

# Technology, Big Data and Qualitative Research

The case of digital ethnography

Gareth Morrell, Head of Insight

**madano**  
clear thinking, clear communication

There are 10 types of people in the world...

those who understand binary and those who don't





```
int main() {  
    cout << "Hello, World!" << endl;  
    return 0;  
}
```

```
try {  
    std::ifstream file("file.txt");  
    if (!file.is_open()) {  
        throw std::runtime_error("File not found");  
    }  
    file.close();  
} catch (const std::exception& e) {  
    std::cerr << "Error: " << e.what() << endl;  
}
```

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int main() {  
    try {  
        // Some code that might throw an exception  
    } catch (const std::exception& e) {  
        // Handle the exception  
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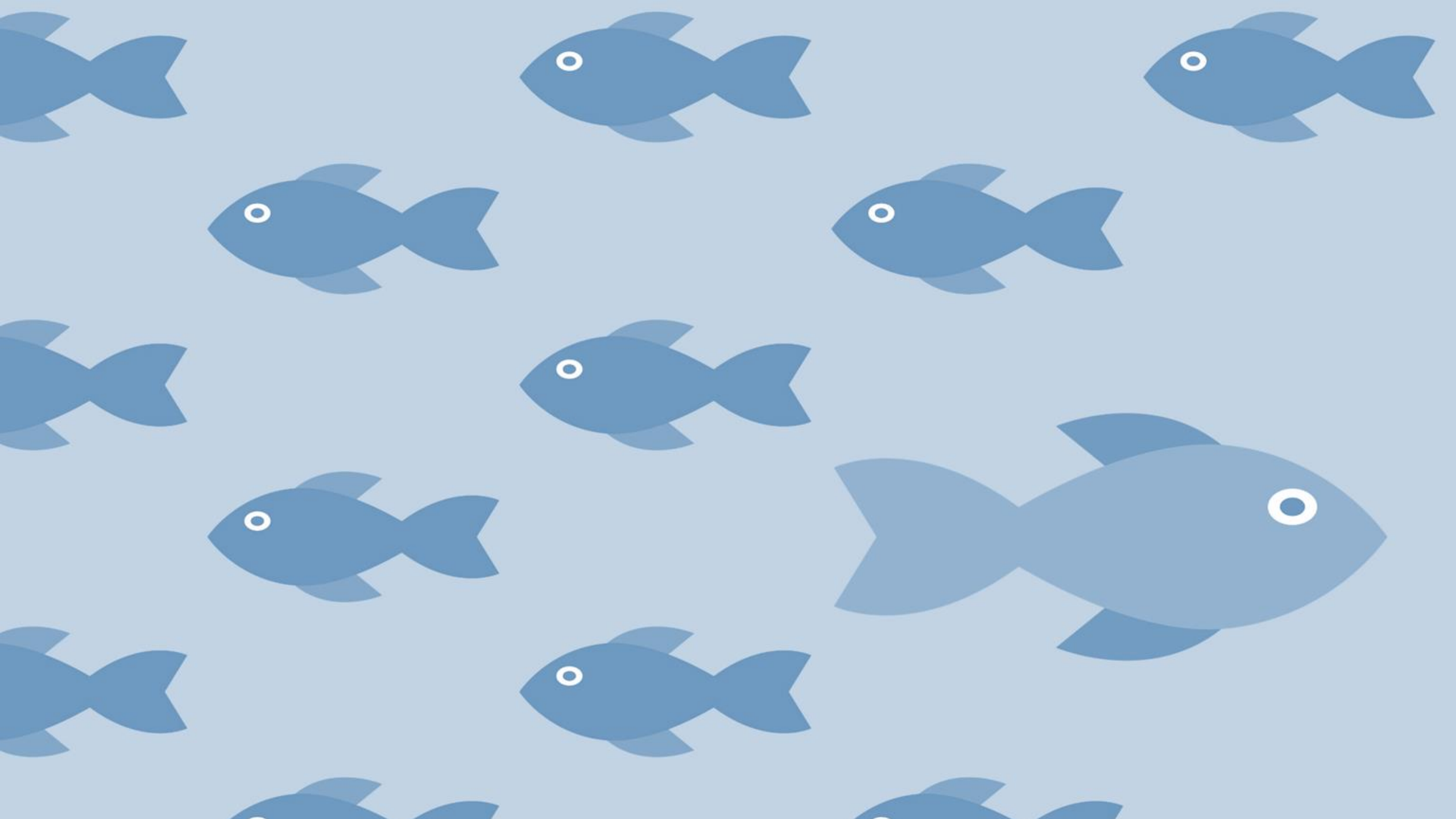
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Big Data and technology

