

Basics of

Fourth Canadian Edition

SOCIAL RESEARCH

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES



W. Lawrence Neuman
Karen Robson

BASICS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

BASICS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

FOURTH CANADIAN EDITION

W. LAWRENCE NEUMAN

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-WHITEWATER

KAREN ROBSON

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: Claudine O'Donnell
ACQUISITIONS EDITOR: Darcey Pepper
MARKETING MANAGER: Christine Cozens
PROGRAM MANAGER: Madhu Ranadive
PROJECT MANAGER: Colleen Wormald
MANAGER OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT: Suzanne Schaan
DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR: Joanne Sutherland
PRODUCTION SERVICES: Cenveo® Publisher Services

PERMISSIONS PROJECT MANAGER: Kathryn O'Handley
PHOTO AND TEXT PERMISSIONS RESEARCH: Integra
Publishing Services, Inc.
COVER DESIGNER: Cenveo Publisher Services
COVER IMAGE: Vladyslav Danilin/Fotolia
**VICE-PRESIDENT, CROSS MEDIA AND PUBLISHING
SERVICES:** Gary Bennett

Pearson Canada Inc., 26 Prince Andrew Place, Don Mills, Ontario M3C 2T8.

Copyright © 2018, 2015 Pearson Canada Inc. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America. This publication is protected by copyright, and permission should be obtained from the publisher prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, or transmission in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise. For information regarding permissions, request forms, and the appropriate contacts, please contact Pearson Canada's Rights and Permissions Department by visiting www.pearsoncanada.ca/contact-information/permissions-requests.

Authorized adaptation from Basics of Social Research, 3e, 2012, Pearson Education, Inc. Used by permission.

All rights reserved. This edition is authorized for sale only in Canada.

Attributions of third-party content appear on the appropriate page within the text.

Unless otherwise indicated herein, any third party trademarks that may appear in this work are the property of their respective owners and any references to third party trademarks, logos, or other trade dress are for demonstrative or descriptive purposes only. Such references are not intended to imply any sponsorship, endorsement, authorization, or promotion of Pearson Canada products by the owners of such marks, or any relationship between the owner and Pearson Canada or its affiliates, authors, licensees, or distributors.

If you purchased this book outside the United States or Canada, you should be aware that it has been imported without the approval of the publisher or the author.

ISBN 978-0-13-430805-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Neuman, William Lawrence, 1950-, author

Basics of social research : qualitative and quantitative approaches / W.

Lawrence Neuman, Karen Robson.—Fourth Canadian edition.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-13-430805-0 (hardback)

1. Sociology—Research—Methodology—Textbooks. 2. Social sciences—
Research—Methodology—Textbooks. I. Robson, Karen, 1973-, author
II. Title.

HM571.N49 2016

301.072

C2016-905266-4



Brief Contents

Preface xv

Part I Foundations

- Chapter 1** Doing Social Research 1
- Chapter 2** Theory and Social Research 21
- Chapter 3** Ethics in Social Research 40
- Chapter 4** Reviewing the Scholarly Literature and Planning a Study 62
- Chapter 5** Designing a Study 79
- Chapter 6** Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement 102
- Chapter 7** Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling 131

Part II Conducting Quantitative Research

- Chapter 8** Survey Research 160
- Chapter 9** Experimental Research 192
- Chapter 10** Nonreactive Quantitative Research and Secondary Analysis 214
- Chapter 11** Analysis of Quantitative Data 234

Part III Conducting Qualitative Research

- Chapter 12** Qualitative Interviewing 261
- Chapter 13** Field Research 278
- Chapter 14** Nonreactive Qualitative Research 305
- Chapter 15** Analysis of Qualitative Data 327

Part IV Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

- Chapter 16** Combining Methods in Social Science Research 344

Appendix Doing a Research Project 365

Glossary 375

Endnotes 386

References 389

Name Index 399

Subject Index 402

Table of Contents

Preface xv

Part I Foundations

1 Doing Social Research 1

Introduction 1

Why Do Social Research? 2

Alternatives to Social Research 2

Authority 3

Tradition 3

Common Sense 4

Media Myths 4

Box 1.1 In the News: Is the Vaccine Panic a Media Myth? 5

Personal Experience 5

How Science Works 6

Science 6

The Scientific Community 7

The Scientific Method and Attitude 8

Steps in the Research Process 8

Use of Research 9

Academic Research 9

Applied Research 10

Purpose of a Study 11

Exploration 11

Box 1.2 Making It Practical: Purposes of Research 11

Box 1.3 Concepts in Action: Sexual Minority Refugees to Canada 12

Description 12

Box 1.4 Concepts in Action: Undergraduate Students Who Are Parents 12

Box 1.5 Concepts in Action: Why Are Immigrant Youth More Likely to Drop Out of School? 13

Explanation 13

Time Dimension in Research 13

Cross-Sectional Research 13

Longitudinal Research 13

Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches 15

Quantitative Data Collection Techniques 16

Qualitative Data Collection Techniques 17

Box 1.6 Focus: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection Techniques 18

Box 1.7 Social Research and the Internet 18

Chapter Summary 19

Review Questions 19

Exercises 19

2 Theory and Social Research 21

Introduction 21

What is Theory? 22

Levels of Theory 23

Empirical Generalizations and Middle-Range Theory 23

Box 2.1 Concepts in Action: Levels of Theory in Two Canadian Studies 24

The Parts of Theory 24

Box 2.2 Concepts in Action: Middle-Range Substantive Theory and Empirical Generalization 24

