

Ethical Principles and Challenges for Qualitative Researchers

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Abstract. The ethics of qualitative research are a reflection of the different procedures and tools that characterise this type of research. Due to its characteristic features (Wiles 2012) and its circular and interactive nature (Rodríguez et al. 2005), ethical problems continuously arise throughout the entire qualitative research process. There are certain ethical considerations that are common to both qualitative and quantitative research. However, in the field of social science where qualitative research techniques are more frequently applied, these ethical issues are considerably complex given that researchers are influenced by a number of aspects intrinsic to the nature of the human phenomena being researched and which affect decisions regarding technical and procedural matters, information management and even dissemination. This situation influences the expertise, ethical quality and commitment of the researcher in relation to the generation and analysis of the materials upon which the work is based and improving the understanding by the scientific community of the phenomenon studied (Aspers and Corte 2019).

Qualitative researchers face a number of issues and challenges to ensure they carry out their research work in line with the principles expected of them relating to qualitative research, which are closely related to ethical values (Guba and Lincoln 1981).

Keywords: Ethics · Qualitative research · Research process · Qualitative researcher

1 Introduction

The topic of ethics and their codification is a matter of international debate in the field of qualitative research, given that due to the very nature of this research it gives rise to complex interactions between the parties producing both the data and the meanings assigned to those data, along with those responsible for interpreting and disseminating the data in scientific publications (Calderón 2015; Houghton et al. 2010). As affirmed by Wiles (2012), qualitative research raises certain added difficulties due to the fact that ethical concerns constitute an intrinsic aspect of the qualitative research paradigm.

Multiple issues arise nowadays: Is my research legitimate and appropriate or is it motivated by the need for publication due to solely academic reasons? Am I respecting international ethical research guidelines? Am I truly qualified to carry out this type of study? Evidently, there are no easy answers to the above questions and they apply



Qualitative Research in Tourism - Use of WebQDA in the C's Tourist Destination Competitiveness Matrix

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Abstract. Up until the beginning of 2020, the world panorama of tourism had enormous growth potential. There was increasing pressure on the tourist infrastructure and related services, so competitiveness in the travel and tourism sector was seen both as a powerful economic tool and a driver of growth, and also a risk to the continued development of the industry if it were not managed in a sustainable manner. In this context, it was (and will be) important to understand and analyse the differentiating and enhancing factors of the competitiveness of a tourist destination – in this case, the city of Oporto and the North of Portugal.

Faced with the difficulty of applying theoretical models to analyse the competitiveness of tourist destinations, it was decided to deepen the study of the most recognised models and, with the support of a panel of experts, the "4 C's Tourism Destination Competitiveness Matrix" was created.

This paper aims to demonstrate the importance of qualitative analysis in the study of tourist destination competitiveness through the results obtained from the base survey of the said Matrix.

The use of the qualitative analysis software webQDA allowed for us to obtain clues, or to observe trends in opinions, about the competitiveness of the destination Oporto, and it demonstrated the potential of the tool, allowing us to infer that it will be possible to obtain more significant conclusions with a larger sample.

Keywords: Competitiveness \cdot 4 C's Matrix \cdot Qualitative research \cdot Tourism \cdot webODA

1 Introduction

The growth of the tourism sector led to a growing interest in deepening the various related topics and sectors, such as the economy, employment, environment, sustainability or competitiveness, both in the context of business and academia. Traditionally, tourism economics has been studied using quantitative methodologies, however, since the turn of the 21st century, there has been an increase in the use of qualitative methodology, as it allows for data to be obtained based on the perception and opinions of the stakeholders. In addition, as a result of technological evolution, qualitative

research can use tools to support the analysis of the collected data, allowing a large amount of information (or data) to be analysed quickly and for reliable results to be obtained.

Thus, after defining the objectives for obtaining and processing the data, it is important that the design of the tools used for analysis and obtaining results are agile and accurately convey the opinion of the stakeholders, so that the results can be used with confidence in the decision-making process. This vision becomes particularly relevant in the case of Tourism Destination Competitiveness (TDC), where in addition to the quantitative data, it is understood that it is of the utmost importance to understand tourists', residents' and managers' perceptions, through their opinions.

