

**BCM210**

Research Practices in  
Media and  
Communication

2015

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# What is Media Research?

- everyday research is flawed - intuitive, common sense, casual, selective.
- scholarly research - is systematic, more objective, more careful with correctness and truthfulness. not personal focus.

**Observation → Initial data gathering → Theory & hypothesis formulation**

- talk
  - conduct a literature review
    - is there research already?
    - similar issues?
    - is there a gap in the research?
  - identify potential sources
- 
- questions asked in research can be very broad. types of questions include:
    - broad, diagnostic research questions
    - clarification questions
    - hypothetical questions
    - application questions
    - summarising questions
    - MORE ON SLIDES
  - further data gathering
    - once you have a hypothesis, then gather data
    - what data?
    - qualitative/quantitative?
    - data must allow you to test your hypothesis

## Quality & Quantity in Media Research

Qualitative:

- a media text's properties, degree of excellence, distinguishing characteristics
- evaluation, judgement and taste
- risks excessive and idiosyncratic interpretations
- but gives value and meaning to data collected

Quantitative

- numbers, magnitude measurements
- benefits - gives hard numbers, easy to interpret
- but does not give much value to the data collected
- cannot count everything, can be too narrow as it neglects what cannot be measured.

Best to combine both. Work out how to compare statistics and quantitative data with theoretical material and qualitative for nuanced insights.

## Data Analysis

- test and analyse significance of results
- e.g. calculate overall average, average per set time period, etc.
- even for quantitative analysis, interpretation still important. may need to work at the best way to find a story in the data

## Deduction

- interpret the conclusions of the data analysis.

# Research Ethics

- if research involves human subjects, ethics clearance is required before data collection.
- a HREC must ensure your research method meets current legal and administrative requirements.
- eliminate potential harm and address issues such as informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity.
- it minimises risk of legal action and helps protect the organisation's and researcher's reputations.

What are ethics?

- ethics = widely-agreed upon moral principles about what is right/wrong, proper/improper.
- ethical research = ensures the researcher is doing the right thing by the project, its participants and society at large.

What is right/proper?

- is subjective
- diff. people have diff. ideas and standards about what is right/wrong/acceptable/unacceptable.
- no universal definitions
- professions, organisations and governments adopt guidelines - broad generalisations.

Ethical standards vary:

- discipline
- political system
- legal system
- religious and social systems
- research content
- setting/institution
- time in history

Why be ethical?

- right thing to do
- morally appropriate
- unethical behaviour can adversely affect research participants - alienation, reluctance to participate
- unethical research reflects badly on you and your profession

Ethical principles for research

- autonomy - self-determination, respect the rights, values and decisions of other people. informed consent.
- non-maleficence - do not intentionally inflict harm on another.
- beneficence - remove existing harms and confer benefits on others
  - non-maleficence and beneficence operate together - you must weigh the possible benefits of research against harmful risks
- justice - people should be treated equitably, benefits of research should be shared with all who qualify.

**Code of behaviour**

- Do not involve people in research without their knowledge or consent
- Do not coerce people to participate
- Do not withhold from the participant the true nature of the research
- Do not actively lie to the participant about the nature of the research
- Do not lead the participant to commit acts that diminish his or her self-respect
- Do not violate the right to self-determination
- Do not expose the participant to physical or mental stress

- Do not invade the privacy of the participant
- Do not withhold benefits from participants in control groups
- Do not fail to treat research participants fairly and to show them consideration and respect
- Always treat every respondent or subject with unconditional human regard (Wimmer & Dominick 2003)

### Ethical dilemmas in media research

- voluntary participation
  - we are all entitled to refuse to participate in research or to terminate participation at any time
  - participation in an experiment, survey, focus group is voluntary
  - any form of coercion is unacceptable
  - be wary of implied coercion - esp. if you are in a position of authority. keep questionnaires anonymous. authority figures should be absent
  - small gifts may increase voluntary participation
- informed consent
  - volunteers need to know enough about a research project to make an intelligent/informed choice
  - researchers should share all aspects of a project that might influence participation
    - minor - eg. length of interview time, number of interviews
    - or something more significant - eg. electric shocks, loud noises, upsetting video content
  - deception - is it necessary?
  - how much information to disclose - may not always be able to reveal everything
- concealment and deception
  - most commonly issues for experimental research
  - concealment = withholding information
  - deception = deliberately providing false information
  - difficulty of obtaining consent
  - generally we feel it is wrong to deceive subjects
  - not only is deception demeaning, subjects are more likely to expect to be deceived again in other research projects
  - but sometimes it is unavoidable - we can ask: 1. how important is the study? 2. are there alternative approaches? 3. how severe is the deception?
- protection of privacy
  - respondents have a right to know:
    - that their privacy will be maintained
    - who has access to their information
  - anonymity - guarantee that a respondent cannot be linked to a particular response - encourages openness and honesty
  - confidentiality - where a respondent can be identified (phone interview, household). their names should not be associated with their information
  - responsibility for confidentiality does not end once data is analysed - anything identifying respondents should not be stored in a public place
- data analysis and reporting of findings
  - ethical guidelines here are less controversial
  - don't tamper with data - don't fabricate, alter or discard
  - exercise reasonable care and guard against needless errors
  - do not plagiarise – give credit to the original author (Wimmer & Dominick 2003)
  - do not conceal information – it might influence the interpretation of your findings

- draw conclusions that are consistent with your data. Don't stretch to fit your favorite theory or a client's desires
  - do not attribute greater significance than the data justifies
- publication
  - research is a public activity and publication is the most efficient way to share. academic success is tied to an efficient publication record
  - submit only to one journal at a time
  - how many times can you publish research based on the same data set?
  - journal editors should evaluate articles in a timely manner and their reviewers should be objective and impartial