Opportunities and challenges

Big data and  
technology present  
opportunities for  
social research



Scale of data available



Speed of collection, collation and analysis



Automation of these processes



Accessibility of outputs

But there are also  
threats and  
challenges



Simplification



Expectations



De-personalisation



Accessibility

Pause:

What is qualitative research?



## How can qualitative research embrace technology and digitization?



We are interested in studying people, social groups and institutions...

...we should also be interested in how we engage and interact with technology



Our data are physical conversations and observed behaviour

...but can take place virtually and still have relevance for real life



We uncover why people think what they think and do what they do

...and this even more important in the context of technology and digitization

# Digital ethnography

Traditional qualitative rigour applied to the opportunities of big data

# Principles of ethnography



Scientific study of individual peoples and cultures



Focuses on rituals, communication and behaviours

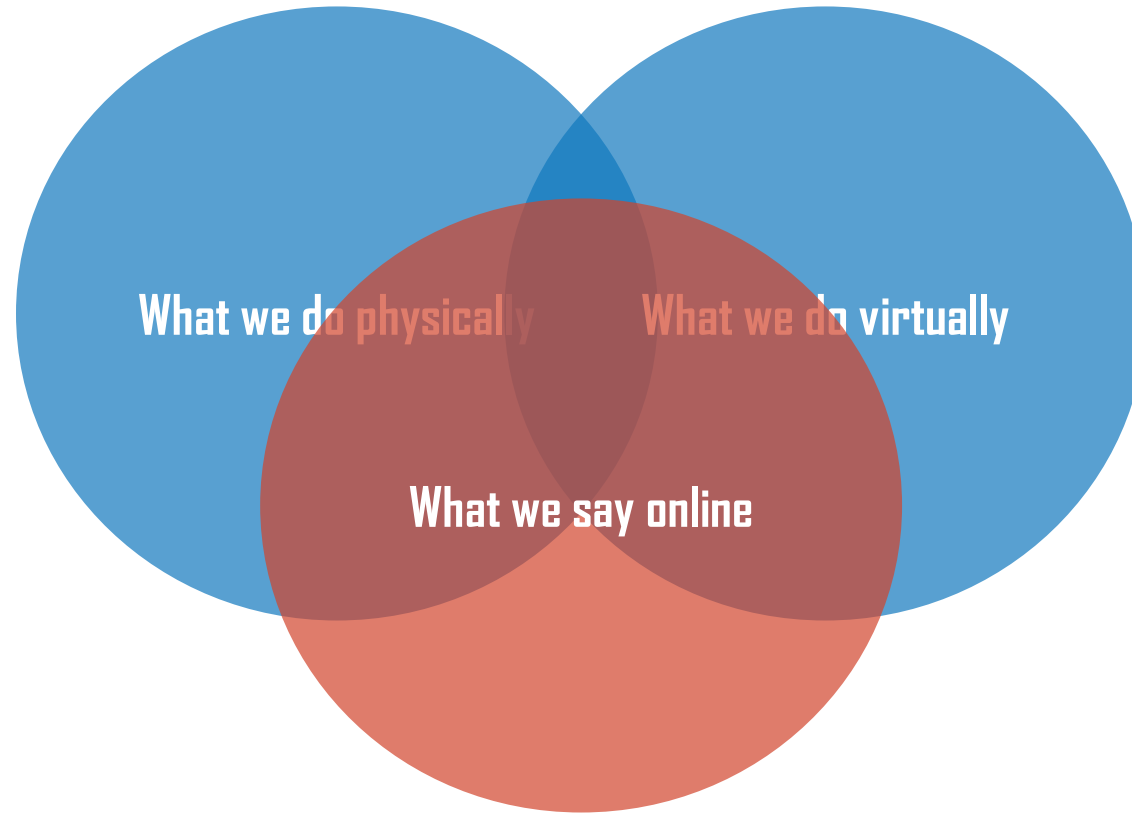


Researcher embeds themselves in specific cultural context



Qualitative study and theoretical development

## Why study the virtual?



What we say and do online can provide a wealth of rich, naturally occurring and unobtrusively articulated data.

Analysed and interpreted with skill and care, it can provide insights into our lives that are missed by other methods.

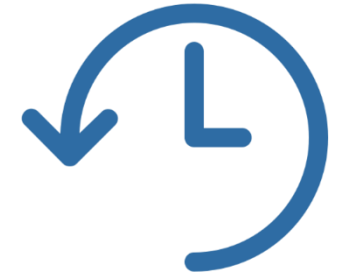
# What is digital ethnography



Digital ethnography **blends the old with new** to paint a picture of people's lives and the patterns and dynamics of belief and behaviour.



A team of PhD level anthropologists is paired with policy or subject experts to uncover the **sub-conscious beliefs** that drive behaviour.



Research subjects are identified and **studied retrospectively** through open source social media channels and subject-specific forums.

