UiO : **Department of Media and Communication**
The Faculty of Humanities

Course Evaluation MEVIT4800 VÅR 2020 – Iris Beau Segers

Periodic Course Evaluation MEVIT4800 VÅR 2020

Introduction

This course evaluation concerns MEVIT4800: Methods in media studies: qualitative and quantitative data and analysis, taught in the spring semester of 2020. The course was taught by Professor Cristina Archetti (qualitative methods, week 1-3) and Iris Beau Segers (quantitative methods, week 4-9). This evaluation will cover following key points:

- Course contents and organization
- Student evaluation and feedback
- Student performance and outcomes
- Feedback from teaching staff
- Conclusion and points of improvement

It is worth noting that during this course, COVID-19 restrictions forced a quick translation of the course contents from a physical to a digital setting. This evaluation will therefore also reflect on this process and its effects on teaching and learning.

1. Course contents and organization

Course description

This course presents methods that are central to empirical research in media and communication research and in journalism research.

These methods include research interviews, document-analysis, content analysis, surveys and introductory statistics. A central aim is to increase students' understanding of the choices involved throughout a research process, including assessing what methods are appropriate for different research purposes.

Learning outcomes

Students will

- be able to critically evaluate and assess existing empirical research
- be able to design and conduct their own scientific investigations within media and journalism research
- be able to discuss methodological issues critically
- be able to analyse different types of data
- enhance their understanding of the scientific process, including the relation between theory and empirical evidence

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Teaching

Teaching takes place throughout the semester organized as lectures, working groups and SPSS seminars. The workload is equivalent to seven weeks of full time studies.

Lectures will be given in English. The working groups will decide themselves which language to use.

This course contains a qualification assignment, graded approved/ not approved. The qualification assignment will involve participation in the SPSS seminars. Each SPSS group will meet one full day a week for two weeks, and the SPSS groups will be assigned according to study programme.

The details and deadlines for the qualifications assignment will be given at the beginning of the semester.

See appendix for the course curriculum of Spring 2020.

2. Student evaluation and feedback

31 students participated in MEVIT4800 in the spring of 2020.

A round of student evaluations was conducted at the end of the teaching term, through an online survey disseminated to students via Nettskjema. 11 students completed the form. The following section will summarize the main findings of the student evaluations.

Expectations and acquired skills

When asked what they expected to learn during MEVIT4800, the majority of responses mentioned three types of knowledge and acquired skills:

- Knowledge and skills related to the design and execution of a research project, in preparation for their Master's thesis project.
- A general refresh of research methodology they had learnt prior to the course.
- Specific knowledge and skills in statistics and the use of statistics software.

When asked what they had gained from following MEVIT4800, students mostly mentioned:

- A deeper understanding of a wide range of different methodological approaches.
- More confidence in understanding and using (English language) methodological terms and vocabulary.
- Specific knowledge and skills in using statistics software.

Specifically, students highlighted their appreciation of 'applied' knowledge, particularly with regards to developing their Master's thesis project, as this student describes:

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> *"I will say that I have gained an understanding of different methodologies, an insight of what is necessary to include in a thesis and important methodological tools if I decided to conduct further research after my thesis."*

Other students were drawn to the course for specific (mostly statistics-related) reasons, such as this student who said they had gained:

> *"A profound respect for statistics, and a small hatred for SPSS."*

Again, the practical and applied nature of the course, and its focus on concrete tools and processes was mentioned as a key benefit that students had gained from the course. For example, this students noted:

> *"I feel that this course has extended my knowledge and made me more comfortable with the English terms. In addition I really appreciate the practical parts of using methods."*

Overall, student responses show that students take MEVIT4800 for both broad and specific reasons and that most importantly, the course largely succeeds at meeting these expectations. Table I further exemplifies this, as all students indicated that they had improved both their quantitative and qualitative skills throughout the course.