In this sense, after studying the most consensual theoretical models, we identified the necessity to create an agile tool as a whole, on the one hand, and yet to include a field dedicated to the expression of individual opinion, on the other.

Then, with the support of several specialists from the business and academic world, a new TDC model was created, which was titled the 4 C's Tourism Destination Competitiveness Matrix, as it consists of 4 dimensions: Capacity, Competence, Communication and Creativity. The data collection instrument is a survey consisting of 30 questions, out of which 5 are open questions. In this paper, the content of the answers to the 5 open questions is analysed using the qualitative data analysis software webQDA.

Overall, the contribution of this tool is highlighted, especially with regard to the simplicity of the data processing, as well as the presentation of the results; results that can be obtained constantly in various tourism or tourist destination contexts, allowing for more assertive decision-making and thus, stakeholders' expectations are more likely to be met.

2 Tourism Destination Competitiveness

The competitiveness applied to tourism and, in particular, tourist destinations, refers to the ability of a given destination to provide goods and services that are considered by tourists as superior to other competing destinations [1]. As D'Hauteserre (2000) points out, the destination's competitiveness is "the destination's ability to maintain or improve its position in the market and participation over a period of time" [2]. Destination competitiveness is also constituted by a destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products while sustaining its resources and market share in relation to its competitors [3].

In order to maintain the competitiveness of a destination, it is necessary for the entities involved to continuously improve tourist offers, developing new services and products. This is a fundamental challenge for tourist destinations to strengthen and also maintain their competitive positions in an increasingly competitive global market [4]. In addition, the evaluation of the competitiveness of a destination depends directly on the adopted policies, especially regarding resource management. For this reason, the topic of the competitiveness of tourist destinations has become essential for strategic planning and for researchers of tourist destination related issues [5].

The theoretical models for analysing the competitiveness of tourism destinations that stand out the most in the literature are: 1. The Calgary or Ritchie & Crouch model (1999); 2. The Dwyer & Kim model (2003); 3. The Enright & Newton model (2004); 4. The Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto's model (2005); 5. The World Economic Forum models (2007); 6. The Mazanec., Wöber & Zins model (2007); 7. The Hong model (2008); 8. The Kim model (2012); 9. The Cvelbar model (2016). The study of these models allowed us to infer that they are mostly analytical models or matrices, which, from our point of view, lack agility and the ability to promote a quick reaction in order to correct weaknesses or produce indicators that promote the creation and implementation of services or products that constitute elements that facilitate the success of tourism organisations or tourist destinations [6].

It is important for research to adjust to new realities and new requirements in terms of time and space. In the context of the TDC analysis, it is necessary, in our opinion, to include fundamental new factors such as the level of digital transformation and its impact on the competitiveness of the tourist destination, as well as the comparison between destinations.

Additionally, one of the factors that is considered fundamental is the comparison between the opinions of the tourists, residents (inhabitants) and managers (and/or policy makers), in order to ensure that the pyramid, tourist/resident/manager remains sustainable for the tourist, the destination and of course for the residents, because as several authors defend, namely Ritchie & Crouch (1999) and Dwyer and Kim (2003), the competitiveness of the tourist destination must aim at the destination's socioeconomic prosperity and contribute to increasing the well-being of the local population [6].

3 Qualitative Research in Tourism

Qualitative research is used to explore the human elements of a given topic, in which specific methods are used to analyse how individuals see and experience the world. Although qualitative research is often described as opposed to quantitative research, many academics and practitioners today turn to mixed methods and interdisciplinary approaches in their projects. Understanding the objectives, intentions and implications of these different research paradigms is vital in selecting the appropriate research methods. According to Given (2008), qualitative methods are the best for addressing many of the questions related to the 'whys' that researchers have in mind when designing their research project. Researchers understand the language, culture and paradigmatic approaches used in qualitative research, especially since interdisciplinary projects increasingly link researchers in various fields of study [7].

As the limitations of the positivist paradigm become evident, the same as in other fields, researchers in the field of tourism and hospitality increasingly resort to various methodologies and subjective and interpretive methods, more commonly called qualitative methodologies [8].

