

CHAPTER THREE

3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction: the qualitative research paradigm

This chapter discusses the planning and execution of the study and the overall research design. The study adopts a qualitative research design. The qualitative design is a holistic process of inquiry that seeks “to *understand* a social or human problem” *rather than being* “based on *testing a theory* composed of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures,” as occurs in the quantitative research design (Creswell, 1994, pp. 1-2, own emphasis). This study uses the “extended-case studies” approach (Babbie, 2007, p. 298) that seeks to investigate, analyse, and interpret contingency relationships¹ among variables such as “news agencies,” “news flows,” “globalisation,” and “a changing global news environment,” instead of setting out to “prove” a cause-effect relationship between variables as quantitative research designs generally do.

Various assertions are made in congruence with this interpretive method of analysis, which propose that internal and external pressures are influencing these news organisations and fundamentally affecting their structures and the nature of news in the selection and production processes. As part of the extended-case studies methodology, in chapter 2 and later chapters the importance and significance of news agencies is discussed. This study therefore seeks not to “prove” the existence of external and internal pressures, but to identify these pressures as intrinsic in the current global socio-economic world order (i.e., under global market capitalism) and as influencing the structures, operations, and relationships of these news agencies.

Qualitative research presents a complex set of issues (and key variables or themes, or both) and seeks to draw conclusions based on inferences from manipulating the data. The approach and method is “inductive” and, as stated in Creswell (1994),

¹ A contingency relationship is based on understanding the relationships between two variables based on simultaneously introducing further variables. It relies on the interpretive method of analysis. See Neuman (2006:87-88, 477-478) and Babbie (2007).

“qualitative studies, because of the inductive, evolving methodological design, may include few terms defined at the beginning of the plan; terms may be defined as they emerge from the data collection” (p. 107) (italics in original text). Punch (1998) furthermore states, “Qualitative questions require qualitative methods and data to answer them” (p. 3). In this study, the qualitative research paradigm proves more appropriate than the quantitative paradigm to investigate the kinds of research questions provided in the introduction to the study. Furthermore, words rather than numbers or quantified data for a counting exercise form the basis of this qualitative inquiry (Babbie, 2007, p. 23; Creswell, pp. 1-2, p. 5; Punch, p. 3).² The words, which formulate the ideas and responses of interviewees, were obtained by conducting in-depth and open-ended interviews with them.³ This data is then put through a rigorous inductive analysis in the process of concept building and formulating themes. The three next chapters describe and discuss various conceptual and thematic arrangements arising from an analysis of the data at length. Below, a systematic description is given of how the research methodology⁴ and study was executed.

A number of case studies—namely, news agencies—form the basis for the enquiry. Citing the original idea from Stake (1994), Baxter and Babbie (2004) describe the use of a number of case studies as “a collective-case studies [approach], in which a number of cases are studied for the insights they provide into the broader category of similar cases” (p. 304). In other words, from studying a number of news agencies, one can establish how their structures and operations are similar or different and whether they all follow the same or different journalistic practices in news selection and production. The focus, however, is on the relationships that agencies enter into, and their selection and operation processes are elements in observing these relationships.

² Valuable information in Creswell (1994:5) is provided on the essential differences between the *qualitative* and *quantitative* research *paradigms*.

³ Neuman (2006:304-308) provides a detailed procedure on doing in-depth interviewing, as does Babbie (2007:305-312). There outlines were followed more or less in the fieldwork over the two years of data collection.

⁴ Creswell (1994:7) defines a “methodology” as “the entire process of a study”.

Baxter and Babbie (2004, p. 304) explain how the collective-case studies approach typically unfolds. In observing collective-cases, the researcher presents a detailed description of each case *separately*, which is known as “a within-case analysis” (ibid.). An in-case analysis is presented in chapter 4 where each of the news agencies is considered separately in order to give a full description of each news agency. The next step is doing a “thematic analysis across [the] cases,” which is referred to as “a cross-case analysis” (p. 304). From the *indiscriminate mass of data* collected in the field, a thematic analysis or cross-case analysis is presented in chapters 5 and 6 where emerging themes are looked at across each of the cases. In these chapters, various themes are produced/or induced from the original data of the interview transcripts after the researcher closely sorted and placed relevant categories into groups. The research questions provided a framework for sorting and finding relevant themes. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide discussions of the “contingency relationships” amongst news agencies. In amassing large amounts of data, the qualitative researcher plays a more involved and significant role than the quantitative researcher in formulating new categories from the undifferentiated mass of interview transcripts, as it is expected in qualitative research (Babbie, 2007, pp. 379-380, p. 384).

