With this, this approach constitutes a contribution of great significance, as it enables the consolidation of the scientific status of qualitative methodology. By dispelling doubts about its rigor and validity, it paves the way for its full recognition as a legitimate and powerful alternative in the construction of knowledge, especially in the social and human sciences.

Ultimately, it is argued that the adoption of systematic skepticism greatly strengthens the legitimacy and credibility of qualitative research findings.

List of Abbreviations in the Scientific Text

ATLAS.ti: The acronym Atlas.Ti corresponds to the German denomination "Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache", which translates to "Archive for Technology, Lifeworld and Everyday Language". On the other hand, the extension (.ti) means text interpretation.

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