Table I: Improvement of quantitative and qualitative skills after having followed MEVIT4800
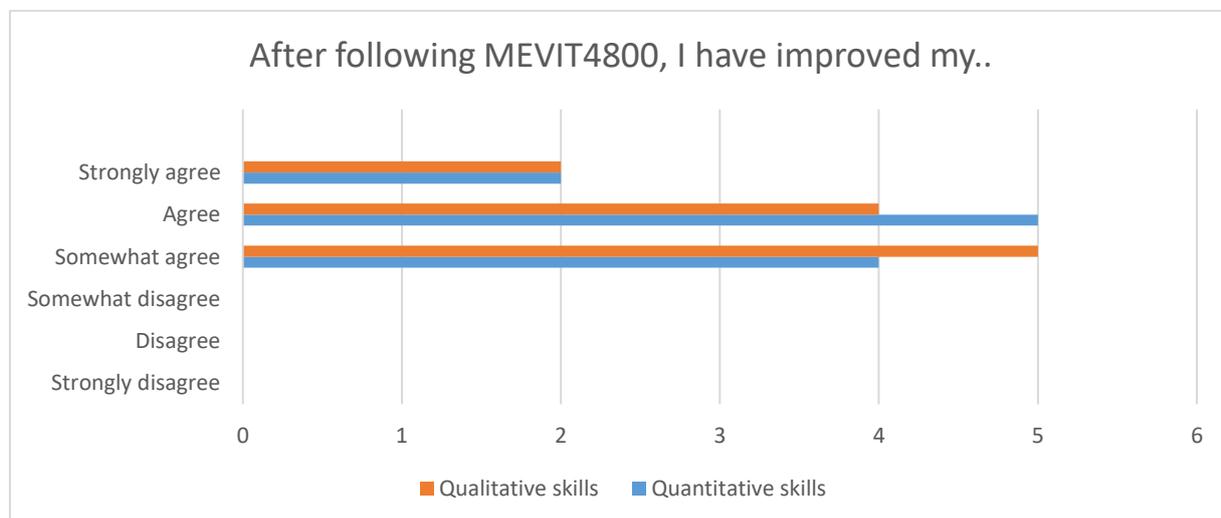
Attendance and experience of lectures

First, the majority of respondents indicated to attend most or all lectures of the course (see Table II). Ten students indicated they there were overall 'satisfied' with the contents of the lectures, whereas one student was 'somewhat satisfied'.

When asked what aspects of the lectures they appreciated the most, students repeatedly mentioned the following points:

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- The use of relatable and concrete examples, in illustrating key concepts and methods.
- The systematic, step-by-step approach to using quantitative methods, which was easy to follow.
- The course organization on Canvas, which was comprehensible and made learning easier.

When asked what could be improved about the lectures, students mentioned:

- A clearer structure of the qualitative aspects of the course.
- The large amount of material to cover each week – which led to time management issues and made learning more difficult.
- They would like the lectures to be recorded, to re-watch or listen to again at a later point.

Table II: attendance of MEVIT4800 lectures
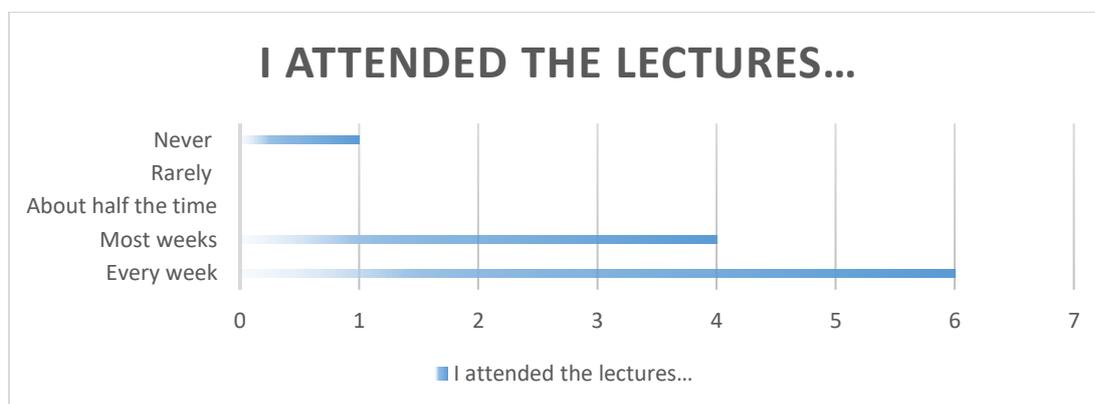
Attendance and experience of seminars

Most students who responded to the survey said they attended seminars half the time (4 students), or most weeks (5 students), as shown in Table III below. Eight students indicated they were satisfied with the seminars, two were somewhat satisfied, and one student did not reply to this question.

