

Developing Quali-quantitative Research Designs: Why and How

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Abstract

For a long time, there have been felt to be two very opposite research traditions for audience research, operating not just in theatre studies, but elsewhere as well: (a) quantitative, intended for use in getting numbers and patterns (very often to satisfy funding agencies that theatres 'know who their audiences are, where they come from, and what they like'); and (b) qualitative, intended to explore topics where practitioners or researchers aren't sure what audiences might be thinking – so, raising questions and seeking insights. For a long time, the two have been seen as in competition and incompatible with each other – or, seeing the qualitative as just a precursor to the 'serious' business of quantitative sampling. But in the last decade or so, there have been multiple attempts to overcome the split and opposition between these – mainly in the area of film and television studies, via a number of big projects (e.g. the international *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* and ongoing *Game of Thrones* projects; the *Alien* memories project). More recently, a number of smaller studies (including early research on the phenomenon of 'livecasting' theatre into cinemas, and on the emergence of National Theatre Wales) have extended this approach into live performance, consciously combining quantitative with qualitative analyses. We have both been involved in these attempts. But this isn't just about mixing methods (i.e., doing two or more kinds of research alongside each other). It is rather about rethinking and expanding the kinds of questions we want to ask, and the possible ways of answering them. With rare exceptions, these approaches have yet to be systematically adopted within studies of theatre and performance audiences. In this workshop we aim to use practical examples from our own research projects to bring the possibilities, advantages and of course challenges to life – and to think how they might be extended to new issues and questions relating to theatrical audiences.

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