Advancing a Role for Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data in the Age of AI-Based Methods

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Computationally Intensive Research: Advancing a Role for Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data
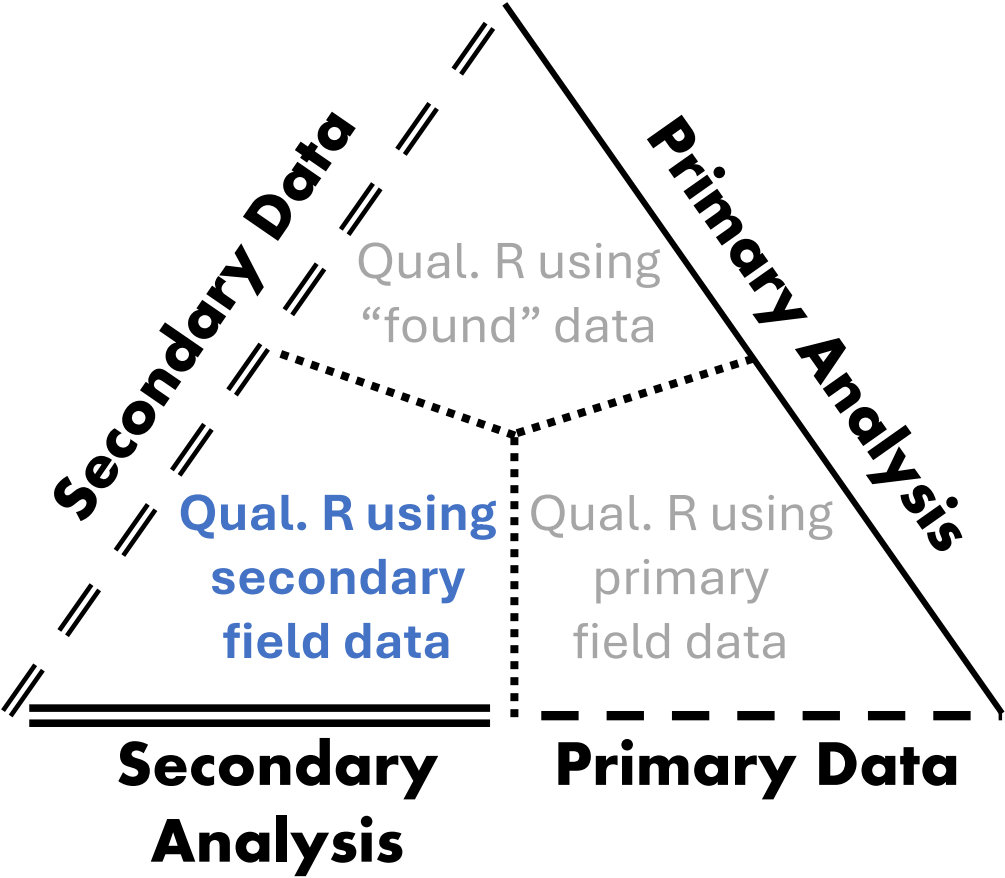
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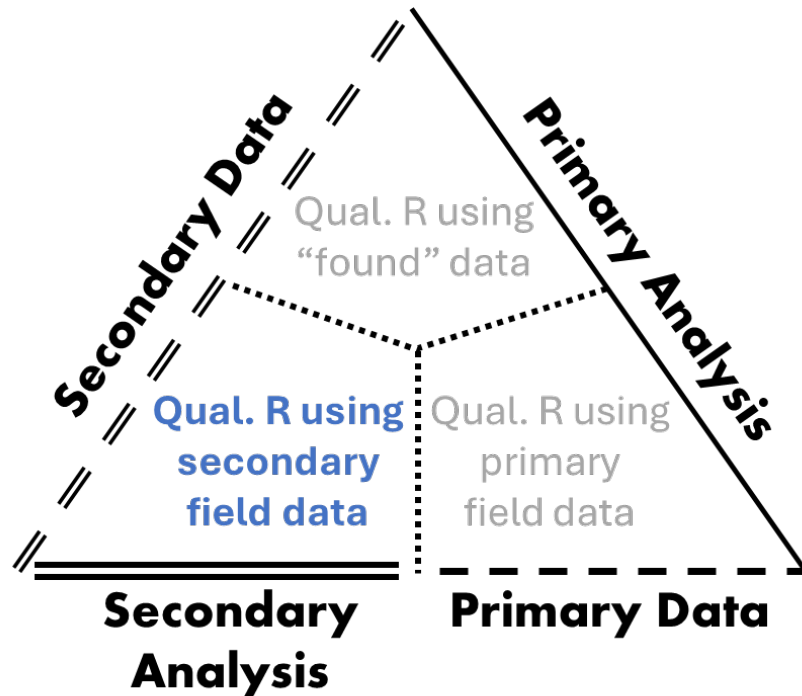IESEG
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The Primary-Secondary Triad in Qualitative Research (Qual. R)

Is the dataset exclusively "generated" for the present research study?