Up until the end of the 1990s, qualitative research occupied a marginal position in tourism journal publications and academic production [9]. However, in the transition into the new millennium, qualitative research gradually gained ground, being currently

accepted as an important and essential tourism research strategy for a broader audience of tourism scholars. Proof of this is Goodson & Phillimore's "Qualitative Research in Tourism: Ontologies, Epistemologies and Methodologies" (2004), the first book on qualitative research methods in tourism. The same thing happened later with the creation of several specialised scientific publications. Interestingly, in 2000, Riley and Love did not have high hopes for the state and the future development of qualitative research in tourism. Contrary to this view, currently qualitative research is continually expanding its toolbox thanks to mobile, visual, digital and sensory data [10].

Thus, as advocated by Ren (2015), the tourism sector reveals an interest from the scientific community in adapting qualitative methods (in combination with quantitative methods) to better accommodate and connect the complexity and multiplicity of tourism. Therefore, qualitative research in tourism is at a productive and dynamic stage of methodological innovation. The current refinement of qualitative research methods and more systematic reflections on how their impacts shape and function industry and global society in general facilitate the development of methods based on tourism and their future integration into a broader cultural and social scope [11].

In addition, the digital age and the internet technology revolution brought about new research opportunities [8].

4 The 4 C's Tourism Destination Competitiveness Matrix

The wide dispersion of issues and the range of approaches makes the investigative process difficult and does not help to organise and systematise research questions; on the other hand, it does not allow, in a simplified way, for destinations to be compared with each other, nor for the opinion of tourists who visit destinations to be compared with the perception of the destination stakeholders, as well as be compared with the opinions of residents in the destination itself – a fundamental part of the pyramid: tourist, manager, resident. In this sense, there was a need to create a tool that would allow for information to be organised and systematised through a survey, and that would allow for questions which are essential to understanding the correlation between the opinion of tourists and stakeholder strategies, to be answered. This new tool should then organise the information and allow quick access to the results.

In the construction of the Matrix, 4 phases were passed (preliminary, preparation, test and evaluation): 1. in the preliminary phase, a theoretical review was carried out on Tourism Destination Competitiveness Models [12]; 2. in the preparation phase, the Delphi method was used, inviting specialists in the field of Economics and Tourism to contribute with their experiences in the construction of the survey instrument [13, 14]; 3. in the test phase, the questionnaire was validated through the Content Validity Coefficient (CVC) [13, 15]; 4. in the evaluation phase, a non-probabilistic approach was used: a convenience sample to gather answers from tourists, residents and managers of the destination [16, 17].

The matrix consists of 4 dimensions: Capacity; Competence; Communication and Creativity of the destination (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. 4 C's Tourism Destination Competitiveness matrix

Data collection is done through a survey consisting of 30 questions, distributed as follows: 9 in the Capacity dimension; 10 in the Competence dimension; 6 in the Communication dimension; 5 in the Creativity dimension. The survey consists of an introductory block: identification of the respondent, another block related to the 4 C's (absolute competitiveness), another for comparison with selected destinations (relative competitiveness) and another related to the destination under study.

The Matrix was built and validated, using the Delphi Panel, and the CVC (Content Validation Coefficient), with the support of several specialists from related sectors. At the end of the construction process, a logo was created for the Matrix, and the patent was registered with the INPI (the Portuguese official patent office).

5 Methodology

To test the 4 C's Matrix, in a real context, a non-probabilistic approach was used - a convenience sample - to obtain answers from tourists, residents and destination managers. 100 responses from tourists, 100 responses from residents and 10 responses from hotel and restaurant managers were collected. The surveys were carried out in person, made available on iPad, between 1 and 27 February 2020, to tourists, residents and managers; all responses were considered valid.

The SPSS statistical analysis software was used to analyse the quantitative responses of the convenience sample. To analyse the answers to the open questions, the qualitative research software webQDA was used.

WebQDA is a qualitative web-based application. It is a simple application that provides essential tools that allow code-based approaches for analysing qualitative data [18], of the CAQDAS type. The computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) extends the possibilities of communication between researchers in the definition of analysis (categorisation, coding and recoding, etc.), which are fundamental for the construction of synthesis and content analysis [19]. Content analysis is a research technique that allows for valid and replicable inferences of the data to be made for its context. Thus, inferences are made about what may affect the type of interpretation of the analysis, based on the establishment of a relationship between the data obtained [20, 21].