The collective-case studies approach adapts the principle applied by Burawoy et al. (1991) that suggests a relationship between the case study method and theory. It is used to address flaws in previous studies (Babbie, 2007, p. 298). Burawoy and his colleagues (1991)⁵ and Burawoy (1998) refer to this as an “extended case method,” which seeks to extend or “discover flaws in, and then modify, existing social theories” (Babbie, p. 298). The research is descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory. It describes the findings of previous related studies (on the topic), it seeks to discover new patterns that may have emerged from the data, and it explains the

⁵ According to Babbie (2007:298), ‘Burawoy sees the extended case method as a way to rebuild or improve theory instead of approving or rejecting it.’ In using this method, the researcher therefore looks ‘for all the ways in which observations conflict with existing theories’ and what Burawoy et al (1991:10) calls ‘theoretical gaps and silences’.

significance/meaning of these findings through an examination of the relationships amongst news agencies based in South Africa in how they operate in news selection, production, and exchange.

3.2 Data collection and analysis: the inductive approach

The researcher gained entry to the field to conduct face-to-face interviews with agency personnel at the various news agencies and news bureaus⁶ and for observation purposes. Babbie (2007) explains that data-collection in qualitative field research is typically “used to make sense out of an ongoing process that cannot be predicted in advance” (p. 286). This is different from positivist/quantitative research in which the researcher has predefined hypotheses and merely wants to test these. Babbie’s (p. 286) explanation resonates with that of Neuman’s (2006) regarding qualitative field investigation. Neuman (2006) states that “[q]ualitative researchers do not narrowly focus on a specific question, but ponder . . . in an inquisitive, open-ended settling-in process as they *adopt a perspective*” (p. 15) (*italics in original text*).

In qualitative research, the related processes of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data is not necessarily a chronological, step-by-step process as it tends to be in the quantitative research design (Neuman, 2006, p. 15). Instead, Neuman (p. 15) explains that all three processes of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation occur simultaneously, in a back and forth motion between each of the steps in the research process. The qualitative researcher is also likely to build new theory as well as draw on and update existing theory during these steps. This back and forth motion provides a systematic technique for investigation that uses an inductive⁷ approach (Babbie, 2007, p. 22, pp. 52-54; Neuman, pp. 58-61).

⁶ The only exception or case in which the researcher did not conduct a face-to-face interview but relied on telephone interviews was that conducted with the respondent from the Pan African News Agency in Dakar, Senegal. A lack of resources did not allow the researcher to travel and stay in Senegal.

⁷ Induction involves a reasoning process that begins from specific observational cases to see whether these cases can explain a situation. In this study, the specific cases for observation are news agencies from the points of views of those who work at these organisations.

Qualitative methodology predominantly uses an inductive process of theory building rather than the “hypothetico-deductive” method of theory testing that quantitative methodology favours (Charmaz, 2006; Kelle, 2005, [paragraph 26]). This study relies on an inductive method because it seeks to explore and understand the changes at and relationships among news agencies. The outcome is “adaptive tendencies” in light of social changes. The researcher maintains that previous studies’ findings are looked at either for newer findings (i.e., to update or extend) or in new ways (i.e., to build new insights into the existent knowledge). The use of induction is such that the data collected seeks to offer different or new foci and explanations for the phenomenon being studied (i.e., news agencies). Concepts that emerge with this method, that appear even in previous studies, are reconfigured. That is, they are put together in a different and original way to extract newer meanings and insights.

While previous studies identify and use the terms “niche” and “competition” (Rantanen, 2004; Schudson, 2000), they do not discuss these in relation to the “adaptive strategies” of news agencies that this study introduces and explains. This method of identifying, using, and renewing existing terms and “old” concepts in a novel way is synonymous with a dialectical method of analysis. In this manner, old themes and concepts are “renewed” in light of different (identified) research problems and questions. Burawoy et al. (1991) developed this as the extended-case study approach.

This study develops the term “adaptive strategies” to refer to how news agencies, faced with external and internal pressures, adapt to their current circumstances in order to maintain their operations. That same term is also used in this study to extend previous studies on news agencies. It is used to extend our understanding of “global news flows” and the position of news agencies in this. Agencies, therefore, are seen to adapt and/or adjust their operations and structures in the face of new, challenging social conditions.