# How does digital ethnography work?

Research questions and study populations defined by client

Search terms agreed to identify relevant profiles



4000  
CONVERSATIONS  
ANALYZED



FOUR+  
SOCIAL  
CHANNELS



800  
USER PROFILES  
EXAMINED



POPULATION  
ESTIMATES  
ANALYZED



SOCIAL SCIENTISTS



POLICY/SUBJECT EXPERTS

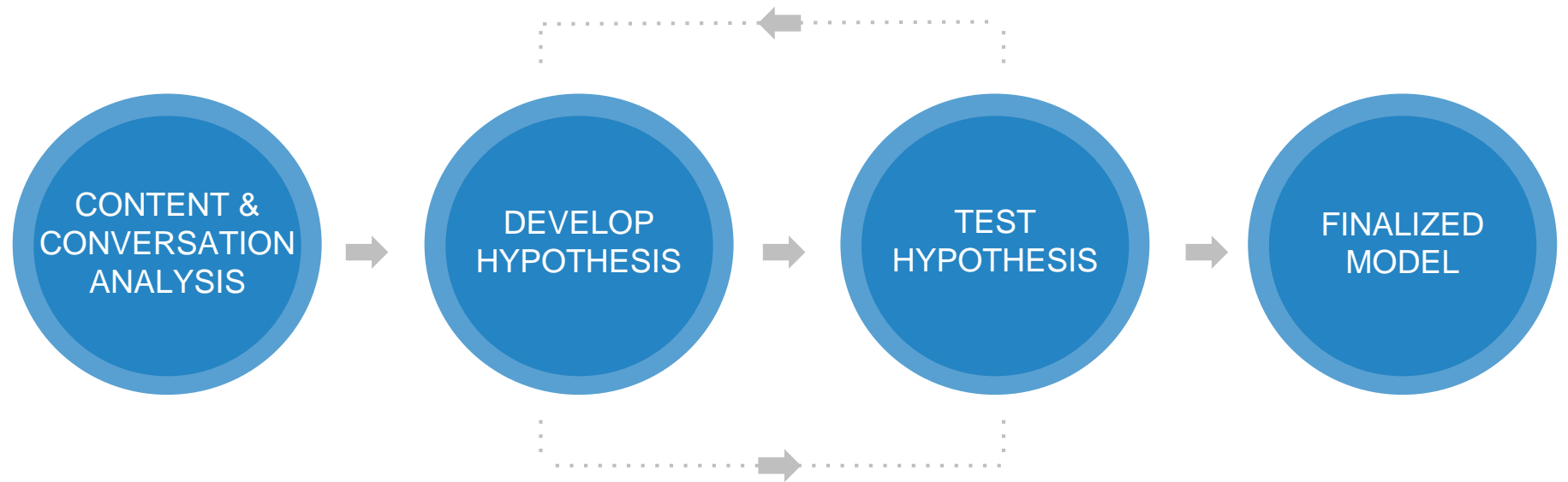


CREATIVE EXPERTISE

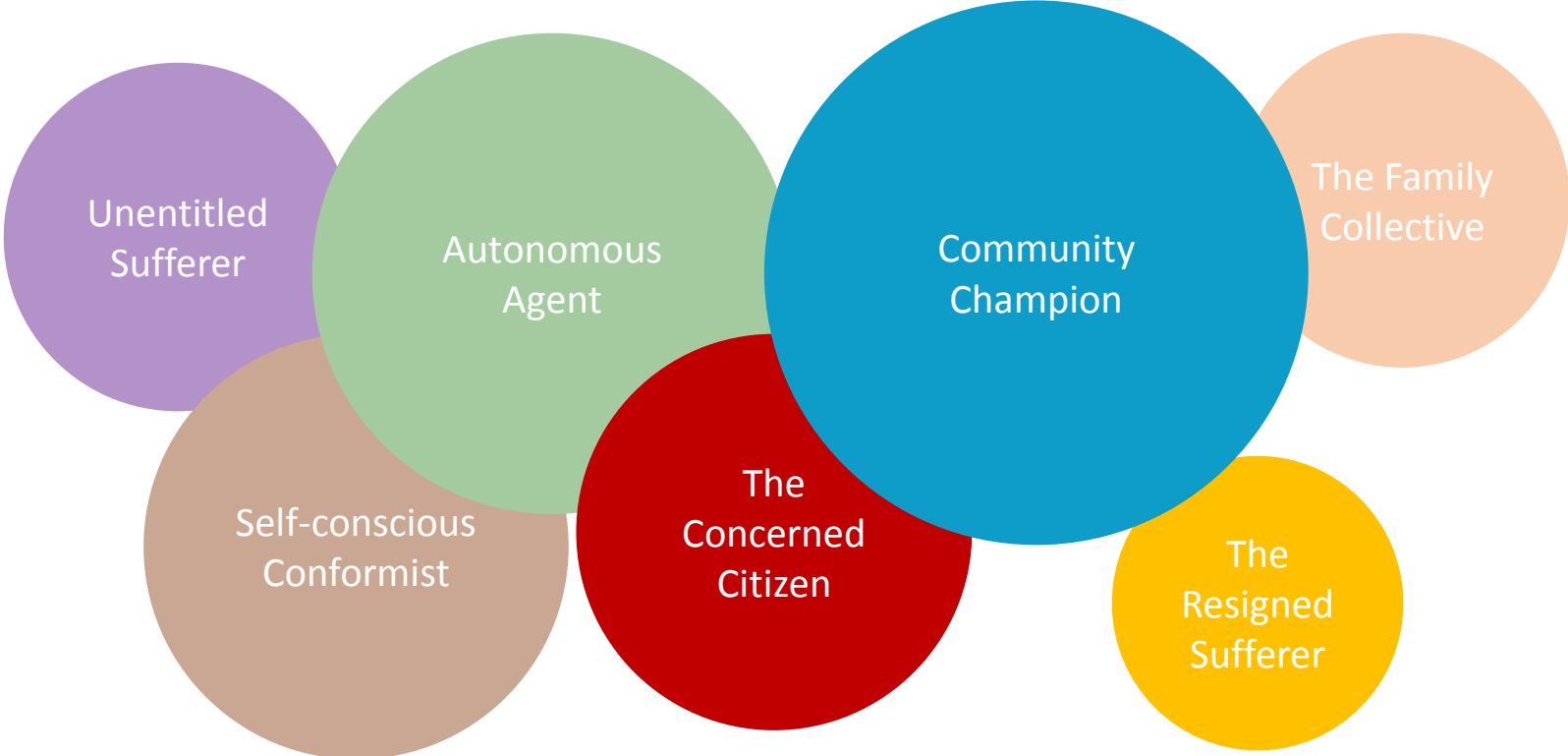


# Analysing the data

A grounded theory approach to developing archetypes



# Patient archetypes

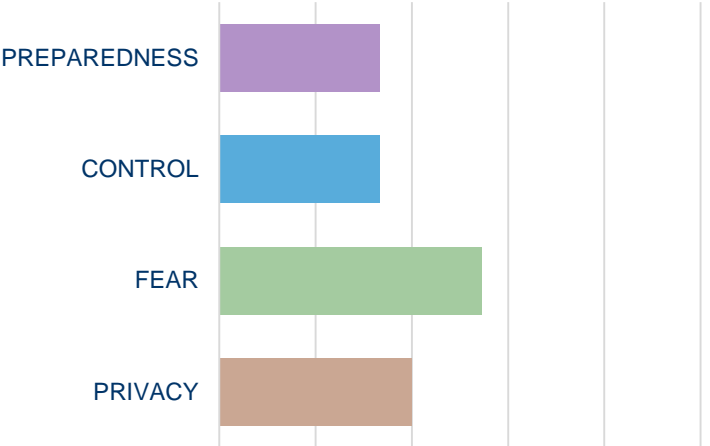


# Un-entitled Sufferer

*“Pertinent quote from patient in this archetype...”*

The Unentitled Sufferer is [synopsis of this archetype].

## Key Behavioural Indicators



## Archetypes Patient Experience:

*Patient centricity through understanding*

- [Add key details on the archetype...]
- Key details...
- Key details...
- Key details...
- Key details...
- Key details...
- Key details...
- Key details...
- Key details...

*Detailed profile cards are created for each archetype.*

*Behavioural indicators are tailored for each study.*

### United Kingdom

- Market specific findings

### Germany

- Market specific findings

### France

- Market specific findings

### Spain

- Market specific findings

### Italy

- Market specific findings

How does this add value?

# Adding to the evidence base



Uncover sub-  
conscious  
beliefs



Identify  
unspoken  
emotions



Understand  
offline-online  
dynamics



Overarching  
population  
findings



Find the belief  
that unifies  
archetypes

# Comparing the analogue and the digital

## Traditional Ethnography

## Digital Ethnography

Expensive



Affordable

Months or years



6-8 weeks

Very small sample sizes



Blending Qual and Quant

Individual case depth



Population breadth



## Qualifications and limitations



Representativeness – it's not for every study



Bias – triangulation recommended



Ethics – what about informed consent?

# Making the most of 'deep data'

## Capitalising on the opportunities



Speed and Scale



Automation



Accessibility

## Overcoming the challenges



Simplification?

