Audience Research Methodologies:
Between Innovation and Consolidation

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We are all aware that the media landscape is transforming, and that this change brings with it problems related to conducting audience research. Contemporary academic discussions on the topic include themes such as the shift from consumption to prosumption, from analogue to digital, and from one audience to several. A well-recognised problem among researchers is that audience behaviour has become harder and harder to grasp. The book *Audience Research Methodologies* is therefore a welcome contribution to the field, in that it explores ways of understanding how people use media and how they construct meaning out of it, as well as ways of developing related research.

The book originated with the conference "New Challenges and Methodological Innovations in European Media Audience Research", which was held in Croatia in 2011; it is based on a selection of papers from the conference. A wide range of topics is discussed in the book, and most chapters take a multi-methodological approach. All chapters include comprehensive literature lists to facilitate further reading.

The editors have taken great pains to design all chapters using similar components: a general description of the chapter's subject, a discussion of related pros and cons as well as the possibilities and limitations that arise with the use of different methodologies, and illustrative case studies. In the introduction, the editors state that the book's aim is to illustrate the dialogues that are increasingly taking place among various research traditions. The book's conclusion warns, however, that its content should not be seen as a replacement of traditional forms of data and methods, but rather as a complement.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the book consists of twelve chapters, which are organised into four sections:

1. Audience Research Methods Between Diversification and Integration
2. Bridging the Gap Between the Researched and the Researcher
3. Studying Online Networks
4. Web 2.0 Technologies As Research Tools

The first section discusses several traditional research methods: participation, in-depth interviews, diaries, electronic tracking, documentary analysis and surveys. The second chapter in particular ("Audience Research Methods") serves as a good overview of these traditional tools.

The second section mainly addresses questions related to action research: how to use participatory design with social networks or museums, or among ethnic minorities. It is a much more narrowly-focused section than the first one, and it drifts rather far away from the book's intention of facilitating dialogue among research traditions. Action research, and how to bridge the gap between researcher and researched, are indeed relevant subjects, but research traditions that maintain wide gaps between researcher and researched also face major challenges in the digital world. A separate discussion of that concern is entirely missing, and would have been valuable.

Sections Three and Four both concern online research. Section Three focuses on the objects of study, while Section Four focuses on the tools that are used. These are the most innovative parts of the book. Even though it is possible to find a lot of articles on these issues in various journals, it is useful to have all of the information gathered in one book. Section Three discusses behaviours as well as attitudes within social networks, as analysed using methods such as creative research, surveys, focus groups, profile analyses, and ethnographies. The fourth section provides the reader with hands-on tools. Even if some of the recommended links and programmes will probably be out of date rather soon—as the authors are very well aware—this section is both inspiring and informative. The way of thinking about digital tools that is presented here, as well as the information given regarding relevant skills (if not to practise oneself, then at least to request from technicians), will not become outdated even if the links will. In these chapters, we learn how different digital platforms work, and how to use APIs (application programming interfaces), which, according to the authors, "are nothing more than huge containers of digital data".

Depending on the reader's prior knowledge and inclinations, the different chapters will be, of course, more or less of interest. I am sure, however, that every researcher can gain inspiration from *Audience Research Methodologies.*

What are the objections then? As already mentioned, the book lacks an in-depth discussion of traditional surveys and experimental research. Both methodologies are mentioned, and surveys are used in several chapters, but little emphasis is placed on traditional quantitative methods, as compared to traditional

qualitative methods. When discussing the former, it is not enough to say that even if it is hard to get representative samples online it is better than using college students, or that results can always be weighted. It is not that simple. In many respects, the book indeed succeeds in its ambition to increase dialogue among research traditions, but the balance of focus given to different traditions is uneven.

Generally, the methods presented are broad: ethnography online and offline, documentary analysis, surveys, in-depth interviews, online tracking, focus groups, diaries, participatory design and creative research (self-created artefacts), profile analyses, APIs, etc. More limited are the media forms used in each analysis. Most chapters address only one media form. Since one of the main methodological problems in audience analysis nowadays is how to investigate multitasking, or how to measure use on different platforms that originates from a common source, it would have been relevant to this book's topic to include a section where this problem was considered.

A third criticism is that when the aim, as here, is to maintain a methodological focus rather than a focus on technical methods, a more extensive and general discussion of samples, generalisable possibilities, etc., is appropriate. This type of discussion can be found in individual chapters, but not generally throughout the book.

However, when something is good, it is always easy to demand more. It was a pure pleasure to read this book, which will be very useful in the field of audience research. I will be putting it in the hands of my students.

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