Assumptions 25

Two Major Paradigms 26

Positivist Approach 27

Interpretive Approach 28

Major Theoretical Frameworks 29

Box 2.3 Focus: Major Traditional Theoretical Frameworks in Sociology 30

Direction of Theorizing 30

Box 2.4 Social Research and the Internet 31

Deductive Approach 31

Box 2.5 Concepts in Action: Examples of Deductive Approaches 32

Inductive Approach 32

Explaining Relationships in Social Research 32

Box 2.6 Concepts in Action: Inductive Theorizing in Practice 32

Box 2.7 Focus: What Is Grounded Theory? 33

Causal Explanation 34

Box 2.8 Concepts in Action: Learning to See Causal Relations 36

Chapter Summary 38

Review Questions 38

Exercises 39

3 Ethics in Social Research 40

Introduction 40

Why be Ethical? 41

Scientific Misconduct 41

Unethical but Legal 42

Box 3.1 In the News: Accusations of Scientific Misconduct 42

Power Relations 43

Ethical Issues Involving Research Participants 43

Origins of Research Participant Protection 44

Physical Harm, Psychological Abuse, and Legal

Jeopardy 44

Box 3.2 In the News: Two Examples of Unethical Research	44	Box 4.2 Concepts in Action: Meta-Analysis: The Effects of Lone Parenthood on Children	67
Box 3.3 Concepts in Action: Three Classic Cases of Ethical Controversy	45	Dissertations	67
Other Harm to Participants	47	Government Documents	68
Maximizing Benefit	47	Policy Reports	68
Deception and Consent	47	Citation Styles	68
Box 3.4 Making It Practical: Informed Consent	49	How To Conduct a Systematic Literature Review	70
Special Populations and New Inequalities	49	Define and Refine a Topic	70
Box 3.5 Social Research and the Internet: Online Research and Ethics	50	Design a Search Strategy	70
Box 3.6 Making It Practical: Special Populations: The Case of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada	51	Locate Research Reports	70
Privacy, Anonymity, and Confidentiality	52	Taking Notes	70
Privacy	52	Box 4.3 Making It Practical: How to Read Journal Articles	72
Anonymity	52	Writing the Review	72
Confidentiality	53	Box 4.4 Making It Practical: Writing an Annotated Bibliography	73
Box 3.7 In the News: The Case of Russell Ogden	54	The Difference Between a Good Review and a Bad Review	74
Privacy, Anonymity, and Confidentiality in Online Research	55	Box 4.5 Concepts in Action: Is this Plagiarism?	75
Respect for Human Dignity	55	Box 4.6 Making It Practical: Examples of Reviews and Common Mistakes	76
Mandated Protections of Research Participants	55	Box 4.7 Social Research and the Internet	76
Ethics and The Scientific Community	55	Chapter Summary	77
Box 3.8 Making It Practical: Basic Principles of Ethical Social Research	57	Review Questions	78
Ethics and The Sponsors of Research	57	Exercises	78
Whistle-Blowing	57	5 Designing a Study	79
Box 3.9 In the News: Dr. Olivieri and the University of Toronto	58	Introduction	79
Arriving at Particular Findings	58	Qualitative and Quantitative Orientations Toward Research	80
Limits on How to Conduct Studies	58	Linear and Nonlinear Paths	80
Suppressing Findings	59	Preplanned and Emergent Research Questions	81
Concealing the True Sponsor	59	Box 5.1 Making It Practical: Narrowing a Topic into a Research Question	83
Box 3.10 Making It Practical: Funding for Research in Canada	60	Qualitative Design Issues	83
Politics of Research	60	The Language of Cases and Contexts	83
Chapter Summary	60	The Context Is Critical	84
Review Questions	61	The Case and the Process	85
Exercises	61	Interpretation	85
4 Reviewing the Scholarly Literature and Planning a Study	62	Quantitative Design Issues	85
Introduction	62	The Language of Variables and Hypotheses	85
Box 4.1 Making It Practical: Goals of a Literature Review	63	Causal Theory and Hypotheses	88
Locating Relevant Sources	63	Box 5.2 Focus: Five Characteristics of Causal Hypotheses	88
How to Find Research Literature	63	Aspects of Explanation	90
Books	64	Box 5.3 Concepts in Action: The Ecological Fallacy	92
Periodicals	64	Box 5.4 Concepts in Action: Error of Reductionism	93

Box 5.5 Concepts in Action: Spuriousness Seen in Sentencing	94
Box 5.6 In the News: Pastafarians versus Intelligent Design	97
Box 5.7 Making It Practical: Examples of Bad and Good Research Questions	98
From the Research Question to Hypotheses	98
Chapter Summary	99
Review Questions	100
Exercises	100
6 Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement	102
Introduction	103
Why Measure?	104
Box 6.1 In the News: Measurement of Sex and Gender	104
Box 6.2 Focus: Precise Measurement of Fuzzy Concepts? Measuring Social Class	105
Quantitative and Qualitative Measurement	106
Parts of The Measurement Process	106
Quantitative Conceptualization and Operationalization	108
Box 6.3 Making It Practical: Five Guidelines for Coming up with a Measure	108
Box 6.4 Social Research and the Internet	109
Qualitative Conceptualization and Operationalization	110
Reliability and Validity	111
Reliability and Validity in Quantitative Research	111
Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research	115
The Relationship between Reliability and Validity	116
Box 6.5 Making It Practical: How Are Reliability and Validity Comparable in Qualitative and Quantitative Research?	117
Other Uses of the Terms <i>Reliability</i> and <i>Validity</i>	118
A Guide to Quantitative Measurement	119
Levels of Measurement	119
Specialized Measures: Scales and Indices	121
Box 6.6 Making It Practical: Scales and Indices: Are They Different?	122
Index Construction	122
The Purpose	122
Box 6.7 Using an Index	123
Scales	123
The Purpose	123
Logic of Scaling	123
Commonly Used Scales	124
Box 6.8 Focus: Examples of Types of Likert Scales	125
Box 6.9 Concepts in Action: Creating Indices	126
Rates and Standardization	127

Box 6.10 In the News: Standardization and the Real Winners at the Olympics	128
Chapter Summary	129
Review Questions	129
Exercises	130

7 Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling 131

Introduction	131
Nonprobability Sampling	132
Box 7.1 In the News: The Canadian Census Controversy	132
Haphazard, Accidental, or Convenience Sampling	133
Quota Sampling	133
Purposive Sampling	134
Snowball Sampling	135
Sequential Sampling	136
Probability Sampling	137
Populations, Elements, and Sampling Frames	137
Box 7.2 Making It Practical: Examples of Populations	137
Why Random?	139
Box 7.3 Making It Practical: It's Not So Random	139
Box 7.4 In the News: What Is the Margin of Error?	140
Types of Probability Samples	141
Box 7.5 Social Research and the Internet	141
Box 7.6 Making It Practical: How to Draw Simple Random and Systematic Samples	148
Box 7.7 Concepts in Action: Illustration of Stratified Sampling	150
Box 7.8 Making It Practical: Illustration of Cluster Sampling	151
Box 7.9 Concepts in Action: Complex Sampling	153
Hidden Populations	154
How Large Should a Sample Be?	155
Drawing Inferences	156
Chapter Summary	158
Review Questions	158
Exercises	159

Part II Conducting Quantitative Research

8 Survey Research	160
Introduction	160
Research Questions Appropriate for a Survey	161
The Logic of Survey Research	161
What Is a Survey?	161
Steps in Conducting a Survey	162

Constructing the Questionnaire	163
Principles of Good Question Writing	163
Box 8.1 Making It Practical: Improving Unclear Questions	165
Aiding Respondent Recall	167
Questions Requiring Special Consideration	169
Open versus Closed Questions	171
Box 8.2 Making It Practical: Closed versus Open Questions	172
Box 8.3 Making It Practical: Standard-Format, Quasi-Filter, and Full-Filter Questions	173
Wording Issues	174
Box 8.4 In the News: The Effect of Question Wording on Public Opinion	175
Questionnaire Design Issues	176
Box 8.5 Concepts in Action: Question Order Effects	177
Box 8.6 Making It Practical: Question Format Examples	179
Nonresponse	180
Types of Surveys: Advantages and Disadvantages	180
Mail and Self-Administered Questionnaires	180
Box 8.7 Making It Practical: Ten Ways to Increase Mail and Online Questionnaire Response	181
Online Surveys	181
Box 8.8 Social Research and the Internet: Making on Online Survey	182
Telephone Interviews	183
Face-to-Face Interviews	184
Interviewing	184
The Role of the Interviewer	184
Stages of an Interview	185
Box 8.9 Making It Practical: Example of Probes and Recording Full Responses to Closed Questions	186
Training Interviewers	187
Interviewer Bias	187
Box 8.10 Focus: Interviewer Characteristics Can Affect Responses	188
Computer-Assisted Interviewing	188
The Ethical Survey	189
Box 8.11 Making It Practical: Ten Items to Include When Reporting Survey Research	190
Chapter Summary	190
Review Questions	191
Exercises	191