In previous studies, no clear associations were made between the external (and internal) pressures on news agencies to adapt and, under extreme conditions, to undergo change. For example, while previous studies identify a dual-function news model at the Reuters agency, they do not relate this to adaptations of the agency to various constraining factors. In another more recent example, in late 2009, AP news bureau in Germany had to sell their operations there due to internal operational and financial constraints and external pressures on American newspapers under the current economic recession (AP Bureau Editor, 2009). The study presents such changes as new insights to explain the influence of a changing news environment on the (necessary) adaptations at news agencies.

The “regionalisation of news flows” through the expansion of news agency bureaus across continents is another addition to re-formulating previous studies’ findings as explained later on in chapter 5 as the prevalence of news bureaus across different geo-political locations. The term “regionalisation of news” is used in conjunction with the explanation of an increasingly competitive global news environment together with the external pressures, such as the diffusive use of digital (and online) technologies, that encroach on the more traditional (newspaper formats) operations of the news agencies’ news production processes.

3.2.1 In-depth, open-ended interviews

Primary data collection methods included the qualitative field interview and direct observation in the field. The main method for generating data was in-depth, face-to-face, open-ended interviews conducted at participating news agencies. These included SAPA, Reuters, the AP, AFP, the DPA, and the IPS. Two telephone interviews with the PANA were also conducted.⁸ The main interviewees included the news editors and bureau chiefs at these news agencies as they are considered to be in a position to speak with authority on their specific organisation’s operations, organisational

⁸ Two telephone interviews were conducted with the Pan African News Agency (PANA), which does not have a bureau in South Africa and has its headquarters in Dakar, Senegal.

structure, news policies, and news structures.⁹ Newsroom journalists¹⁰ were also interviewed when they were present and accessible to the researcher.

3.2.2 Secondary data

Secondary data collection was important to this study for two reasons. Firstly, secondary sources were widely consulted to support arguments in the absence of conducting content analysis of news content. Secondly, secondary data consisted of reviewing related documents in the operations at news agencies including annual reports, newsroom diary pages (see Appendix 2), pages of newsroom codes (Appendix 3a & 3b), and archival material. Online Internet sources were also consulted and included the professional websites produced by the various news agencies (see bibliography section). Other important secondary documents provided to the researcher by one of the news agencies (SAPA) included the general manager's annual reports from August 1939 to August 1956. The SAPA editor could not provide any of the later dated annual reports, as this would have breached the ethical practices at that newsroom. For the same reason, none of the other participating news agencies provided official documents concerning strategic operations at their news organisations. News agencies are competitors, and official documents may contain sensitive information that one news organisation would not want another to access.

Several information brochures from two other participating news agencies, the IPS and the DPA, were provided to the researcher. Annual reports, such as those supplied by SAPA, were important. For instance, they helped to validate the historical relationship between the SAPA and the Reuters' news agency, which was mentioned in several of the earlier annual reports dating back to 1939.

⁹ The terms 'journalist', 'correspondent' and 'reporter' are all used interchangeably in the study. They were referred to by the actual respondents during interviews in an interchangeable manner.

¹⁰ In the case of the South African news agency, interviews were also conducted with newsroom journalists because of their availability during field visits.

In previous studies (Sreberny & Stevenson, 1997; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985), the main method of data collection was content analysis of newspapers' news content. These previous studies also employed small teams of researchers all contributing over an extended period (more than four years) in conducting their research, drawing up their findings, and reporting the results. These were studies commissioned and funded by the international non-government organisation, UNESCO. The studies also often used triangulated methods of data collection and analysis.

In this study, choosing the qualitative interview over content analysis was based on a distinction made between the content of texts—as in newspaper reports, which is not the primary data for analysis here, given the research questions—and the content of interview transcripts, which are the primary data sources. The medium for data analysis is the transcript of interviews with news editors and bureau staff. In this study, a triangulated approach was not feasible under the constraints of a fixed budget and limitations placed on a single researcher's time in the field. The empirical observations extended over at least two years, from November 2005 to November 2007. Collating, coding, analysing, and interpreting the data (i.e., formulating conceptual and theory-based themes) took several months to complete. Appendices 4 and 5 give some indication of the mountainous and detailed work required before actual thematic categories were found in the data.

The importance of the difference between the methodology of previous studies and this one, however, is based, more importantly, on the focus of the study and its central method of investigation, which is based on a qualitative paradigm. The qualitative researcher wants to interrogate the relationships between news agencies within the current contextual changes of a global news environment, described under the phenomenon/concept of globalisation. The researcher also wants to explore the nature of these relationships in order to shed new light on changes at these organisations—what these are and the impact of these on the news product. For

instance, of interest were news agencies' inability to accommodate investigative journalism, the commoditisation of the product (i.e., news), and the homogenisation of news based on routine news values. Interviews with news agency personnel is a better method than content analysis to shed light on the kinds of changes at their organisations and how this is having an impact on their operations (e.g., cutbacks in staff).