Is it the first time this specific dataset undergoes analysis in a research study?

Secondary Data

Primary Analysis

Qual. R using "found" data

Qual. R using secondary field data

Qual. R using primary field data

Secondary Analysis

Primary Data

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The Primary-Secondary Triad in Qualitative Research (Qual. R)

Secondary Data

Primary Analysis

Qual. R using "found" data

Qual. R using secondary field data

Qual. R using primary field data

Secondary Analysis

Primary Data

Some Observations:

> Computational methods are predominantly utilized for analyzing "found" data.

> Datasets generated through qualitative studies are precious materials, often produced through rigorous, resource-intensive processes.

> Qualitative researchers frequently note that much of their laboriously generated data often remains unused.

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Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: A Brief Background

> **For much of the twentieth century, data reuse in social science research was primarily associated with quantitative datasets.**

> **A notable exception: Barney G. Glaser (1963)**

"[Secondary analysis of qualitative data] fills the research needs of persons with macro-interest and micro-resources, resolves the student's 'all but finished dissertation' problem, palliates the research-team member's occasional ennui and alienation, and far from least can lend new strength to the body of fundamental social knowledge." (p. 11)

> **From the late 1990s, researchers increasingly recognized the significance of the secondary analysis of qualitative data in health, sociology, and political science, among other disciplines.**
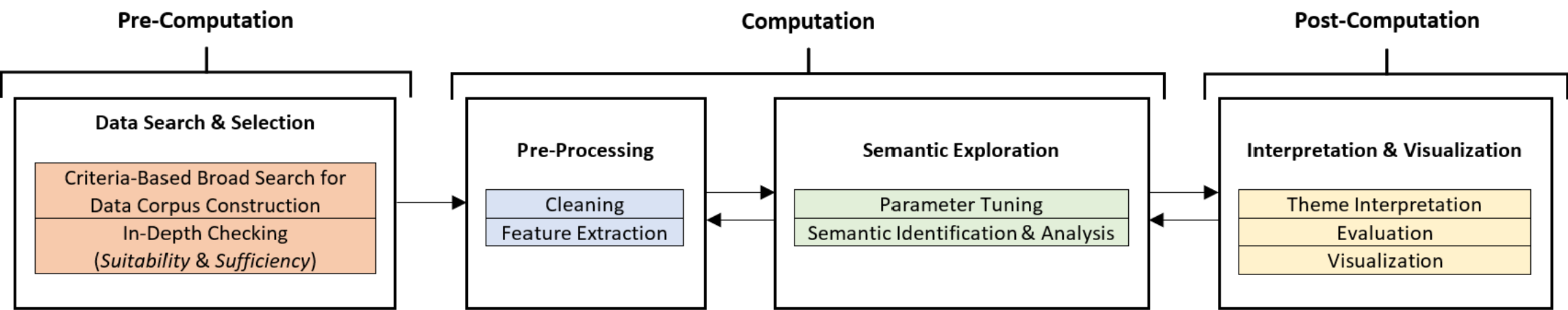
Glaser, B. G. (1963). Retreading research materials: The use of secondary analysis by the independent researcher. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *6*(10), 11-14.

Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: A Key Benefit

Secondary analysis is increasingly valued for its great potential to support **longitudinal** and **cross-contextual** theorizing. It enables working with data assemblages, not only "scaling up" across datasets from multiple studies but also organizing qualitative data in new ways.
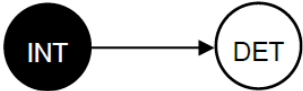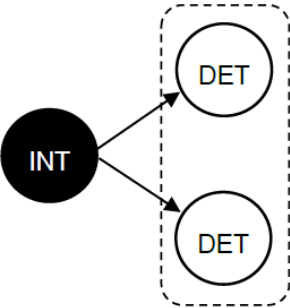
Computationally Intensive Secondary Analysis

> Computational methods are often positioned in contrast to or separate from "traditional" qualitative research that relies on, for instance, interview data.