9 Experimental Research	192
Introduction	192
Research Questions Appropriate for an Experiment	193
Random Assignment	194
Why Randomly Assign?	194
Box 9.1 Focus: Science of the Sophomore	196
How to Randomly Assign	196
Matching versus Random Assignment	196
Experimental Design Logic	197
The Language of Experiments	197
Box 9.2 Making It Practical: Steps in Conducting an Experiment	198
Types of Design	199
Design Notation	204
Internal and External Validity	205
The Logic of Internal Validity	205
Threats to Internal Validity	205
Box 9.3 Concepts in Action: The Mincome Experiment	207
External Validity and Field Experiments	207
Box 9.4 Social Research and the Internet: Web Experiments	210
Practical Considerations	210
Box 9.5 Concepts in Action: Subsidized Daycare and Women's Labour Market Participation	210
Results of Experimental Research: Making Comparisons	211
A Word on Ethics	211
Chapter Summary	212
Review Questions	213
Exercises	213
10 Nonreactive Quantitative Research and Secondary Analysis	214
Introduction	214
Nonreactive Measurement	215
The Logic of Nonreactive Research	215
Varieties of Nonreactive or Unobtrusive Observation	215
Recording and Documentation	215
Box 10.1 Concepts in Action: Finding Data in Birth Announcements	216
Quantitative Content Analysis	216
What Is Content Analysis?	216
Box 10.2 Making It Practical: Examples of Nonreactive Measures	216
Topics Appropriate for Quantitative Content Analysis	217

Measurement and Coding	218
Coding, Validity, and Reliability	219
Box 10.3 Concepts in Action: The Print Media and Content Analysis in Canada	220
How to Conduct Content Analysis Research	221
Box 10.4 Making It Practical: Latent Coding Questions	222
Box 10.5 Making It Practical: A Recording Sheet	223
Inferences	224
Existing Statistics and Documents and Secondary Data Analysis	224
Appropriate Topics	224
Box 10.6 Focus: The Census	225
Social Indicators	225
Locating Data	225
Box 10.7 Social Research and the Internet: Accessing Existing Statistics and Data Online	227
Box 10.8 Focus: Research Data Centres and the Data Liberation Initiative	228
Limitations	228
Box 10.9 Focus: Official Unemployment Rates versus the Nonemployed	230
Box 10.10 Focus: Crime Statistics over Time	231
Ethical Concerns	232
Chapter Summary	233
Review Questions	233
Exercises	233
11 Analysis of Quantitative Data	234
Introduction	234
Dealing with Data	235
Coding Data	235
Entering Data	235
Cleaning Data	237
Results with One Variable	237
Frequency Distributions	237
Measures of Central Tendency	239
Box 11.1 Making It Practical: Why Not Always Use the Average?	240
Measures of Variation	240
Box 11.2 Making It Practical: Calculating z-Scores	244
Results with Two Variables	244
A Bivariate Relationship	244
Seeing the Relationship: The Scattergram	245
Bivariate Tables	246
Measures of Association	250
More than two Variables	250
Statistical Control	250
Box 11.3 Focus: Five Measures of Association	251
Box 11.4 Making It Practical: The Assumption of Linearity	252
Constructing Trivariate Tables	252
Linear Regression Analysis	253
Inferential Statistics	255
The Purpose of Inferential Statistics	255
Statistical Significance	255
Levels of Significance	255
Type I and Type II Errors	256
Box 11.5 Social Research and the Internet: Online Statistical Analysis Resources	258
Chapter Summary	259
Review Questions	259
Exercises	260
Part III Conducting Qualitative Research	
12 Qualitative Interviewing	261
Introduction	261
Research Questions Appropriate for Qualitative Interviewing	262
Similarities and Differences between Qualitative Interviews and Friendly Conversations	263
Key Elements in Qualitative Interviewing	264
Interview Guide	264
Asking Questions in Qualitative Interviews	265
Kvale Question Types	265
Box 12.1 Concepts in Action: Interview Guide for Research on the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Bullying	266
Box 12.2 Concepts in Action: Kvale Question Types in an Actual Interview Transcript	267
Sampling in Qualitative Interviews	268
How Many People to Interview?	269
Incentives	269
Interview Sites	269
Recording and Transcribing	270
Advantages and Limitations of Qualitative Interviews	270
From the Perspective of the Interviewee	270
Data Rich with Description	271
Development of New Theories	271
Development of New Avenues of Research	271
Problems with Validity and Reliability	271
Focus Groups	272
The Focus Group Procedure	272
The Role of the Moderator	272
Composition of Focus Groups	272

Box 12.3 Concepts in Action: The Interview Guide for a Focus Group	273
The Number of Groups in a Focus Group Study	273
Box 12.4 Focus: Advantages and Limitations of Focus Groups	274
Focus Groups as Social Groups	275
Qualitative Data Resources	275
Chapter Summary	276
Review Questions	276
Exercises	277
13 Field Research	278
Introduction	278
Box 13.1 Making It Practical: What Does a Field Researcher Do?	279
Questions Appropriate for Field Research	279
Ethnography	280
Box 13.2 Concepts in Action: Ethnography of Canadian Parkour Enthusiasts	281
The Logic of Field Research	281
What Is Field Research?	281
Box 13.3 Making It Practical: General Steps in Field Research	282
Steps in a Field Research Project	282
Preparing, Reading, and Defocusing	282
Box 13.4 Concepts in Action: Field Research on Tattoo Enthusiasts	283
Selecting a Field Site and Gaining Access to It	283
Box 13.5 Social Research and the Internet: Online Field Research and “Netnography”	284
Entering the Field and Establishing Social Relations with Members	284
Adopting a Social Role and Learning the Ropes	286
Box 13.6 Concepts in Action: Overt and Covert Field Research	287
Relations in the Field	289
Roles in the Field	289
Maintaining Relations	290
Observing and Collecting Data	292
Watching and Listening	292
Taking Notes	293
Box 13.7 Making It Practical: Recommendations for Taking Field Notes	294
Data Quality	298
Box 13.8 Focus: Participatory Action Research	299
Focusing and Sampling	300
Leaving the Field	301
Ethical Dilemmas of Field Research	301
Deception	302

