

**Trena M. Paulus and Jessica N. Lester. (2021).  
*Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World*.  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. VitalSource. Paperback,  
376 pages. (ISBN: 9781544321585)**

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Co-written by two research-methods professionals with extensive teaching experience, *Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World* was published in the timeliest manner, shortly after COVID-19 moved most of social science research and evaluation practice fully online. The book expands and updates Paulus and Lester's earlier work in *Digital Tools for Qualitative Research* (2014).<sup>1</sup> In both publications, the authors advocate for envisioning digital tools as pervading the entirety of the qualitative research process. However, this new volume, which is not a second edition in the traditional sense, signals a move beyond digital tools to include research uses of online spaces and electronic resources. It aims primarily to equip readers with strategies for generating a unique and comprehensive digital workflow across every step of the research process.

Cutting-edge content is what makes this book stand out, with new ideas and important guidance included that is not often found in other methods texts. Although referring mainly to research/researchers, the book offers several fresh perspectives salient to evaluation capacity building that can be harnessed by program evaluators who are interested in developing skill sets to navigate the online/offline nexus in today's digital world. In this review, some of these innovative contributions are highlighted, followed by a description of the ways in which Paulus and Lester have made this book one of the go-to texts for introducing digital qualitative research methods to new audiences.

Two introductory chapters cover the ways in which theories of technology can inform and shape qualitative research design today. A third chapter focuses on one of the most useful novelties offered by this book: the integration of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) across the research process as a way to streamline a digital research workflow in a meaningful way. This third chapter first distinguishes between the main QDAS packages available (including ATLAS.ti, Dedoose, Elan, EXMARaLDA, f4 analyse, Heurist, Hyper RESEARCH, Leximancer, LiGRE, MAXQDA, NVivo, QDA Miner, Quirkos, RQDA, SONAL, Transana, and WebQDA). The chapter then introduces the Five-Level QDA Method developed by [Woolf and Silver \(2018\)](#), which allows researchers to gain clarity on both methodological and analytical intentions before selecting and leveraging the QDAS features that are most useful. Finally, the chapter provides guidance on how to use QDAS software to support all aspects of the research

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process, beyond data analysis, in order to organize and manage project files, engage in teamwork, review literature, generate data with digital tools from digital spaces, transcribe audiovisual data, analyze and interpret sources of data, and write and report findings.

In the following six chapters, Paulus and Lester emphasize the role that technologies can play in qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting processes. Chapter 4 illustrates four phases for creating a fully digital and “paperless” literature review workflow, building primarily on PDF files that are readily accessible in online databases. These four phases cover locating and evaluating relevant resources, storing and organizing these resources, reading and annotating them, and analyzing and synthesizing them. In Chapters 5 and 6, the authors distinguish between pre-existing digital spaces as a potential source of data and the use of digital tools to generate data. More specifically, Chapter 5 explores three ways of treating digital spaces as sources of data: extraction and analysis of websites and other online content, virtual observations of activities naturally taking place in online spaces, and retrieval and analysis of text and image-based interactive online conversations. It illustrates how digital spaces such as GoodReads, Reddit, and Instagram can be treated as sources of qualitative data. Chapter 6 offers a detailed discussion of researcher-influenced data that can be created with the assistance of digital tools. It highlights both the advantages and disadvantages of engaging with online surveys, video-recorders and video-conferencing tools. The following Chapter 7 introduces the ways in which current technological innovations can support the transcription of both audio and video data (with tools such as InqScribe, ExpressScribe, oTranscribe, Trint, Audio Notetaker, and Dragon). With Chapter 8, we arrive at the use of digital tools for data analysis in order to search, annotate, link, code, query, and/or visualize a variety of data types. Finally, before a short concluding chapter, Chapter 9 covers how to select and critique digital tools and spaces for supporting writing (such as Google Docs, Authorea, and Scrivener) and for representing and popularizing findings (with venues such as digitized ethnographies, digital stories, blogs, websites, film and video, and social media platforms such as Twitter).

The book includes several other valuable features. Explicit attention is paid to ethical challenges faced when adopting digital research workflows (from protecting the identity of participants when their voices and faces are part of the data, to treating social media and other online information as sources of data, and uploading data to the cloud beyond the researchers’ direct control). Readers are invited to engage in a critical appraisal of the role of technology, with lists of “reflexivity questions” and brief annotated resources for further reading at the end of each chapter. There are over 40 vignettes written by on-the-ground qualitative researchers who have struggled with methodological entanglements. They bring life to the ideas shared in the book and illustrate the use of digital spaces and tools across a range of disciplines and topics. Each chapter is logically linked to those that precede and follow, building a scaffolded foundation for navigating the text.

I hope the details I provide above demonstrate the value of *Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World*.<sup>2</sup> I recommend this informative methods text for its cutting-edge content, its accessibility, and its thoroughness.<sup>3</sup> Far from being a book for researchers only, it offers useful guidance for evaluators who wish to learn more about how new technologies can transform evaluation practices and be used to create robust evaluation workflows, both in times of COVID-19 and beyond, as we engage new contexts and perspectives and continue to reshape our understanding of “fieldwork.”

## NOTES

- 1 Written together with a third co-author, Paul Dempster.
- 2 Of note, in the past year, Paulus and Lester have presented their book online on at least two occasions: during a webinar held on October 7, 2020, as part of the Fall Qualitative Research & Innovation Webinar Series presented by NVivo and SAGE Publications; and during an online interview with research methods specialist Janet Salmons, held on September 3, 2020, as part of a series for SAGE MethodSpace. Recordings of these events are available on YouTube.
- 3 I would suggest complementing its use with that of [Salmons \(2015\)](#), which provides a “Qualitative e-Research Framework” that offers a conceptual schema of key questions about interrelated facets of qualitative online research. This schema, displayed as a circular system, was designed to facilitate a holistic approach to thinking through all elements of an online study.

## REFERENCES

- [Paulus, T. M., Lester, J. N., & Dempster, P. G. \(2014\)](#). *Digital tools for qualitative research*. Sage.
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