

Report on participation in the doctoral workshop “Fieldwork in Contemporary Audience Studies”

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The purpose was to attend a workshop for doctoral students: “Fieldwork in Contemporary Audience Studies”. The one-day workshop included four keynote speeches from four professors and lecturers, and then presentations from 11 PhD students and discussions.

The professors’ keynotes covered fieldwork research from several viewpoints. On the one hand, they addressed methodological issues and planning and organising a fieldwork project. On the other hand, their personal experiences of different kinds of research projects and possible difficulties during those gave unique insight into audience research. It is not that common to hear conference presentations about mistakes or learning from them.

The essence of the workshop were inevitably the PhD students’ presentations about their research projects and their questions concerning methods, analysis and theorising their research. As all the participants had been and would be dealing with audience fieldwork, it was easy to relate with both the successes and despairs. The discussions that followed the presentations were extraordinary vivid and rich; with both the respondents’ and students’ contribution.

These kinds of workshops are a luxury, at least from a PhD student’s perspective. Focused and well-prepared feedback, and peer discussions and support are those occasions that advance the research process, and help to see the forest for the trees.

Abstract of my work presented and discussed in the workshop:

Multimethodological challenges in cross-media research: combining data from different methods

Media field is increasingly fragmenting and boundaries between genres are blurring. Personal media landscapes can contain over a hundred media titles. There is a need to understand the whole scope of people’s media use. In my PhD thesis I examine how people engage with media in the cross-media environment, especially with magazines. The data has been collected using four different methods. All in all seven age groups’ media use was studied but in this paper I focus on twelve 45–55 year old readers and non-readers of a Finnish women’s magazine.

Magazine publishers often define media engagement by readership frequency, minutes spent with issue and the percentage of an issue that was actually read (Napoli, 2010). In my research I treat engagement as the readers' relationship with the content, or as the readers' media experiences – such as building identity or getting useful tips (Peck & Malthouse, 2011). Also dimensions of spatial and actual media practices are an important part of media experiences (Schrøder, 2011); reading print magazines in a comfortable laid-back position can be preferred to reading online content in front of a computer, because the reading position is associated with relaxation (Ytre-Arne, 2011).

To examine the various forms of media engagement four qualitative methods were utilised: 1) online media diaries to record the daily media routines; 2) Q-sorting interviews to map the personal media landscapes and the interrelations between media titles; 3) ethnographic observation to reveal the media practices at homes; and 4) reading aloud interviews to examine the readers' relationship with the content in the magazine.

The diversity of the research data presents also challenges. The 'field' could be on one hand the online diaries where the participants speak with their individual ways and voices, and where I also ask questions and give tasks; on the other hand the 'field' are the homes where they show their media practices to the researcher; and furthermore the 'field' can be the pages of the magazine where the reader meanders and reflects out loud her thoughts and feelings. My first question for the workshop is how to connect the different fields, materials and externalisations of media use into coherent definition of engaging with media? How to combine routines, feelings, concrete practices and content? The second question concerns the importance and presence of the fields in the analysis. How clearly should they be described in order to give sufficient information about the context of the methods?

References

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- Schrøder, K. C. (2011). Audiences are inherently cross-media: audience studies and the cross-media challenge. *Communication Management Quarterly*, 18(6), 5-27.
- Ytre-Arne, B. (2011). 'I want to hold it in my hands': readers' experiences of the phenomenological differences between women's magazines online and in print. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(3), 467 - 477.