Confidentiality	302
Involvement with Deviants	302
Publishing Field Reports	302
Chapter Summary	303
Review Questions	303
Exercises	304
14 Nonreactive Qualitative Research	305
Introduction	305
Historical research	306
Research Questions Appropriate for Historical Research	306
The Logic of Historical Research and Quantitative Research	307
The Logic of Historical Research and Interpretive Research	307
Box 14.1 Concepts in Action: Male Mental Patients at Colquitz, British Columbia	308
A Distinct Historical Approach	308
Steps in a Historical Research Project	311
Conceptualizing the Object of Inquiry	311
Locating Evidence	312
Evaluating Quality of Evidence	312
Organizing Evidence	312
Synthesizing	312
Writing a Report	313
Data and Evidence in Historical Context	313
Types of Historical Evidence	313
Box 14.2 Social Research and the Internet: Using Archival Data and Online Archives	314
Research with Secondary Sources	316
Box 14.3 In the News: An Oral History of the Franklin Expedition	317
Research with Primary Sources	318
Equivalence in Historical Research	319
The Importance of Equivalence	319
The Qualitative Analysis of Text	320
Research Problems Appropriate for Qualitative Content Analysis	320
The Major Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Content Analyses	321
The Different Types of Qualitative Content Analyses	321
Box 14.4 Concepts in Action: Examples of Qualitative Content Analysis	323
Discourse Analysis	323
Box 14.5 Focus: General Steps in a Critical Discourse Analysis	324
Chapter Summary	325
Review Questions	325
Exercises	326

15 Analysis of Qualitative Data 327

Introduction 327

Comparing Methods of Data Analysis 328

Similarities 328

Differences 328

Explanations and Qualitative Data 330

Coding and Concept Formation 331

Conceptualization 331

Coding Qualitative Data 332

Box 15.1 Making It Practical: Tips on Open

Coding in Qualitative Research 333

Box 15.2 Making It Practical: Tips for Axial

Coding 335

Box 15.3 Making It Practical: Tips for Selective

Coding 337

Analytical Memo Writing 338

Box 15.4 Social Research and the Internet:

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data

Analysis 340

Did I Do It Right? 340

Box 15.5 Focus: Qualitative Data Analysis

Checklist 340

Other Techniques 341

Flowchart and Time Sequence 341

Diagrams 341

Chapter Summary 342

Review Questions 343

Exercises 343

Part IV Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

16 Combining Methods in Social Science Research 344

Introduction 344

Overall Advantages and Disadvantages of the Quantitative Approaches 345

Advantages and Disadvantages of Specific Quantitative Approaches 346

Overall Advantages and Disadvantages of Qualitative Approaches 351

Advantages and Disadvantages of Specific Qualitative Approaches 352

Mixing Methods in Qualitative-only and Quantitative-only Analyses 354

Mixing Quantitative Methods with Quantitative Methods 354

Mixing Qualitative Methods with Qualitative Methods 355

Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Methods 355

Box 16.1 Focus: Institutional Ethnography as a Multi-Method Research Approach 355

The Stages of Mixed Methods Research 356

Sampling in Mixed Methods Designs 358

Box 16.2 Concepts in Action: Using Mixed Methods to Study Homeless Street Youth and Suicide: Qualitative Methods Followed by Quantitative Methods 359

Box 16.3 Concepts in Action: Using Mixed Methods to Study Immigrant Settlement Patterns in Ontario: Quantitative Methods Followed by Qualitative Methods 360

The Role of Theory in Mixed Methods Research 361

Obtaining Conflicting Results 362

Arguments Against Mixing Methods 362

Box 16.4 Focus: Positive and Negative Aspects of Mixed Methods Research 363

Chapter Summary 363

Review Questions 364

Exercises 364

Appendix Doing a Research Project 365

Glossary 375

Endnotes 386

References 389

Name Index 399

Subject Index 402

Preface

Many students approach a first course on social research with anxiety and trepidation. Some of them associate the course with mathematics and statistics, with which they may have had an unpleasant experience; some may have struggled in natural science courses that used experiments; and some do not know what to expect from a course in social research and believe it is beyond them and only for advanced, very smart scholars. Many students delay taking the required “methods” course until the last semester of their degree—although the course is often meant to be taken in the second year of study. Indeed, courses in research methods often carry the unfortunate reputation that they are difficult or boring. As university professors who have considerable experience teaching these courses, the authors are well aware of the inherent challenges of convincing students that the study of methods can be enjoyable!

Basics of Social Research introduces you to social research and presents “what researchers do and why” in a nonthreatening manner that captures both the excitement and the importance of doing real research. Once you overcome any anxiety and recognize what research is actually about, you might even find it fascinating. A course in social research methodology differs from most other social science courses. Most courses examine content topics such as inequality, crime, racial divisions, gender relations, urban society, and so forth. A methodology course is relevant, as it prepares you to think more systematically about content and also reveals how content findings are created. That is, this social research method teaches you how the knowledge in social sciences comes into being.

This text aims to make the information it presents easy to understand and accessible, but that does not mean it is simplistic. Indeed, proper research is a serious activity, and often how well a study was conducted can have real consequences on many outcomes, including how policies and laws are put in place. An underlying goal of this text is to show you how social research has very real applications in real life—it is not just a topic you are forced to learn for your degree requirements. It is something you can take with you as a skill that will enable you to be critical of what the media are telling you about results from the “latest poll.” Just as the actual daily work of a nurse, social worker, police officer, teacher, physician, or counsellor often involves serious issues that have real implications for people’s lives, so does social research.

Basics of Social Research has three goals. First, it seeks to show you that social research is simultaneously an important enterprise and one that is not beyond you—you *can* understand it. And it can even be interesting and fun. Second, it uses many examples from real research in published Canadian studies to show you the origins of the findings and information found in textbooks or in the media. Finally, it gives you a foundation for further learning about research and shows you that this activity requires dedication, creativity, and mature judgment.

This text is a shortened version of a larger, in-depth textbook on social research that one of the authors (Neuman) first wrote about 30 years ago and that has been updated many times since then. It was written to provide an uncomplicated introduction to social research for students with a limited background in research.

Like most written works, this text, too, reflects its authors. From the beginning, we have been firmly committed to the value of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. We believe that each approach offers a distinct as well as a complementary perspective to understanding the social world and that both approaches are equally important and necessary.

NEW IN THE FOURTH CANADIAN EDITION

This new edition has been thoroughly updated and revised for the Canadian market. Key revisions to the content include the following:

- Updated information on the Canadian Census, throughout
- Updated information on the status of breaches of research ethics in Canadian research
- Simplified explanation of concepts and how they relate to theory (Chapter 2)
- New content on the importance of avoiding plagiarism (Chapter 4)
- New discussion of the shifting understanding of how to measure sex and gender (Chapter 5) and examples that demonstrate how to move beyond the gender binary (Chapter 11)
- A clearer connection drawn between qualitative research questions and interview guides (Chapter 12)

- Expanded discussion of the role of the key informant in gaining access to field research sites (Chapter 13)
- Discussion of the value of oral history exemplified in the recent discovery of the Franklin Expedition shipwreck (Chapter 14)
- A new checklist for researchers new to qualitative data analysis (Chapter 15)
- Additional visual aids throughout to illustrate concepts and processes in social research, designed to aid the visual learner

- **Image Library.** All the figures in the text are provided in electronic format, for use in PowerPoint slides, handouts, or other presentations.
- **Computerized Test Bank.** Pearson's computerized test banks allow instructors to filter and select questions to create quizzes, tests, or homework. Instructors can revise questions or add their own, and may be able to choose print or online options. These questions are also available in Microsoft Word format. The computerized test bank for *Basics of Social Research*, Fourth Canadian Edition, includes approximately 800 questions in essay, multiple-choice, and definition formats.

