Analytic Procedures

Before we explain our basic exploratory procedures, it is important to emphasise three points:

1. This was not, and never claimed to be, a sample survey which could generate generalisations about the relative frequency of any kinds of responses within the total Game of Thrones (GoT) audience. Rather, the research was designed to allow us to look for patterns, connections and separations within whatever population we managed to recruit (while still knowing that if we managed to recruit good numbers, that would clearly strengthen our confidence in any claims we made).

2. Our research was not hypothesis-driven where, once data-capture was complete, a pre-programmed set of analytic steps would be enacted. Rather, we were driven by certain high-level questions, and it would be a matter of trying out different steps in our analysis, to find out what might be revealed.

3. We were committed from the outset to an overall research design in which quantitative data and qualitative materials could be brought to ‘talk’ to each other, by a variety of analytic stratagems. We were determined that our participants’ ‘talk’ should be much more than illustrative additions to the data. But this also meant that we were not fixated on precise numbers from qualitative explorations. Rather, quantitative results from qualitative materials were provocations to find ways to explore the meanings and feelings associated with those patterns. The various Chapters in our book contain examples of such cascading explorations across and between quantitative and qualitative results.

The design of the questionnaire flowed from these three decisions.

Structure of the questionnaire and database

The Game of Thrones (GoT) questionnaire contained a number of different kinds of question, with resulting different formats of answer within the database:

1. A number of questions used Likert-type scales (asking participants to choose one from a range of five or seven scaled possibilities). In the database these were stored as numbers 1-5/7. (See Questions 1,3,5,20) For a very particular reason one additional question offered six options (see Question 21).

2. A pair of demographic questions asked people to assign themselves according to age and gender. Age asked people to place themselves within 5-year bands, from under 16 to over...
80. Gender asked them to indicate Male or Female or Identify Differently. In each case, these were resolved into numbers in the database. (See Questions 18,19)

3. One question offered a drop-down list of all possible countries, and asked people to indicate where they live. (See Question 22) In the database these appear as the country names.

4. Three questions asked people to select, as appropriate to themselves, from lists ranging from 8 to 13 possibilities. Where the number of options was below 10, answers were assigned numerical values; where they exceeded 10, they were assigned alphabetical values in order not to generate possible confusions. In two of these cases we asked people to limit their choices to three, but did not enforce this for fear of irritating participants who might drop out before completing all the answers (see Questions 10,14). In the third case (Question 17) participants were invited to select as many as they felt applied to them.

Answering the above questions was ‘compulsory’, in the sense that the software would not accept a submission without answers to these questions.

5. All the remaining questions simply invited people to ‘talk’ to us about their feelings, responses and activities around Game of Thrones. No limits were placed on the amount that people could write. Equally there was no requirement to answer such open questions at all. (See Questions 2,4,6,7,8,9,11,12,13,15,16,23,24)

6. In addition to these, the software capturing participants’ responses automatically generated a unique number for each completion. It also generated for each answer a column with a random set of characters which would allow us to randomise lists of answers at appropriate points in our analysis (in order to avoid for instance privileging those who completed the survey first). Unfortunately this did not apply to responses imported from our Spanish colleagues’ website, with a small consequence for how we were able to use this facility within ACCESS, limiting us to using the function ‘Sort Z/A’ against this column. (NB: This facility may not be of use to anyone exporting our materials to other database software.)

Basic analytic procedures
ACCESS permitted us to use, separately and together, two forms of search:

1. Purely computational inquiries, looking at numerical spreads of quantitative responses, and cross-relating them. This was done in the same ways it might be done with any database software.
2. Qualitative enquiries need a little more explanation. Alongside quantitative searches, ACCESS also enables searches for components within participants’ answers, both establishing frequencies and separating out for closer examination the answers containing those components. This is done by the very simple procedure of placing asterisks around the desired element in the Criterion line. A simple example can explain what this involved. We knew that spellings of characters’ names were inconsistent, and open exploration revealed for instance that Daenerys’ name was quite frequently misspelt – but also a considerable number of people preferred to call her either ‘Dany’ or ‘Khaleesi’. To have a working sense of the total number of people naming her as a favourite character, and to be able to access their full answers, it made sense to develop a search string as follows: *daen* or *dany* or *khal*. (None of these abbreviated versions seemed likely to occur in other unrelated words.) Many such search-strings were developed, tested and deployed, both to get a sense of overall numbers, and to isolate those including these ‘mentions’, for the purpose of closer discursive analysis. (See Appendix 2 of our book, for a discussion of the concept of ‘mentions’.)

The same basic facility in ACCESS was also deployed in our analyses of responses to the key Questions 10, 14 and 17, to explore the interrelationships of attitudes to the show, using simple search-strings [eg, *a* and *b*; *a* and *c*; and etc; or *a* and not *b*; *b* and not *a*; and etc.]. Systematic exploration of the full sets of these allowed us to discover some strong – and surprising – patternings of responses, many of which are reported and discussed in our book.

Beyond these foundational analyses, a great deal of our explorations was conducted through the creation and testing of such search-strings, allowing us to isolate and sample (using the randomising column) materials for close discursive analysis.

For further details, please look in particular at Chapter 2 of Watching Game of Thrones. For any queries about the database and ways of delving into it, please contact:

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