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Table III: attendance of MEVIT4800 seminars

I ATTENDED THE SEMINARS…
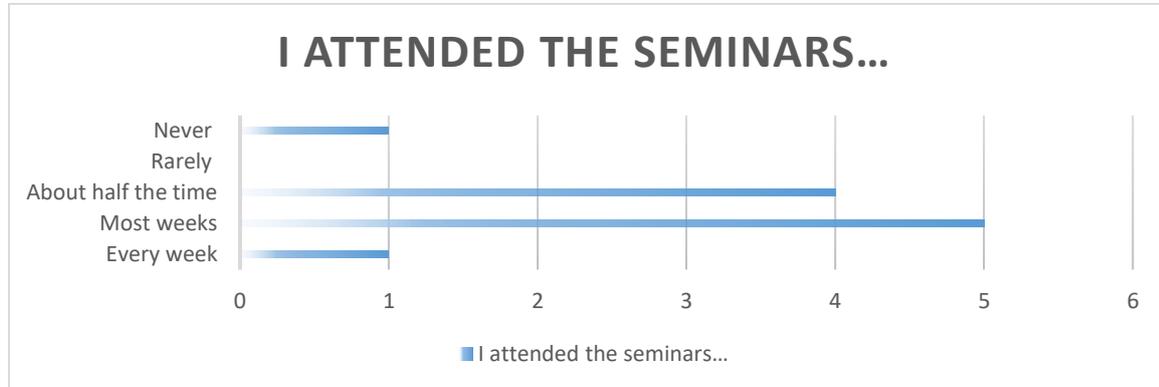
When asked that aspects of the seminars they appreciated the most, students mentioned:

- The practical approach to methods and working on specific tasks and cases.
- The fact that the seminars actively applied concepts and skills taught in the lecture.
- The interactive and informal nature of the seminars, in which students could discuss the course materials with each other and the lecturer.

Students also indicated several points of improvement, but these were not always very clear, and in some cases, had little to do with the lecturer's performance or the course contents:

- Some seminars were more relevant than others, in preparing for the exam and a Master's thesis.
- Some seminars were less well structured and more difficult to follow.
- If you were not prepared in advance, the seminars did not work so well.

Overall, students attended the seminars less regularly than the lectures. However, most students indicated that the seminars were a useful addition to the lectures, as they provided them with a space to discuss the course contents, and practice their methodological skills in applying them to concrete tasks and cases.

SPSS seminars and online teaching

This course was planned to have two SPSS seminars, in which students could work on their mandatory assignments under supervision of their lecturer. Each seminar began with a short lecture on statistical methods and how to use SPSS, after which students could use the remainder of the time to work on their mandatory assignment.

Due to the sudden switch to online teaching, the second week of SPSS seminars took place in an online setting, with very little time to prepare. In the student evaluation, students were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with different aspects of the SPSS seminars, including the online support they received in the second week.

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As Table IV shows, students were most satisfied with the 'live' contents and explanations of the SPSS seminar in the first week, but were also largely satisfied with the online solutions provided in week two. Evaluations of the course literature were more mixed[1].

Overall, students indicated an appreciation for the online support they received in completing their mandatory assignment, both in the form of recorded 'SPSS tutorials', as well as quick and detailed replies to emails. However, some also indicated that the learning curve for the SPSS assignment and seminars was very steep, as they only had two weeks to learn to use the software, and they had to cover a lot of ground.