INSTRUCTOR SUPPLEMENTS

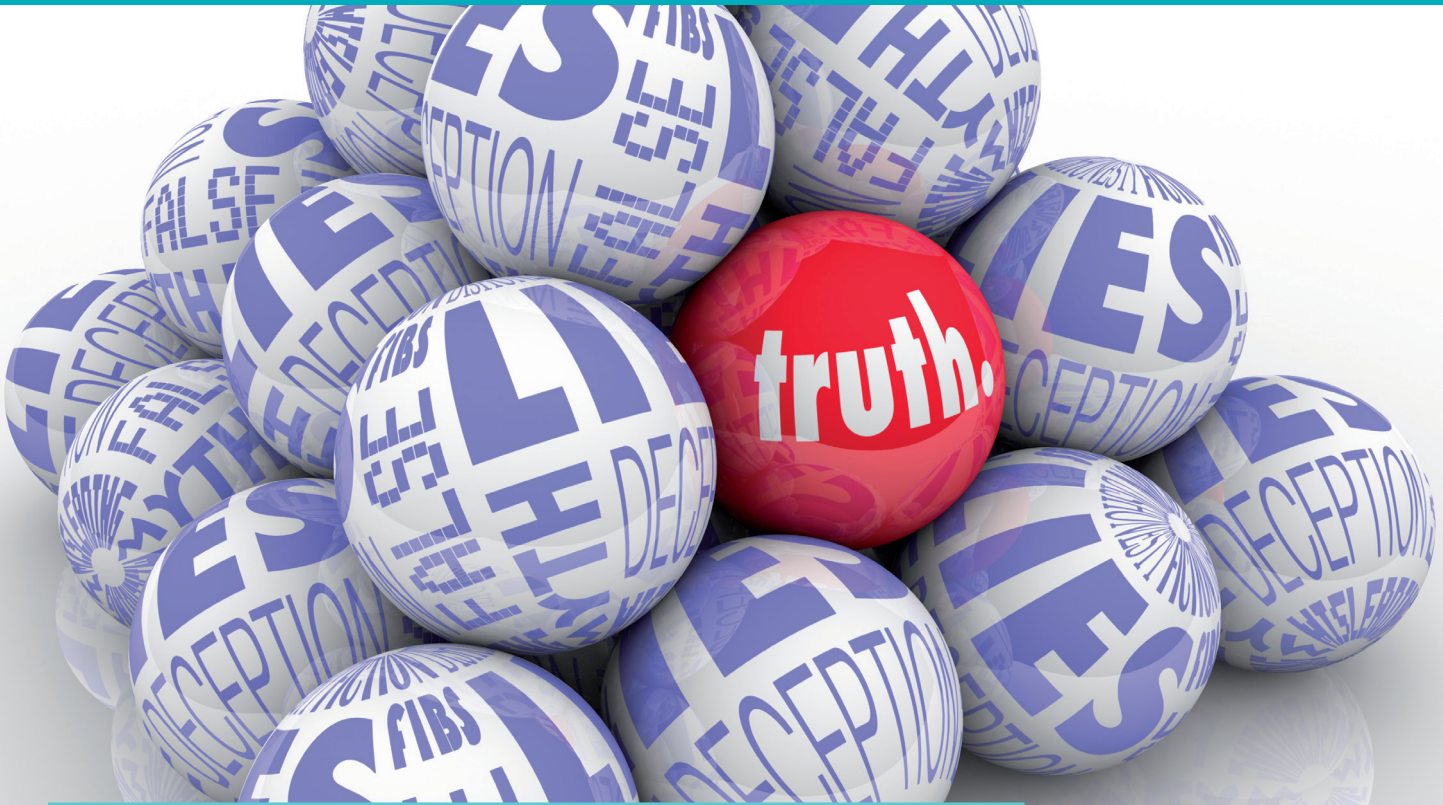
These instructor supplements are available for download from a password-protected section of Pearson Canada's online catalogue (<http://catalogue.pearsoned.ca>). Navigate to your text's catalogue page to view a list of available supplements. Speak to your local Pearson sales representative for details and access.

- **Instructor's Manual.** This manual includes chapter-by-chapter learning objectives and classifies the test bank questions by topic, objective, and skill.

Learning Solutions Managers. Pearson's Learning Solutions Managers work with faculty and campus course designers to ensure that Pearson technology products, assessment tools, and online course materials are tailored to meet your specific needs. This highly qualified team is dedicated to helping schools take full advantage of a wide range of educational resources, by assisting in the integration of a variety of instructional materials and media formats. Your local Pearson Canada sales representative can provide you with more details on this service program.

Chapter 1

Doing Social Research



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Photo Credit: IQconcept/Fotolia

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- LO 1** Explain why knowledge of social research methods is a useful “everyday” skill to have.
- LO 2** Explain five alternatives to social research.
- LO 3** Explain what is meant by the *scientific community* and the *scientific method*.
- LO 4** Describe the general steps in the research process.
- LO 5** Explain the difference between academic and applied research.
- LO 6** Explain the three major purposes of social research.
- LO 7** Compare the two major time dimensions in social research.
- LO 8** Explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches, and identify their main data collection techniques.

INTRODUCTION

If you think about the last time you heard some shocking science-related news, it was probably on social media within the last few days. It may have made you think about your consumption patterns or behaviour, particularly if the news you heard was about a particular disease. But did you stop to think about how the researchers came up with their findings? If you didn't, you are not alone. The vast majority of people do not possess the skills to critically evaluate research.

As teachers of social research methods, we believe that research is the most interesting and most important topic in our fields. The fact of the matter is that social research affects many aspects of our everyday lived experiences. Educators, government officials, business managers, human service providers, and health care professionals regularly use social research methods to guide their policies and practices. People use the findings from social research to reduce crime, improve public health, sell products, or just understand aspects of their lives. And as mentioned above, reports of research findings, especially those that are “shocking,” appear all over the media every day. Most importantly, however, because the results of research are discussed in the popular media, understanding how researchers arrived at their findings can make you an informed consumer of research. The knowledge and skills you will acquire from this text and a course on research methods is a *practical* skill that you can use in your everyday life as a consumer and informed citizen. It is not just some course-specific information that has no applicability in the real world. The skills you can obtain from understanding social research methods are perhaps among the most real-world applicable skill sets you will ever receive for distinguishing good information from false information. Whether or not you ever conduct your own research, knowing how to discern sound research from “garbage” research is an important skill for anyone to have.

LO 1 Explain why knowledge of social research methods is a useful “everyday” skill to have.

social research: A process in which a researcher combines a set of principles, outlooks, and ideas with a collection of specific practices, techniques, and strategies to produce knowledge.

WHY DO SOCIAL RESEARCH?

People conduct social research to learn something new about the social world. A researcher combines theories or ideas with facts in a careful, systematic way. He or she learns to organize and plan carefully and creatively and to select the appropriate technique to address a specific kind of question. A researcher must treat the people in a study in ethical and moral ways. In addition, a researcher must fully and clearly communicate the results of a study to others.

Social research is a process in which people combine a set of principles, outlooks, and ideas (i.e., methodology) with a collection of specific practices, techniques, and strategies (i.e., a method of inquiry) to produce knowledge. It is a challenging process of discovery that requires persistence, personal integrity, tolerance for ambiguity, interaction with others, and commitment to doing quality work.