For the present study, content of news reports and news copy were not the ideal means for drawing out the relationships among news agencies and were not suited to the focus of the research. This focus is on examining the relationships among news agencies under conditions of external and internal pressures from a changing news environment. These relationships are important to explaining news flows, which in turn explain the dissemination and impact of information in societies. Journalists and media practitioners speaking about these relationships themselves, however, are seen as congruent to the purpose of the study. The scope of the study is to enable a complete and better understanding of the relationships amongst news agencies. It is particularly concerned with the altered and shifting global landscape—socially, culturally, politically and economically—as a phenomenon described under the process of globalisation (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998; Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992).

3.2.3 Purposive sampling (or theoretical sampling)

The sampling method used in the field was purposive or judgemental sampling.¹¹ Neuman (1994) describes purposive sampling as based on the researcher's initiative

¹¹ As a matter of importance, I mention here that my attempts to get the reactions, opinions and comments from the Pan Africa News Agency by telephone calls and e-mails proved somewhat futile. The head-office representative (deputy editor) whom I spoke with telephonically to Senegal was not willing to give the contact details of a PANA journalist based in South Africa over the telephone, and a request in an e-mail to have the contact details was ignored. In one of the telephone conversations (I contacted PANA to Senegal twice by telephone) the issue of payment was mentioned with regard to the participation of PANA in this study. When the participant was informed that participation in the study was voluntarily requested from news agencies and that the interview would be used solely for study purposes, the cooperation was limited and no interest in the follow-up interview was given.

or judgement in identifying “particular types of cases [or individuals] for in-depth investigation” (p. 198). The purpose and nature of the study took precedence over, for instance, having to avoid the kind of sampling bias or sampling error that quantitative procedures take into account (see Babbie, 2007, pp. 184-7 on differences between quantitative and qualitative sampling).

A total of twenty-three interviews were conducted with journalists, editors, sub-editors, bureau chiefs, and an intern at four global (international) news agencies,¹² one nationally based news agency, a continental news agency, and with the IPS, which is considered to be a global “alternative information provider and service.” Demographically, the sampling frame (based on the purposive sampling technique) produced mainly male participants and mainly Caucasians. The entire sampling frame consisted of 23 participants.

3.2.4 Field interview procedure

In initially contacting various respondents to participate in the study, the researcher provided background information regarding the study, the reasons for the interview, as well as the researcher’s particulars. Participation was voluntary, and the “rights” of the participants to anonymity and such were provided in a letter of invitation from the institution at which the researcher is registered. Before entering the field to conduct face-to-face interviews, the researcher conducted an online Internet search of the individual websites of the news agencies for background information. This was to give the researcher a broader scope and an overview of the agency and its bureaus located in Southern Africa. It was also done to find the contact details of the agencies based in South Africa. The SAPA website provided some information about the organisation, its structure and activities, subscriptions, and membership fees and

Further e-mails requesting voluntary input on an open-ended questionnaire were also ignored. The e-mailed questionnaire covered issues that arose from the previous interviews, including government interference in the media in Africa, the funding of PANA and its pitted history, in the opinion of some of the other news agencies, as an unsuccessful attempt at an African continental news agency.

¹² The Bloomberg financial agency and news provider, the main competitor of Reuters, declined to participate in the study requiring senior authorisation to do so from the head office in New York.

policies. It also gave the contact details and the physical address of the agency. Websites of the other news agencies had similar and general information as well as daily news website pages.

The various news agencies were then contacted telephonically to set up appointments for the face-to-face (informal, open-ended, and unstructured) interviews. In the case of the German news agency, the researcher set up the appointment in person. Twenty-three interviews were conducted at seven news organisations including the international, national, and continental news agencies and the alternative news provider with international status. In the case of SAPA, some of these face-to-face interviews were conducted back-to-back on the same day with newsroom journalists who were doing shift work at the time of the researcher's visits.

The researcher transcribed each interview, which was then returned to the relevant participant via electronic mail for them to check the accuracy of the content and correct any errors such as ambiguities arising from the researcher's interpretation or from the voice-recording equipment. Obtaining feedback from participants also included clarifying that the researcher could use the contents of the transcript in the analysis and write-up of the findings yielded from the study. In other words, participants granted their permission for the use of the interview for the purposes of this study. Authors such as Babbie (2007), Creswell (1994), and Punch (1998) refer to this within the "ethical dimension" and considerations in doing qualitative field research.