In order to proceed with content analysis, the following data were exported to an Excel sheet in two large blocks: 1. Descriptors: Profile of the respondent, nationality, gender, age, marital status, academic background, profession, approximate monthly income, type of traveller (alone or in a group), transport you used to travel, reason for the trip, accommodation in the city, how you booked the accommodation, days spent in the city, total travel budget; 2. Answers to the 5 open questions asked to respondents: What memories will you take away from the city?; What word would you use to describe the city?; What is your opinion about the amount of tourists in Oporto?; What message would you like to leave to the residents of Oporto?; What message would you leave to the Mayor of Oporto, regarding tourism?

After organising the file, data was exported to the qualitative research software webQDA through the 'automatic coding' function.

6 Analysis and Discussion

In order to proceed with content analysis, the following data were exported to an Excel sheet in two large blocks: 1. Descriptors: Profile of the respondent, nationality, gender, age, marital status, academic background, profession, approximate monthly income, type of traveller (alone or in a group), transport you used to travel, reason for the trip, accommodation in the city, how you booked the accommodation, days spent in the city, total travel budget; 2. Answers to the 5 open questions asked to respondents: What memories will you take away from the city?; What word would you use to describe the city?; What is your opinion about the amount of tourists in Oporto?; What message would you like to leave to the residents of Oporto?; What message would you leave to the Mayor of Oporto, regarding tourism?

After organising the file, data was exported to the qualitative research software webQDA through the 'automatic coding' function.

In order to understand and interpret the most frequent words used by the participants in the construction of their sentences, and to therefore facilitate the next step which involves coding, word clouds were built with the support of the software for each answer and group of participants (tourist, resident, manager). The next step involved coding the most relevant ideas conveyed by the participants' responses to each of the questions and their analysis (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Answers spectrum

Question 1 – What memories will you take away from the city?

It is noticed that there is a strong image that tourists take away from the city – welcoming. The following four categories stand out as memories of the destination: identity, culture, history and safety.

Question 2 – A word to describe the city

As can be seen from the word cloud produced using the webQDA software (Fig. 3), the main describers used by the group of tourists were: welcoming, unique, excellent, magnificent.



Fig. 3. World cloud (tourists)

The word cloud related to the group of residents, in turn, highlighted the following words: unbeaten, unique, welcoming, magnificent (see Fig. 4):



Fig. 4. Word cloud (inhabitants)

With regard to the managers group some of the most relevant words to describe the city were: magnificent, welcoming, unbeaten, stunning (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Word cloud (managers)

In this group, it is observed that no word is highlighted (this may be due to the smaller number of respondents).

Question 3 – Opinion about tourism intensity in the city?

Most respondents find that the intensity of tourists in the city is agreeable, as shown in Fig. 6. This is the case for 53.5% of tourists.

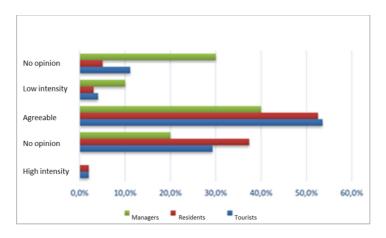


Fig. 6. Intensity of tourists in the city

It should be noted that in the resident's group, the percentage that believe that there are too many tourists is 2%; 37.4% believe that there are a lot of tourists, but 52.5% believe that the intensity is agreeable (see Table 1).

Matrix (E)	Tourists	Residents	Managers
High intensity	2,00%	2,00%	0,00%
Intense	29,30%	37,40%	20,00%
Agreeable	53,50%	52,50%	40,00%
Low intensity	4,00%	3,00%	10,00%
No opinion	11,10%	5,10%	30,00%

Table 1 Answers matrix

It should also be noted that the majority of respondents from the 'tourists' and 'residents' groups expressed an opinion on this question.

Question 4 – What message would you leave to the residents of the city?

This question was, for obvious reasons, asked only to tourists and managers. The results show that tourists are appreciative, as demonstrated in Fig. 7:

Beautiful City
We loved Congratulations
Thank you
We will be back Authentic
Friendly

Fig. 7. Tourists word cloud (message to the residents)

On the other hand, data indicates that the managers focus on the concept of being welcoming, allowing us to infer that their message is intended to motivate residents to continue promoting hospitality or the 'art of welcoming' tourists who visit the city (Fig. 8).