Reading this text cannot transform you into an expert researcher, but it can teach you to be a better consumer of research results, help you to understand how the research enterprise works, and prepare you to conduct small research projects. It will also make you equipped to identify good research practices and critically assess whether the shocking finding reported on social media is an outcome of sound research design. After studying this text, you will be aware of what research can and cannot do and why properly conducted research is important.

LO 2 Explain five alternatives to social research.

ALTERNATIVES TO SOCIAL RESEARCH

Most of what you know about the social world is not based on doing social research. You probably learned most of your knowledge about the social world by using an alternative to social research, based on what your parents and other people (e.g., friends, teachers) have told you. You also have knowledge based on your personal experiences, the books and magazines you have read, and the movies and television shows you have watched. You may also use plain old common sense.

More than just a collection of techniques, social research is a process for producing knowledge. It is a more structured, organized, and systematic process than the alternatives that most of us use in daily life. Knowledge from the alternatives is often

correct, but knowledge based on research is more likely to be accurate and have fewer errors. Although research does not always produce perfect knowledge, compared with the alternatives it is much less likely to be flawed. Let us review the alternatives before examining social research.

Authority

You have acquired knowledge from parents, teachers, and experts as well as from books, television, and other media. When you accept something as true because someone in a position of authority says it is true or because it is in an authoritative publication, you are relying on authority as a basis for knowledge. Relying on the wisdom of authorities is a quick, simple, and cheap way to learn something. Authorities often spend time and effort to gain knowledge, and you can benefit from their experience and work.

There are also limitations to relying on authority. First, it is easy to overestimate the expertise of other people. You may assume that they are right when they are not. History is full of past experts whom we now see as being misinformed. For example, some “experts” of the past measured intelligence by counting bumps on the skull; other “experts” used bloodletting to try to cure diseases. Their errors seem obvious now, but can you be certain that today’s experts will not become tomorrow’s fools? Second, authorities may not agree, and all authorities may not be equally dependable. Whom should we believe if authorities disagree? Third, authorities may speak on fields they know little about, or they may be plain wrong. An expert who is very informed about one area may use his or her authority in an unrelated area. Also, using the halo effect (discussed later), expertise in one area may spill over illegitimately to be authority in a totally different area. Have you ever seen television commercials in which an athlete uses his or her fame as authority to convince you to buy a product? We need to ask: Who is, or is not, an authority?

An additional issue is the misuse of authority. Sometimes organizations or individuals give an appearance of authority so they can convince others to agree to something that they might not otherwise. For example, much research is reported by **think tanks**, which are organizations composed of a body of experts in a field that are often motivated by particular advocacy goals. Sometimes these advocacy goals can be political and ideological in nature, and therefore the topics they choose and the research findings they report tend to reflect a certain ideology. For example, in Canada, the findings reported by the Fraser Institute tend to reflect a conservative and free-market capitalist agenda, while findings from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives tend to focus on social justice issues. Thus, in evaluating the authority of research findings, it is important to know the source of the research that is being reported and any motivations it might have to push forward a certain agenda.

Think tanks: Organizations composed of a body of experts in a field that are often motivated by particular advocacy goals.

Tradition

People sometimes rely on tradition for knowledge. Tradition is a special case of authority—the authority of the past. Tradition means you accept something as being true because “it’s the way things have always been.” Many people believe that children who are raised at home by their mothers grow up to be better adjusted and have fewer personal problems than those raised in other settings. People “know” this, but how did they learn it? Most accept it because they believe (rightly or wrongly) that it was true in the past or is the way things have always been done. Some traditional social knowledge begins as simple prejudice. You might rely on tradition without being fully aware of it when you believe such things as “People from ‘that’ neighbourhood will never amount to anything,” or “You can never trust that type of person,” or “That’s

the way men (or women) are.” Even if traditional knowledge was once true, it can become distorted as it is passed on, and soon it is no longer true.

Common Sense

You know a lot about the social world from your everyday reasoning or common sense. You rely on what everyone knows and what “just makes sense.” For example, it “just makes sense” that murder rates are higher in nations that do not have the death penalty because people are less likely to kill if they face execution for doing so. This and other widely held common sense beliefs—such as that poor youth are more likely to commit deviant acts than those from the middle class, or that most Catholics do not use birth control—are false.

Common sense is valuable in daily living, but it allows logical fallacies to slip into one’s thinking. For example, the so-called gambler’s fallacy is, “If I have a long string of losses playing a lottery, the next time I play my chances of winning will be better.” In terms of probability, this is false. Also, common sense contains contradictory ideas that often go unnoticed because people use the ideas at different times, such as “opposites attract” and “birds of a feather flock together.” Common sense can originate in tradition. It is useful and sometimes correct, but it also contains errors, misinformation, contradiction, and prejudice.

Media Myths

Television shows, movies, and newspaper and magazine articles are important sources of information. For example, most people have no contact with criminals but learn about crime by watching television shows and movies and by reading newspapers. However, television portrayals of crime (and of many other things) do not accurately reflect social reality. The writers who create or “adapt” images from life for television shows and movie scripts distort reality, either out of ignorance or because they rely on authority, tradition, and common sense. Their primary goal is to entertain, not to accurately represent reality. Although many journalists try to present a realistic picture of the world, they must write stories in short periods with limited information and within editorial guidelines.

Unfortunately, the media tend to perpetuate the myths of a culture, as do some bloggers and individuals on social networking tools such as Twitter, Tumblr, and reddit. And because what bloggers and other social media users post is very current, people often mistake the information on such sites for fact, when it is often just opinion. For example, the media purport that most Canadians who receive welfare are single mothers (in reality, single and childless men are the largest group of recipients), that most people who are mentally ill are violent and dangerous (only a small percentage actually are), or that extreme weather is evidence that climate change is a hoax (when, in fact, this supports climate change arguments). Also, mass media hype can create the perception that the magnitude of a problem is greater than it is (see Box 1.1). People are misled by visual images more easily than by other forms of “lying”; this means that stories or stereotypes that appear in film and on television can have a powerful effect.

Competing interests use the media to win public support.¹ Public relations campaigns try to alter public opinion about scientific findings, making it difficult for the public to judge research outcomes. For example, a large majority of scientific research supports the theory on climate change (i.e., pollutants from industrialization and massive deforestation are raising Earth’s temperature and will lead to environmental disasters), but the media give equal attention to a few dissenters who question climate change, creating the impression in the public mind that “no one really knows” or that scientists are undecided about the issue. Media sources do not mention that the

Box 1.1 In the News

Is the Vaccine Panic a Media Myth?

Canadians hear a lot about the importance of getting vaccinated. They must make decisions about vaccinating themselves against seasonal flu and new “pandemic” strains. Many must also make decisions about vaccinating their children against potentially life-threatening illnesses.