Table IV: Student evaluation of SPSS seminars
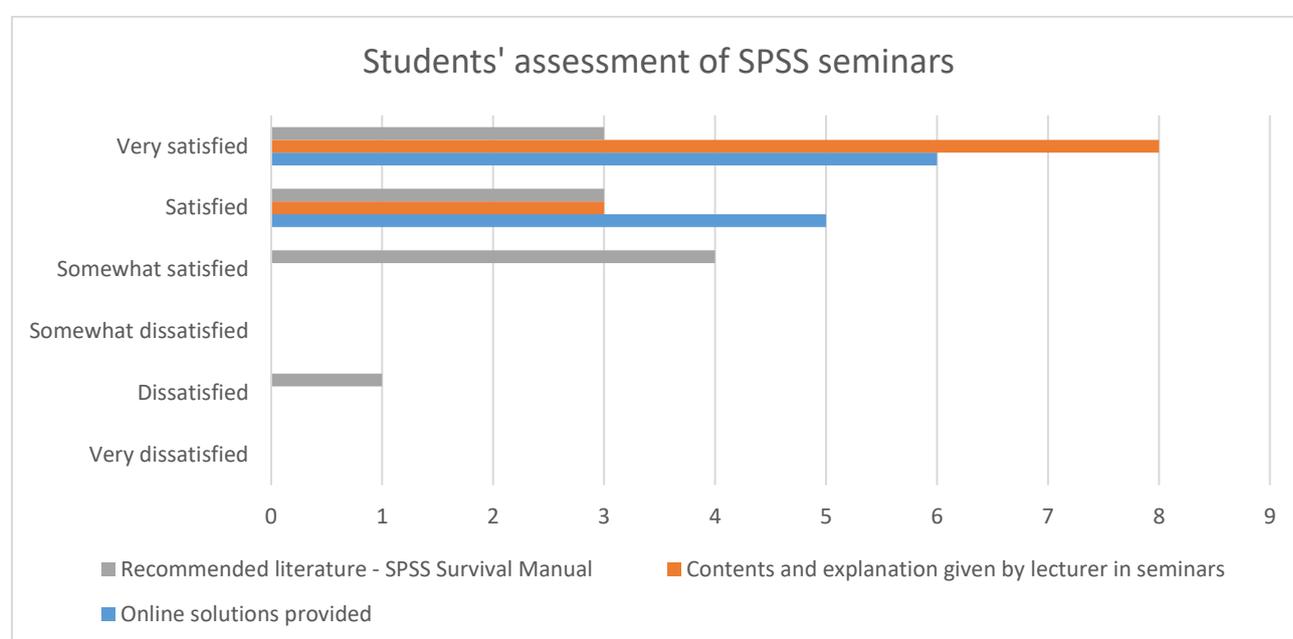
3. Student performance and outcomes

All students of the course successfully passed their mandatory SPSS assignment. Keeping in mind that students had to complete their SPSS assignment at the start of the Norwegian lockdown, under stressful conditions and without physical support of their lecturer, the grading of this assignment was slightly adjusted. All students answered all (or in rare cases, the overwhelming majority) of the questions and showed a basic understanding of the software, and therefore passed the assignment.

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[1] It must be noted here, that most students indicated they had not read the required literature prior to the SPSS seminars, as they had been recommended to. This definitely proved to be an obstacle to their understanding of the software.

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29 out of 31 students completed the exam, and 28 passed the course.

The average grade of the course is a B, with the following distribution:

Grade	Amount of students
A	7
B	13
C	6
D	1
E	1
F	1

Two students (graded a C and an F) asked for an explanation of their grades.

It is important to note that most students lost points on three more in-depth exam questions related to qualitative methodology. This signals a need for balancing out the current structure of the course, as the course largely focuses on quantitative methods.

4. Feedback from teaching staff

Lecturers Cristina Archetti and Iris Segers met on several occasions to discuss the progress throughout the course. Together, they identified several obstacles to teaching MEVIT4800, summarized in the following points.

- Students' level of methodological training

First, it was quite apparent that most students lacked sufficient understanding of methodological concepts, which made it necessary to revisit very basic concepts such as ontology/epistemology, level of measurement, independent/dependent variables, measures of central tendency, etc. In addition, students have a variety of academic backgrounds. Whereas some students had some experience with statistics and using SPSS, other students had barely had any methodological training before enrolling in the course.

- Lack of time

Overall, both lecturers found that they had to communicate a lot of information in an insufficient amount of time. As this course needs to cover all the basics (especially as many students are not yet familiar with research methods), the current timespan of the course (9 weeks) is too short to sufficiently cover all the course content.

- Contents – and imbalance of quantitative and qualitative components of the course

As it is currently taught, MEVIT4800 overwhelmingly focuses on quantitative research methods, reflected in the workload assigned qualitative vs. quantitative methods, and the weight assigned to evaluation components of the course (the mandatory assignment and the exam). This might communicate the assumption that one is more important or difficult than the other. In addition, it

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gives students less of a chance to familiarize themselves with qualitative methodology, as was also reflected in the student evaluations and their answer to the exam questions. We therefore suggest expanding the qualitative element of the course, so there is more time to go through the material in detail. Finally, there is currently no room for the integration of theory of methods, which is an essential part of methodology and should be covered in more detail. It is especially important as students do not display any former knowledge of this topic.

- Attendance

Although this doesn't reflect as much in the student evaluations, there were some significant drops of attendance during some parts of the course, especially in seminars. Overall, approximately two thirds of students attended the lectures, and seminar attendance varied between only a few students, and about three-quarters of the class.

- Course curriculum

Finally, the course curriculum entails many different texts, spread across various books, articles and the syllabus. In some cases, different assigned texts overlapped, and provided the same information twice. Both lecturers noticed very few students did the required readings, and some of them had not even acquired all the necessary texts.