Other peripheral information was recorded in field notes during the interviews such as activities in the newsrooms, the number of journalists present, and the interviewees' reactions or non-reactions to questions. These notes included information on the surrounding location, offices, office space, office setup, equipment/technologies, and the demographics of "visible" personnel.

3.2.5 Reliability and validity

It is important to note that related issues of validity and reliability may characterise the nature of a qualitative research design. Reliability questions the application of methods in gathering and producing the same data under the same conditions. Technically, the same kind of in-depth and detailed information will be collected with open-ended interviewing. However, the content at the outcome of each interview may differ, depending on whether the same respondents were interviewed, the (changing) context, and the content of the interview questions.

The quality of measurement regarding reliability suggests that the same form of data (not necessarily the same content) would have been collected in each of several other observations using the same method of in-depth interviewing. Hence, the primary method of qualitative interviewing used in the study is a reliable tool as far as it has produced what the researcher hoped it would produce, which was detailed and rich information relevant to the investigation. The intention in the investigation is that a further and fuller understanding of the meanings of the relationships among news agencies and the implications of this with regard to the phenomenon of globalisation and global market capitalism is established.

The validity of the study questions whether the assumptions and conclusions drawn by the researcher tally with the initial research problem and whether the findings are comprehensible (Babbie, 2007, pp. 143-149). Even if the methods of data collection have high reliability, it may not mean that these methods are the best in producing the most valid conclusions in an enquiry. The methods of qualitative interviewing and observation used in the study are valid because they produce data relevant to the investigation and to understanding and grappling with the identified problem being investigated. The measurement tool, which is the respondents' views based on the issues that they raise in the context of the research, is a valid measure of the research problem. Ultimately, the question of validity in this study suggests that the respondents have little, if any, reason at all to lie about their own views on the work

that they do and the operations of their organisations. The researcher also crosschecked (triangulated) with annual reports and other related documents that some of the respondents themselves provided.

3.3 Data processing and secondary analysis: open coding and the “constant comparative method” in developing thematic questions

According to Charmaz (2006, p. 3), the coding process entails attaching labels or codes (such as a descriptive term) to segments of the data. Codes are used to represent what that particular segment in a data text is about. Coding is used in order for the text to be “distilled,” and it allows the researcher to get a handle on large amounts of data when analyzing the data and making comparisons between segments of the text (pp. 2-3). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 61), coding is a process of analysing data. Various levels and step-by-step procedures for coding the text are presented so as to, firstly, manage the large amounts of the data and make sense of them and to, secondly, identify recurrent and “emerging” (Glaser, 1978) themes and concepts, which are then assigned a code and categorised. Glaser and Strauss (1967) call the initial coding phase “open coding”¹³ and state that it involves “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (as cited in Strauss & Corbin, p. 61).

Open coding is a first scrutiny (and an accurate reading) of the text, which could be field notes, interview transcripts, or related documents. The data is “broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). This phase begins a process of conceptualising the data (i.e., forming concepts), then grouping concepts, and then assigning them to categories that are given a conceptual name.

¹³ Also see Neuman’s (2006: 461-464) explanation of “open coding”, “axial coding” and “selective coding”.

Naming a category can involve creative imagination and logic with regard to the data content, but names can also “come from the pool of concepts that a researcher already has from the disciplinary and professional reading” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 67-68). Strauss and Corbin call these “literature-derived concepts” (p. 68). A third way of naming a conceptual category is to allow the respondents’ own words and phrases to come through in the text and be used (p. 69).

Various coding strategies in this initial phase are used for developing concepts and assigning concepts to categories. Strauss (1987, p. 28) suggests a “line by line scrutiny of the text,” which is the generative way to derive concepts. Another strategy involves reading blocks of text, such as sentences or paragraphs, and conceptualising the overall meaning of that segment. A third strategy is reading the entire document (e.g., a complete transcript) and then comparing it with another (like) document (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 72-73).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 61), categories provide a classification of concepts, which are “discovered” when text segments and coded concepts are compared against each other. Categories have “conceptual power because they are able to pull together around them other groups of concepts or subcategories” (p. 65). The researcher usually identifies subcategories in the data when the general properties¹⁴ (i.e., attributes or characteristics) and the dimensions¹⁵ (i.e., the depth or extent) of a category are worked out from the data (pp. 69-70).