Parents obviously only want to have such injections administered to their children if they are proved to be safe. In the past several years, a purported link between childhood vaccinations—particularly the vaccine for measles, mumps, and rubella (known as MMR)—and childhood autism has come into the media spotlight. Measles, mumps, and rubella are potentially life-threatening illnesses that strike in childhood. This rumour about the supposed link between the vaccine and autism has surfaced time and time again in the media across the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

What caused this media myth to start? In a paper originally published in 1998 in the prestigious British medical journal *The Lancet*, Wakefield and colleagues argued that they found a link between the MMR vaccine and later bowel dis-

ease and autism in children. Since then, the paper has been officially retracted and shown to be extremely flawed. For one, the study’s findings relied on a very small biased sample of 12 children, which was found to be fabricated. Subsequent studies, all of which had much larger samples (in the thousands) and much more rigorous research designs, failed to show any link between the MMR vaccination and autism.²

While the Wakefield paper was retracted, this was not done until several years after the original publication date. Although Wakefield was stripped of his licence to practise medicine in Britain in 2010, and later evidence from the *British Medical Journal* accused Wakefield of outright research fraud (Godlee, Smith, & Marcovitch, 2011), public confidence in vaccines was severely damaged in the media frenzy that followed the publicity surrounding the original flawed research paper. In fact, the myth still exists that there is a link between vaccinations and autism, and this myth continues to be perpetuated by influential celebrities like Jenny McCarthy. As a result, the number of parents not vaccinating their children has increased, and there is some concern that our collective immunity is being threatened.

dissenters represent less than 2 percent of all scientists or that most dissenting studies are paid for by heavily polluting industries. Industries also spend millions of dollars to publicize the negative findings because their goal is to deflect growing criticism and delay environmental regulations, not to advance knowledge.

News media offer horoscopes, and television programs and movies report on supernatural powers, ESP (extrasensory perception), UFOs (unidentified flying objects), and angels or ghosts. Although no scientific evidence exists for such phenomena, between 20 and 50 percent of the Canadian public accepts them as true, and the percentage holding such beliefs has been growing over time as entertainment media give the phenomena more prominence.³

Personal Experience

If something happens to you, if you personally see it or experience it, you accept it as true. Personal experience, or “seeing is believing,” has a strong impact and is a powerful source of knowledge. Unfortunately, personal experience can lead you astray. What appears true may actually be due to a slight error or distortion in judgment. The power of immediacy and direct personal contact is very strong. In spite of knowing this, many people believe what they see or personally experience rather than what very carefully designed research has discovered.

The four errors of personal experience—overgeneralization, selective observation, premature closure, and the halo effect—reinforce each other and can occur in other areas, as well. They are a basis for misleading people through propaganda, cons or fraud, magic, stereotyping, and some advertising.

The first and most common problem is **overgeneralization**. It occurs when some evidence supports your belief, but you falsely assume that it also applies to many other situations. Limited generalization may be appropriate; under certain conditions, a small amount of evidence can explain a larger situation. The problem is that many

overgeneralization: An error that people often make when using personal experience as an alternative to science for acquiring knowledge. It occurs when some evidence supports a belief, but a person falsely assumes that it applies to many other situations, too.

people generalize far beyond limited evidence. For example, over the years the authors of this text have known a number of visually impaired people. All of them have been very friendly. Can the authors then conclude that all visually impaired people are friendly? Do the six or so people with whom they happened to have personal experience represent all such people?

selective observation: The tendency to take notice of certain people or events based on past experience or attitudes.

The second error, **selective observation**, occurs when you take special notice of some people or events and tend to seek out evidence that confirms what you already believe and to ignore contradictory information. People often focus on or observe particular cases or situations, especially when they fit preconceived ideas. We are sensitive to features that confirm what we think but ignore features that contradict our ideas. Psychologists have found that people tend to “seek out” and distort their memories to make them more consistent with what they already think.⁴

premature closure: An error that is often made when using personal experience as an alternative to science for acquiring knowledge. It occurs when a person feels he or she has the answers and does not need to listen, seek information, or raise questions any longer.

A third error is premature closure, which often operates with and reinforces the first two errors. **Premature closure** occurs when you feel you have the answer and do not need to listen, seek information, or raise questions any longer. Unfortunately, most of us are a little lazy or get a little sloppy. We take a few pieces of evidence or look at events for a short while and then think we have it figured out. We look for evidence to confirm or reject an idea and stop when a small amount of evidence is present. We jump to conclusions. For example, we want to learn whether people in a particular town support Mary Smith or Juan Sanchez for mayor. We ask 20 people; 16 say they favour Mary, 2 are undecided, and only 2 favour Juan, so we stop there and believe Mary will win on the basis of a small sampling of town residents.

halo effect: An error often made when people use personal experience as an alternative to science for acquiring knowledge. It occurs when a person overgeneralizes from what he or she accepts as being highly positive or prestigious and lets its favourable impression or prestige “rub off” onto other areas.

The fourth common error is the **halo effect**, which occurs when we overgeneralize from what we accept as being highly positive or prestigious and let its favourable impression or prestige “rub off” onto other areas. For example, you pick up a report by a person from a prestigious university—say, McGill or the University of Toronto. You assume that the author is smart and talented and that the report will be excellent. You do not make this assumption about a report by someone from an unknown university or college. Under the halo effect, you form an opinion and prejudge the report and may not evaluate it by its own merits alone.

LO 3 Explain what is meant by the *scientific community* and the *scientific method*.

HOW SCIENCE WORKS

Although social research builds on some aspects of alternative ways of developing knowledge, it is science that distinguishes social research. Social research involves thinking scientifically about questions about the social world and following scientific processes. This suggests that we examine the meaning of science and how it works.

Science

data: The *empirical evidence* or information that a person gathers carefully according to established rules or procedures; it can be qualitative or quantitative.

The term *science* conjures up an image of test tubes, computers, and people in white lab coats. These outward trappings are a part of science, especially natural science (i.e., astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, and physics), which deals with the physical and material world (e.g., planets, plants, chemicals, rocks, electricity). The social sciences—such as anthropology, psychology, political science, and sociology—involve the study of people and their beliefs, behaviour, interaction, institutions, and so forth. Fewer people associate these disciplines with the word *science*. Science is a social institution and a means of producing knowledge. Not everyone is well informed about science.

quantitative data: Information in the form of numbers.

Scientists gather data using specialized techniques and use the data to support or reject theories. **Data** are the empirical evidence or information that one gathers carefully according to rules or procedures. Data can be **quantitative** (i.e., expressed as numbers) or **qualitative** (i.e., expressed as words, visual images, sounds, or objects).

qualitative data: Information in the form of words, pictures, sounds, visual images, or objects.

Table 1.1 How Different Sources of Knowledge Might Address the Topic of Vaccine Safety

Knowledge Source	How the Topic of Vaccine Safety Might Be Addressed
Authority	Doctors say that vaccinations are safe and that they are rigorously tested before they are administered to the public. My doctor says they are safe, too.
Tradition	Vaccines have been around since the 18th century and have served to eradicate many devastating diseases.
Common Sense	Pharmaceutical companies spend a lot of money on developing vaccines, so vaccines must be safe.
Media Myth	I saw celebrities on TV arguing that vaccines are dangerous. They are suggesting that many other people may feel the same way.
Personal Experience	My mother had me and my siblings vaccinated, and we are all fine.
Scientific	The study linking vaccines to autism has been retracted because it was fraudulent, and several other studies have since shown absolutely no linkage between the vaccine and developing autism.

