

Q Methodology – A Systematic Approach for Interpretive Research Design

MA Social Research module

Module Outline

This module provides research students with a comprehensive introduction to Q methodology. Q methodology is a set of research design principles and techniques that allows for a systematic and scientific understanding of subjectivity. The methodology was originally developed by William Stephenson in the 1950s and used for identifying market segments in advertising and communications. For social science, Q methodology offers a means of systematically identifying the range of distinctive subjective standpoints in a given context. Being systematic and interpretive is Q methodology is well suited to postgraduate research either as a standalone research design or offering an injection of systematicity to interview based research or an interpretive supplement to aid survey instrument design. In what is an interactive and hands-on workshop, participants will develop an understanding of the basic principles of Q research design and process from identifying the volume of debate, developing statements, administering a Q sort, conducting and interpreting results using dedicated software. By the end of the workshop, participants will possess the ability to design, administer and interpret a Q methodology research project.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand principles of Q methodology;
- Understand the principles of question sampling in Q survey instrument design;
- Knowledge of participant selection and understanding of the relative opportunities and limitations of administering Q sorts in collective, individual or online settings;
- Knowledge and experience of how to input and manage data and run factor analysis using dedicated Q method software packages;
- Knowledge and experience of interpreting factors and integrating quantitative and qualitative data

Course Assessment

A single 2500 word research report which presents the findings from the in-class research exercise undertaken during the workshop. The in-class research exercise employs Q methodology to systematically map the subjectivity surrounding a current national or local public policy issue.