

## Extended Mission Statement

*Research Network: Mixed Methods and Multi-Method Social Research – An Interdisciplinary Network on the Methodology and Applications of Integrative Research Methods*

Visit: <https://www.hsu-hh.de/methoden/en/mixed-methods-network>

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## Mission Statement

The research network *Mixed Methods and Multi-Method Social Research* works to improve the quality and prevalence of empirical social research combining different (qualitative and/or quantitative) methods approaches. Network activities aim to increase the visibility and intensity of scientific debate in three main areas: Investigating the methodological and epistemological groundwork of method integration, advancing integrative research methods and design, intensifying dialog across methodological, disciplinary, and regional divides. The network proceedings are guided by an inclusive *concept of mixed methods and multimethod research* (MMMR), and the definition of three *main project goals* as outlined below.

## Concept of Mixed Methods and Multimethod Research

In accordance with popular definitions, we view MMMR as the combination of different empirical research methods with the goal of increasing the validity and innovative potential of social research (cf. Johnson et al. 2007, pp. 123). Such combination especially, but not exclusively, involves *qualitative and quantitative* methods approaches. We follow the now widely accepted terminological convention of referring to combinations of qualitative *and* quantitative research as “mixed methods”, whereas combinations of qualitative *or* quantitative methods are termed “multimethod research” (Fetters/Molina-Azorin 2017, pp. 5). However, given the fuzziness of the qualitative-quantitative distinction and the considerable heterogeneity *within* the qualitative and quantitative camps, we also acknowledge other terminological conventions, e.g. the use of “multimethod research” as an overall term for integrative research (e.g. Goertz 2017; Brewer/Hunter 2006, pp. 4). Method combinations may involve a greater or lesser extent of method integration, resulting in different degrees of interaction between the strands of a research design. Generally, integration is not limited to technicalities of data collection and analysis but potentially encompasses all aspects of research design, including substantive theory as well as epistemological and normative stances.

Our notion of MMMR builds on the assumption that there are no essential, incommensurable differences in the epistemological and methodological groundwork of various (qualitative and

quantitative) approaches to empirical social research. Despite the immense heterogeneity in the methods and methodology field, distinct methodological approaches resemble variations over the same methodological themes, rather than radically opposing dogmas. Among such common themes are the pursuit of a close connection between theoretical constructs, empirical operationalizations, and data (Kelle 2006, pp. 300), the linking of intensive within-case and extensive cross-case inference (Goertz 2017), and the balancing of “imagination” (discovery, innovation) and “rigor” (testing, corroboration) in empirical research (Abbott 2004, pp. 3 ff.).

However, we do not propose a universal methodological or epistemological framework for MMMR, but acknowledge the diversity of various integrative and mono-methods traditions. Their specific strengths should be utilized to increase the scope and validity of empirical social research (Kelle/Erzberger 2003), rather than be assimilated into one unified model of research methodology. We view MMMR as the domain for an integrative dialog between different methods approaches.

At the same time, the field of MMMR has itself differentiated into a multitude of methodological frameworks. This situation is complicated further by the influence of disciplinary divides, i.e. there is systematic variation in what MMMR means in the fields of political science, educational research, psychology, etc. Along with such conceptual differences, the popularity and prevalence of MMMR also varies in different research areas.

Given this diversity of (mono-)methods traditions, we are skeptical about the idea of MMMR as a “third research paradigm” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie 2004) or “third research community” (Teddlie, Tashakkori 2009, p. 3). While we appreciate the successful efforts to establish MMMR as a distinctive and recognized branch of social research methodology, we are concerned that MMMR might be turning into a methodological niche and ‘orthodoxy’ of its own – quite ironically so, given its initial ambitions to overcome methodological traditionalisms (cf. Maxwell 2018).

We believe method integration should neither be conceived as an alternative research program next to existing mono-method approaches, nor should it aspire to supersede or replace them as some sort of super-methodology (Maxwell 2011; Hammersley 2002; Kelle 2017). Hence, we view method integration as a search for similarity and complementarity in methodological difference, but also a search for difference in methodological unity.

With regard to the practical application of research methods, MMMR means paying close attention to the conceptual underpinnings of a given research question and its epistemological and methodological implications, looking for threats to validity specific to the empirical methods chosen, and finding ways to overcome them through method combination (Kelle 2001).

## **Project Goals and Network Activities**

From the network’s perspective on MMMR outlined above follow three main goals. Firstly, network activities are designed to increase exchange and dialog between mixed researchers across different methodological, disciplinary, and regional communities. The principal means to achieve this goal are different workshop and conference formats, particularly our biannual workshop meetings with international guest experts. Also, network activities will conclude with an international conference on mixed methods and multimethod research.

Secondly, network activities serve to initiate and support original research by network members, ideally but not exclusively with an interdisciplinary orientation. Such original work may include methodological research on method integration as well as substantial research applying MMMR-designs. One important objective is to promote research that contributes to a “methodological ethnography” of the current prevalence, quality, and actual practice of MMMR across varying fields and disciplines. Publications should be oriented towards an English-speaking audience to provide international visibility.

Thirdly, the immediate results of network activities, such as presentations and working papers presented at the workshops, are available as a resource for research and teaching in the field of method integration. In addition to publications by the network members, the main means for achieving this goal are the documentation of network activities via the network website, as well as the multiplication of network results through members’ conference participations and teaching.

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