Throughout the coding process, a constant back and forth comparison between segments of the data (e.g., comparing the contents of one respondent’s interview transcript with the contents of another) takes place. This enables the researcher to

¹⁴ A property is a description of the characteristics of a category. For example, the category ‘colour’ can be described in terms of its properties of ‘intensity’, ‘hue’, ‘shade’, and so forth, Strauss and Corbin (1990: 70-71).

¹⁵ Dimensions of a category relates to its properties. For example, the category ‘colour’ has the properties ‘shade’ and ‘intensity’, and in terms of the dimensions of these properties, a ‘shade’ or ‘hue’ can be light or dark; the intensity, high or low.

identify similar concepts and phrases in the same context in which they are used in various responses to a particular question. This comparative procedure referred to by Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 101-116) as “the constant comparative method” allows the researcher to begin to formulate categories and descriptions of segments of text that are then assigned a category name (Babbie, 2007, pp. 380-381).

“Questioning the data” or developing further questions from the data goes hand in hand with the constant comparative method. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that “[t]he purpose behind the use of questioning is to open up the data [to] think of potential categories, their properties and dimensions” (p. 77). They also help the researcher to ask more focussed questions in the next or follow-up interview.

Overall, the coding process does not occur in a vacuum. Kelle (2005), for instance, maintains, “Strauss and Corbin (1990) take into account the fact that any empirical investigation needs an explicit or implicit theoretical framework which helps to identify categories in the data and to relate them in meaningful ways” ([paragraph 16]). The concept of “theoretical sensitivity” developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later adopted by Strauss and Corbin (1990) further explains the coding process and the next level of coding, axial coding. This second level of coding situates the researcher in the research process and in relationship to the phenomenon being investigated because meanings and their importance begin to be drawn out in the data.

3.3.1 Theoretical sensitivity

Denzin and Lincoln (2003b, pp. 31-38) describe qualitative research as beginning with the researcher and the researcher’s perceptions, self-reflection, and self-assessment of him or herself within the socio-historical context (as cited in Neuman, 2006, pp. 14-15). The research process also becomes an acknowledgement of the researcher’s place in society (i.e., to impart information that will, among other things, be useful) (p. 15). This resonates well with the description of developing theoretical

sensitivity. Charmaz (2006) describes the entire grounded theory process as a method that “allows the researchers to control their research process and to increase the analytic power of their work” (p. 6). A researcher does not approach the analysis of the data in a “tabula rasa” way, but instead relies on “theoretical sensitivity” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Charmaz (2006) believes that the researcher, the research process, and the research subject matter are all “part of the world” and that one “constructs” one’s theory “through past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 10). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), “theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness [in the researcher] of subtleties of meaning [in the] data” (p. 41). This awareness comes from information in the internal and external environments of the researcher (i.e., their disposition towards the area of study as well as their grasp of previous relevant theoretical knowledge). This awareness may influence how theory may be constructed from the analysis of data.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 42), the source for developing theoretical sensitivity of the researcher includes reading relevant literature “on theory, research and documents,” and this familiarity produces a “rich background of information that sensitizes” the researcher to the phenomena in question. Kelle (2005) notes that “it is impossible to free empirical observation from all theoretical influence since already seeing [or, one’s analytical ability] is a theory-laden undertaking” ([paragraph 5]). As Corbin states, “Doing qualitative research is something that a researcher has to feel him- or herself through. It is not something that can be dictated” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. x).

3.3.2 Axial coding: a process of re-integrating categories and subcategories

Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to the second, and higher (or more complex), level of analysis in coding the text (and the actual start of theory development and

construction) as “axial coding.” Axial coding is defined as “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (p. 96). This describes how “emergent categories [identified in the open coding phase] are related to their subcategories by means of a model [called] the ‘paradigm model’¹⁶” (p. 11).

In a simplified discussion (here), the researcher explains how the “paradigm model” may be applied in this study: the “specific conditions” refer to socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions that give rise to the phenomenon of globalisation. These conditions are also conceptualised as global capitalism, which is specified as more than a mere economic concept and system; it involves political decision-making and cultural production as well. In turn, the concept of globalisation is described with certain “properties and dimensions” that may be inferred rather than directly observed. It is inferred within the context of “specific sets of conditions” (e.g., the integration of nations or fluidity of communications across nations—because of technologies) in which “actions and interactions” take place.