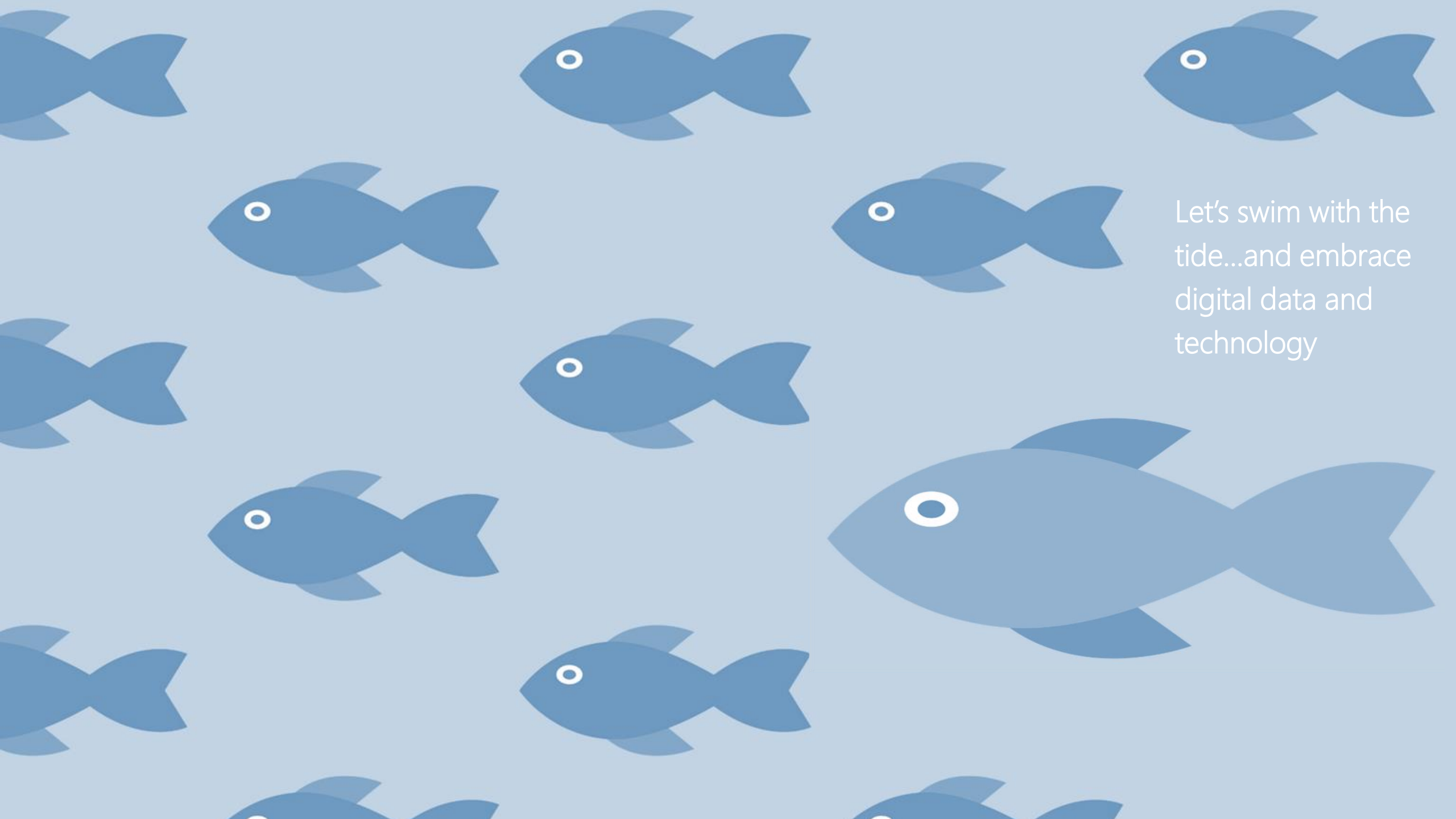


Expectations?



De-personalised?

So, lets embrace and embed these links



Let's swim with the  
tide...and embrace  
digital data and  
technology

Why we must swim  
with the tide...



Qualitative methods are an essential part of a digital social research future



We need richness and depth to complement the benefits of quantitative research



And we can do this by sticking to rather than betraying the principles of qualitative research

Thank you for listening

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