Regardless of these challenges, it must be noted that some students showed high interest in and engagement with the course materials. Students expressed that they enjoyed following the course, and found that they learned a lot (see also student evaluations above). In addition, students did an excellent job at making a sudden switch from physical to digital teaching, especially as they were in the middle of a mandatory assignment that was challenging for most of them. They were very receptive and positive towards the attempt to continue the course online, and expressed appreciation for the continued support of the teaching staff.

5. Conclusion and points of improvement

After having reviewed both the students' and lecturers' evaluation of MEVIT4800, we would like to recommend some changes to the course, as well as to the broader teaching structure.

Specific to MEVIT4800

- As it stands, there is simply not enough time to give students the basic methodological toolkit to independently conduct a Master thesis project. In particular, the student evaluations, and their answers to more in-depth exam questions related to qualitative methods, show that students could benefit from spending more time on developing their qualitative toolkit. We therefore recommend expanding the timeframe of MEVIT4800, in particular to spend more time in qualitative methods, and to balance out the workload

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between quantitative and qualitative methods. One possible way is to prolong the course, another would be to split it up into two courses (both mandatory for students to take).

- Make both lecture and seminar attendance obligatory.
- We recommend changing the evaluation of the course, to balance the weight of qualitative and quantitative methods within the course. Our preference goes to taking a two-pronged approach: assessing students' qualitative research skills via them conducting a small study (possibly in groups, but with separate final papers), and one exam that tests their quantitative knowledge. These two assignments should have equal weight, to communicate the message that they are equally important.
- There is currently no room for the integration of theory of methods, which is an essential part of methodology and should be covered in more detail. This could be done within MEVIT4800, as part of the Master's introduction, or during the Bachelor's programme.
- We recommend some significant changes to the course literature, by selecting a smaller amount of sources (e.g. two methodology books).[2] As students highlighted their appreciation for the applied nature of the course, there might also be room for including more research articles to illustrate the use of different methods.

More broadly

- We believe that the general level of Master students' methodological skills signals a need for more methodology training integrated into earlier phases of the study programme (notably the Bachelor programme). We therefore suggest that during the Bachelor programme, students are better familiarized with research methodology (e.g. knowledge of basic statistics, as well as conducting small research projects on their own).
- We also suggest an obligatory element of the Master introduction that will focus on research methods in particular. This might help ensure that all students attain a basic skill level before MEVIT4800.
- Finally, we suggest a better way of shaping students' expectation of the importance of attending lectures and seminars. Make it clear to them that reading alone is not enough to successfully complete the programme, emphasize the explicit expectation that students attend sessions.

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[2] Iris Segers is happy to make some concrete recommendations.

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Appendix: Course curriculum Spring 2020

Books

Foster, Liam, Ian Diamond and Julie Jefferies (2015) *Beginning statistics. An introduction for social scientists*. Sage: London

Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann (2009) *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage. Chs. 6-12, 15-16. 170 pp.

Neuendorf, Kimberly A. (2016): *Content Analysis Guidebook*, Ch. 1, 3-6, 8

Pallant, Julie (2016). *SPSS survival manual*, 6th edition, Open University Press

Articles available on web

Fabio Giglietto , Luca Rossi & Davide Bennato (2012) *The Open Laboratory: Limits and Possibilities of Using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as a Research Data Source*, Journal of Technology in Human Services, 30:3-4, 145-159 http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15228835.2012.743797

Articles and book chapters (i kompendium)

Field, Andy (2009) Chapter 1-2 in *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (Sage).

Fink, Arlene (2013) Chapter 1 and 2 in *How to conduct surveys.* A step-by-step guide (5th ed.) Sage

Karppinen, K. & Moe, H. (2012). *What we talk about when we talk about document analysis*. In N. Just, N. & M. Puppis (Eds.), Trends in Communication Policy Reseach: New Theories, Methods and Subjects. Bristol UK / Chicago, USA: Intellect. 20 pp.

Recommended further reading:

Corbin, J. M. and A. L. Strauss (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage.

Field, A. (2016). *An adventure in statistics.* Sage

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn (ed.) (2012) *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*, Second edition, Abindon,Oxon: Routledge. Also available as e-book.

Fossheim, Hallvard, & Ingierd, Helene (Eds.). (2015). *Internet Research Ethics*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk. (178 pp) (Free download from
https://press.nordicopenaccess.no/index.php/noasp/catalog/book/3)