Welcome Visit Open mind
Congratulations
Sense of humor Discover
Tourists Good work
Have fun You're important

Fig. 8. Managers word cloud (message to the residents)

Since the managers groups is less significant in terms of the number of participants and the responses were anonymous, it was decided to transcribe them (see Table 2):

Table 2. Answers matrix (suggestions to the inhabitants/residents)

Sugestions from the managers to the residents		
You should visit the city as a tourist; there is so much to discover		
It's important to konw how to welcome		
Continue with open mind, good mood and the mission to welcome		
Keep the identity		
Have fun		
Visti Oporto, too		
We're on the right path		
Thanks for promoting the city		
You're important to tourism		
North's citizen know how to welcome		

An observation of the content of the responses allows us to infer that, in general, the following aspects are again highlighted: the involvement of residents in promoting the city, the motivation to welcome tourists and acknowledgment.

Question 5 – Message to the mayor of the city

It was interesting to understand what each of the groups would tell the Mayor of Oporto if they had the opportunity. The tourists express their satisfaction (with the work that has been done) and congratulate the Mayor.

Figure 9 shows that tourists leave messages about the intention of returning to the city, about the residents and about the city itself:



Fig. 9. Word cloud (tourists' message to the Mayor of the City)

Residents also highlight the work done in the city and also congratulate the Mayor (Fig. 10):

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Fig. 10. Word cloud (residents'/inhabitants' message to the Mayor of the City)

Residents also highlight the work done in the city, and the group of managers, in addition to congratulating the Mayor, highlight the excellent work done and the need to further promote the city (Fig. 11):



Fig. 11. Word cloud (managers' message to the Mayor of the City)

Overall, the results of the analysis of the five questions allow us to verify that, in most questions there are differences between the perceptions of the three types of respondents (tourists, residents and managers). However, it appears that the managers have, in general, a more optimistic view.

The study allowed us to infer that the opinion of the respondents assumes a significant relevance with regard to their personal view on the matters at hand, clearly justifying the use of content analysis in order to transform this content into topics that may support the definition of policies and the implementation of measures aimed at increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations, as recommended by Given (2008): in the exploration of the human elements of a given topic, in which specific methods are used to analyse how individuals see and experience the world.

In addition to the results of the convenience sample, which do not fail to indicate clues about the competitiveness of this specific destination, the potential of the 4 C's Matrix is highlighted through the simplicity of application and consequent qualitative analysis, foreseeing that it will be possible to obtain even more important and significant results with a larger sample.

7 Final Considerations

Up until the beginning of 2020, the growth of tourism revealed enormous potential to generate wealth and contribute to economic and social development, including that of communities located in remote areas of the world. The growth, thematic scope and attractiveness of the sector are some of the factors that have led to the academic world's growing interest in deepening the scientific study of tourism, leading to an increase both in the study and analysis tools and in the creation of specialised publications.

Technological developments have allowed for the range of sources and samples and the use of technology to collect and analyse data to be increased, including in qualitative research in the tourism sector.

About the creation of the 4 C's Tourism Destination Competitiveness Matrix, it is believed that this new analysis instrument will be highly valid, both to support other researchers in the analysis of TDC destinations, and also to compare the competitiveness between tourism destinations. In addition, the new matrix can be used as a working tool for managers and other tourism stakeholders as a way of understanding the areas in which they should focus their intervention in order to adjust their performance to the opinions and expectations of tourists and residents, such as the aim of increasing their level of satisfaction with the service provided. Furthermore, the 4 C's Matrix can be systematically used.

Once the new matrix was built and validated, it was applied using a convenience sample. The results of the content analysis of the convenience sample allowed for it to be concluded that in all dimensions there are different perceptions, namely between tourists and residents and the managers of the destination; being that the latter, in general, have a more positive or optimistic view than the other respondents.

The sample size used does not allow for more precise conclusions to be drawn; a situation that will naturally change in samples with adequate dimensions. Despite this, the simplicity of the sample's data processing is highlighted, as well as the presentation of the results. The importance of qualitative analysis as an instrument to support research in the tourism sector is also demonstrated.

Furthermore, from the point of view of the results, it is important to emphasise that, in parallel with the competitiveness of the destination, the stakeholders must align their actions in order to guarantee the sustainability of the destination.

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