Empirical evidence refers to observations that people experience through the senses—touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste. This confuses some people, because researchers cannot use their senses to directly observe many aspects of the social world they seek answers about (e.g., intelligence, attitudes, opinions, feelings, emotions, power, authority).

The various ways in which acquiring knowledge might address the topic of the safety of vaccinations (discussed in Box 1.1) are shown in Table 1.1.

The Scientific Community

Science comes to life through the operation of the scientific community, which sustains the assumptions, attitudes, and techniques of science. The **scientific community** is a collection of people who practise science and a set of norms, behaviours, and attitudes that bind them together. It is a professional community—a group of interacting people who share ethical principles, beliefs and values, techniques and training, and career paths. For the most part, the scientific community includes both the natural and social sciences.

Many people outside the core scientific community use scientific research techniques. A range of practitioners and technicians apply research techniques that scientists developed and refined. Many use the research techniques (e.g., a survey) without possessing a deep knowledge of scientific research. Yet anyone who uses the techniques or results of science can do so better if they also understand the principles and processes of the scientific community.

At the core of the scientific community are researchers who conduct studies on a full-time or part-time basis, usually with the help of assistants. Many research assistants are graduate students, and some are undergraduates. Working as a research assistant gives most young scientists a real grasp on the details of doing research. Universities employ most members of the scientific community's core. Some scientists work for

empirical evidence: The observations that people experience through their senses—touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste; these can be direct or indirect.

scientific community: A collection of people who share a system of rules and attitudes that sustain the process of producing scientific knowledge.

the government (such as for Statistics Canada) or for private industry (such as for Ipsos Canada, Gallup, Pollara, and Environics). Most, however, work at the approximately 200 research universities and institutes located mostly in the advanced, industrialized countries. Thus, the scientific community is scattered geographically, but its members tend to work together in small clusters.

How big is the scientific community? A discipline such as sociology may have about 8000 active researchers worldwide. Most researchers complete only two or three studies in their careers, whereas a small number of highly active researchers conduct a large number of studies. In a specialty or topic area (e.g., the study of at-risk youth, social movements, divorce), only about 100 researchers are very active and conduct most research studies. Although research results represent what humanity knows and have a major impact on the lives of millions of people, only a small number of people actually produce most new scientific knowledge.

The Scientific Method and Attitude

You have probably heard of the scientific method, and you may be wondering how it relates to all of this. The **scientific method** is not one single thing: It refers to the ideas, rules, techniques, and approaches that the scientific community uses. The method arises from a loose agreement within the community of scientists. It includes a way of looking at the world that places a high value on professionalism, craftsmanship, ethical integrity, creativity, rigorous standards, and diligence. It also includes strong professional norms, such as honesty and uprightness in doing research, openness about how a study is conducted, and a focus on the merits of the research itself and not on any characteristics of the individuals who conducted the research.

scientific method: The process of creating new knowledge using the ideas, techniques, and rules of the scientific community.

LO 4 Describe the general steps in the research process.

STEPS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Social research proceeds in a sequence of steps. Although various approaches to research suggest slightly different steps, most studies follow the seven steps discussed here.

To begin the process, you select a *topic*—a general area of study or issue, such as domestic abuse, homelessness, or powerful corporate elites. But a topic is too broad for conducting a study—this makes the next step crucial. You must then narrow down the topic, or *focus* the topic into a specific research question for a study (e.g., “Are people who marry at a younger age more likely to physically abuse a spouse under conditions of high stress than those who marry at an older age?”). As you learn about a topic and narrow the focus, you should review past research, or the literature, on a topic or question. You also want to develop a possible answer, or hypothesis, so theory can be important at this stage.

After specifying a research question, you will have to *design* a highly detailed plan on how you will carry out the study. This third step requires that you decide on the many practical details of doing the research (e.g., whether to use a survey or qualitative observation in the field, how many subjects to use). It is only after completing the design stage that you are ready to *collect* the data or evidence (e.g., ask people the questions, record answers). Once you have gathered the data carefully, your next step is to *analyze* the data. This will help you see any patterns and give meaning to, or *interpret*, the data (e.g., “People who marry young and grew up in families with abuse have higher rates of physical domestic abuse than those with different family histories.”).

Finally, you must *inform others* by writing a report (we return to this topic in Chapter 4) that describes the study’s background, how you conducted it, and what you discovered. The seven-step process shown in Figure 1.1 is oversimplified. In

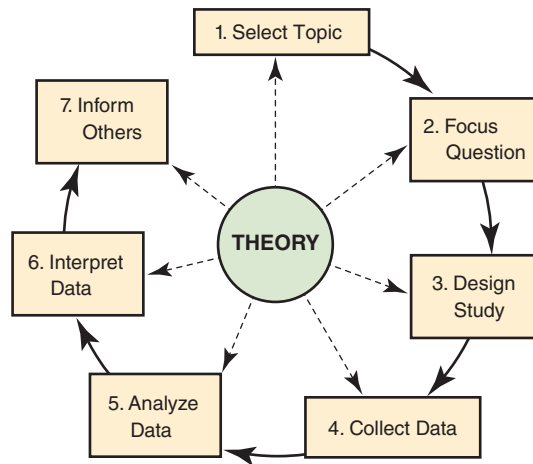


Figure 1.1 Steps in the Research Process

practice, you will rarely complete one step totally and then leave it behind to move to the next step. Rather, the process is an interactive one in which the steps blend into each other. What you do in a later step may stimulate you to reconsider and slightly adjust your thinking in a previous one. The seven steps are for one research project; it is one cycle of going through the steps in a single study on a specific topic.

USE OF RESEARCH

For over a century, science has had two wings: Some researchers adopt a detached, purely scientific, and academic orientation; others are more activist, pragmatic, and interventionist oriented. This is not a rigid separation. Researchers in the two wings cooperate and maintain friendly relationships. Some individuals move from one wing to another at different stages in their careers. In simple terms, some researchers concentrate on advancing general knowledge over the long term, whereas others conduct studies to solve specific, immediate problems. Those who concentrate on examining the fundamental nature of social reality are engaged in basic research.

LO 5 Explain the difference between academic and applied research.

Academic Research

Academic social research advances fundamental knowledge about the social world. Academic researchers focus on testing theories that explain how the social world operates, what makes things happen, why social relations are a certain way, and why society changes. Academic research is the source of most new scientific ideas and ways of thinking about the world. Many laypersons criticize basic research, asking, “What good is it?” and consider it to be a waste of time and money. Although academic research often lacks a practical application in the short term, it provides a foundation for knowledge in a specific discipline that may advance understanding in many policy areas, problems, or areas of study. Academic research is the source of most of the tools, methods, theories, and ideas used by applied researchers to analyze underlying causes of people’s actions or thinking. It provides the major breakthroughs that significantly advance knowledge; it is the painstaking study of broad questions that has the potential to shift how we think about a wide range of issues. It may have an impact for the next 50 or 100 years. Often, the applications of academic research appear many years or decades later. Practical applications may be apparent only after many accumulated advances in academic knowledge build over a long period.

academic social research: Research designed to advance fundamental knowledge about the social world.