To illustrate, globalisation in the 20th century is said to be a condition of more intense competition and the proliferation of cultural products and intense integration and cooperation amongst nations. Intensity and proliferation are properties and dimensions that describe the condition of globalisation. The fourth aspect of the

¹⁶ Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) application of axial coding in the coding process uses a ‘coding paradigm’ which comprises of four items; causal conditions, context, action/interactional strategies, and consequences (Babbie 2007: 296-297, 380-381). These assist the researcher to conceptualise their data and specify concepts thereby making relationships between categories and subcategories easier to identify. Strauss and Corbin explain these four items (1990, pp. 96) as follows: causal conditions refer to events that lead to an occurrence or to the development of a phenomenon. A phenomenon, in turn, is a ‘central idea, event, happening or incident about which a set of actions or interactions are directed at managing, handling, or to which the set of actions is related’. The second item, the context, refers to a specific set of properties that relate to a phenomenon. The context locates events that relate to a phenomenon along a dimensional range. ‘Context represents the particular set of conditions within which the action/interactional strategies are taken’. There may also be ‘intervening conditions’ brought about by actions/interactional strategies that are taken. These actions/interactional strategies, the third item, are devised to manage, carry out or respond to a phenomenon under a set of perceived [intervening] conditions. Finally consequences, refer to the outcomes or results of actions and interactions (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp. 96-97).

paradigm model is “the consequences” (although this is not to be taken as a “causal” or linear process) or what the researcher is seeking to understand and explain.

News flow (i.e., information) is seen as a central feature of the phenomenon of globalisation. If globalisation is conceptualised as the compression of time and space and as the further integration of the world, information is central in both facilitating this compression and in maintaining the conditions (integration) for it. For example, news agencies are information wholesalers that supply information (news) that is relevant and contributory to flows of information. The more information that a group of people has at their disposal about other groups of people, the more likely will they be to understand the actions and orientations of the other group (or to formulate perceptions about the other group). This supports, and in some way validates, the phenomenon of globalisation (a process of integration). However, under certain conditions (brought about by global capitalism, in turn brought about by other conditions), news agencies have also had to alter their roles and relationships so as to fulfil their main *raison d’être* as well as to survive under changing conditions.

News agencies then respond to or strategise how to manage these external and their own internal changes, and in doing so, they indirectly affect changes in the phenomenon of globalisation (either to constrain or to assist it). The grand outcome is a fundamental shift or change in the nature of agencies brought on by certain conditions—intervening conditions resulting in further changes, for instance—in the news product and the kind of information that they relay, which has a further impact on the phenomenon of globalisation.

3.3.3 Selective coding and the use of memos and computer technology in integrating categories

The third stage in the coding process proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) is the selective coding phase. The researcher begins actual theory development at this stage. Strauss and Corbin define selective coding as “the

process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships [by asking further questions], and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116).

Selective coding is a more complex analytical coding level than the first two levels because it involves bringing together the main coded categories with the subcategories to create a story or a narrative that is embedded in the data. The previous coding level, axial coding, provides the basis for the selective coding level to take place, because in the previous stage, the researcher has categorised and re-integrated categories in terms of their most visible properties, dimensions, and relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 117).

3.3.4 The procedure for data coding and analysis: (phase 1)

A process of systematically coding the data derived from the field interviews was conducted to elicit categories from the data. In the open-coding phase, the researcher carefully read each of the transcribed interviews verbatim. Broad categories and related concepts that related to different sets of issues (e.g., issues related to structure, composition [staff/personnel], and operations of the participating news agencies) emerged from the data.

The researcher constantly compared segments of data between each of the interview transcripts (as grounded theorists do, see above), which helped to identify similar and different points of view on a particular category and generate further concepts and subcategories. The researcher then used different coloured markers to highlight segments of the text that dealt with specific issues that were relevant to the research focus. Colours (highlights) were randomly assigned to segments, and the important thing to the researcher was that similar segments had the same colour and different segments had a different colour. (See Appendix 4 for a sample of open coding using colour codes for categories and their related subcategories).

Each different colour coded segment from each of the transcripts was then manually entered into a data spreadsheet using the Microsoft (MS) Excel computer spreadsheet program¹⁷ (see Appendix 5). This computer format afforded the researcher easier reading, quicker access, and clearer comparisons between respondents' coded interviews (than the transcribed interview format presented), and this allowed the researcher to more easily spot (observe) and code different (embedded) subcategories in the data. Though the researcher found that entering each individual colour coded transcript onto computer format was most time-consuming and laborious, the result allowed the researcher a far more convenient approach to move to the next coding stage of axial coding.