> Data generated through qualitative studies can yield valuable insights and help ambitious and innovative theorizing when analyzed computationally.
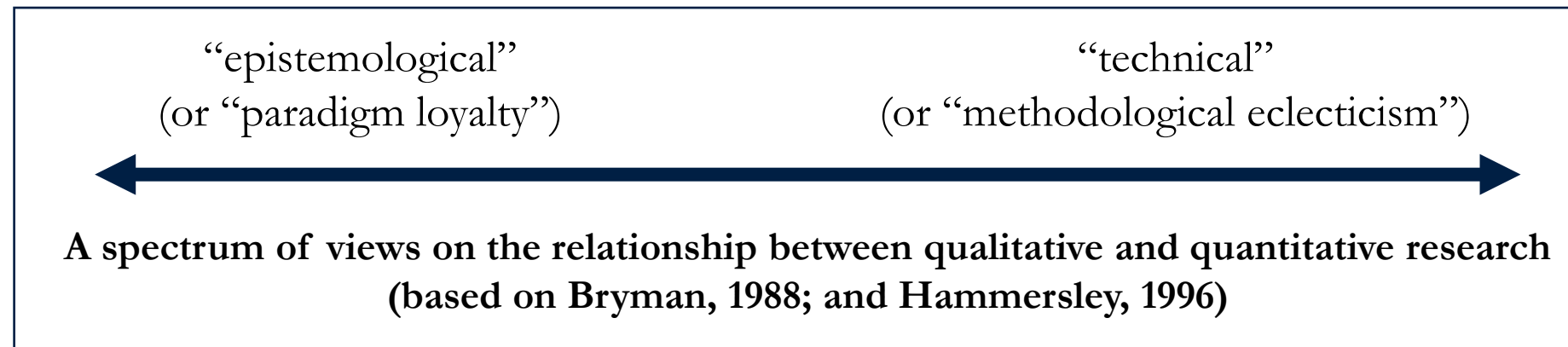

A Scheme for Conducting Computationally Intensive SAQD (Mohajeri & Karami, 2025, Figure 1)

Innovative Research Designs & Computationally Intensive Secondary Analysis

Type of research design	Illustration of an example scenario	Description of an example scenario
Integrated inductive-deductive theorizing (II-DT)	INT → DET	The INT phase is accomplished through a conventional qualitative study using primary qualitative data. The DET phase entails computationally intensive *amplified analysis* to test the theory built in the INT phase.
Sequential deductive theorizing	DET_1 → DET_2 → DET_3	Three consecutive rounds of DET with an already established theory are conducted. Each round of DET entails computationally intensive *assorted analysis*.
Sequential II-DT	INT → DET_1 → DET_2	The INT phase is accomplished through a conventional qualitative study that draws on primary qualitative data. Two consecutive DET rounds follow, each involving computationally intensive *amplified analysis*.
Parallel II-DT	INT → DET / DET	The INT phase is accomplished through a computationally intensive qualitative study drawing on digital trace data. Two parallel DET rounds are conducted in the second phase, each involving computationally intensive *amplified analysis*.

Note: INT: inductive theorizing, DET: deductive theorizing

Examples of Research Designs Augmented by CI-SAQD (Mohajeri & Karami, 2025, Table 2)

Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: Epistemological Aspects

> The debate surrounding secondary analysis has been described as a proxy for other debates: positivism/interactionism, realism/post-modernism, and even academic freedom/neo-managerialism.

"epistemological"
(or "paradigm loyalty")

"technical"
(or "methodological eclecticism")

A spectrum of views on the relationship between qualitative and quantitative research (based on Bryman, 1988; and Hammersley, 1996)

> The issue of data "fit"

> The issue of "not being there"

Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: Overview of Benefits

> When collecting primary data is overly cumbersome, if not infeasible or unjustifiable

> When the economy and sustainability of qualitative research are crucial

> Can foster new research questions

> Can motivate researchers to adopt a "bricoleur" mindset, leveraging diverse theoretical approaches while mining a wide array of qualitative datasets

Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data: Challenges and Limitations

> Practical challenges
- The *suitability* and *sufficiency* of preexisting data for secondary analysis
- Establishing and maintaining digital archives

> Deeper challenges
- Ethical concerns about confidentiality
- Epistemological debates
- Lack of robust protocols and structures to foster collaboration among such entities as researchers, data repositories, university libraries, and funding institutions