The following items (i.e., listed as "themes" on the computer data sheets) were encountered and assigned to categories:

Category 1 (Imbalances): This can be conceptualised as providing the context or historical background for the present topic. Concepts identified in the data included ideological, global news flows, monopolisation, imbalances, Cold War, NAM, and NWICO.

Category 2 (National news flows): The focus here is on the national news agency, SAPA, in relation to the global news agencies. Concepts identified included news flow agreements, SAPA relations with the global news agencies, SAPA relations with the Pan African news agency, and SAPA relations with the alternative news provider, IPS.

Category 3 (News flows on the African continent): The emphasis here is on the global news agencies' roles in Africa and their comments on the Pan-African news

¹⁷ MS excel is a software computer program for capturing large quantities of data in a spreadsheet format for easy access, reading and comparison. It is set up like a notebook with different pages. Each page can represent a new aspect or topic, or category. Such notebooks were created by the researcher for each of the respondents (or from each of the transcribed interviews). The end result was that each interview (of each of the respondent's) produced a richly detailed, colour-coded and conceptualised 'notebook' from which the researcher had easy access and could draw up categories from the ability to quickly page between segments of text in the notebooks of the different respondents.

agency's successes and failures. Concepts and terms included news flow agreements, global news agencies, and the African continent.

Category 4 (Structure and operations): This refers to the general overview of news agencies' organisational structures. Concepts included structure, ownership, profiles, news policies, and news values.

Category 5 (Ownership and control): This relates to "theme 4" and provides information on the ownership structure of news agencies in the post-Cold War period. Related concepts include ownership, control, Cold War, and post-Cold War

Category 6 (Globalised world): This theme begins to introduce the more visible issues facing news agencies in a changing global context. Concepts include news flows, news agencies, globalised world, and post-1990s.

Category 7 (Global competition/relationships among global agencies): The emphasis in this theme and its specific focus is on describing the competitive relationships amongst the global news agencies. Related concepts include

Category 8 (News values): This theme focuses on the cultural and political economic production of news based on the framework of news values employed at the various news agencies. Related concepts include objectivity, values, Western, and journalism.

It should be noted that the themes identified in the research process are not mutually exclusive and self-contained. They affect each other not necessarily in a cause-effect relationship, but rather in a manner producing deeper and significant levels of meaning. The themes are interrelated and overlap with each other and the researcher found it necessary to collapse some of the themes that overlapped in the data with other broader themes that encompassed them (later on in the selective coding process). At this open coding phase, the details allowed the researcher to observe main categories and related subcategories in the data.

3.3.5 Procedure for coding and analysis: (phase II)

Not all of the data can be presented in the formal reporting, but it is necessary to reduce these data to present a description of what is being studied (Strauss & Corbin,

1990, p. 22). According to Strauss and Corbin, “reducing and ordering materials, represents selection and interpretation” (p. 22). What this involves is the researcher interspersing their own interpretative comments “in and around long descriptive passages and the quotations from interview field notes” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 22). This usually results in a rich and descriptive narrative where “illustrative materials are meant to give a sense of what the observed world is really like; while the researcher’s interpretations are meant to represent a more detached conceptualization of that reality” (ibid. op cit.).

3.4 Conclusion

In this study, the researcher attempts to make critical observations concerning the relationships amongst news agencies based on the firsthand accounts of these relationships from participants at these organisations. The relationships amongst news agencies discussed in previous chapters are said to impact upon the global flow of news.

Global news flows are studied with a specific focus on exchange of news among agencies based in South Africa. The hope is that in understanding how news agencies operate in a changing world context as well as the relationships between them that this will contribute to further expanding the field of global news flows and the importance thereof in processes (phenomena) such as globalisation and global capitalism. A case of news flows in the South African context is, however, not being articulated as *the* model for the South or for the rest of Africa in which many of the media systems are still heavily dependent on their states (cf. Curran & Park, 2000).

In open coding, the researcher begins the analytical process of breaking down the data into discrete units in order to locate concepts and significant terms within the data. These are then conceptualised according to their properties and dimensions. Properties are a description or characterising of concepts while its dimensions refer to the gradient of change it exhibits under different sets of conditions. The next coding

stage is called axial coding. The researcher begins in this phase to draw relationships and look for patterns in the data, and in doing so the data is re-arranged so that it begins to tell a story. The third stage of coding is called selective coding during which the researcher merges the first two levels of data coding. It involved a process of inductive reasoning and eliciting the main categories (concepts) dealt with in the study. All phases of the coding process employ an inductive form of reasoning which means that the researcher relies on the actual data to make inferences and draw relationships between concepts. Induction is a process of theory building or concept construction.