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Communication Research: Strategies and Sources

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Foreword

Communication Research: Strategies and Sources is designed to acquaint students of communication with research and the vast array of information sources available in the discipline. It describes the strategies involved in selecting, refining, and researching communication topics. It is a guide to the literature, explaining the content and utility of significant and representative communication research sources. It is also a communication research manual, providing an opportunity for students to use and become familiar with communication research materials. Throughout the book, we stress the overall strategy of searching the literature for information on a particular topic.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the necessary steps to begin communication research and describes published sources that are available in or accessible through most medium-sized college and university libraries. The works that are described are used when conducting documentary, archival, or library research. This type of research is necessary before any other research methodology is attempted.

Communication is a broad discipline in which researchers are interested in many different subject areas. Thus, we explain the structure of the communication field, the types of research done by students of communication, and focus on the basics of documentary and library research. These basics include developing and refining research questions, writing and organizing, beginning investigation of a topic, and acquiring the tools that make the research process more efficient. We also describe each type of communication research source that is available for accomplishing a research goal.

This text is beneficial for both undergraduate and graduate students who need to become acquainted with the variety of available communication research resources and procedures. We introduce students to sources in interpersonal, group, organizational, public, and mass communication and to common research strategies.

Foreword

Because the book is designed as a supplemental text, there is a fair amount of flexibility in its use—from one or two students working independently, to a module within a course, to an entire class focused on communication research. Any undergraduate or graduate communication course that requires students to use the literature of the field is an appropriate vehicle for offering instruction in researching topics.

For example, this text is a helpful introduction to research procedures and the communication literature in Introduction to Graduate Studies classes as well as in undergraduate and graduate Communication Theory and Research classes. It is appropriate for a variety of introductory-level undergraduate classes in which it is desirable to acquaint students with the literature and research procedures of the field. In addition, instructors may select from among the many sources cited those that are pertinent to their specific courses, such as Freedom of Speech, Media Law, Organizational Communication, Investigative Reporting, Interpersonal Communication, and Media Research. This book is also a useful manual to aid research-paper writing and development by students working on independent studies. It is most helpful for graduate student preparation of thesis and dissertation proposals and for the literature reviews required in many graduate and undergraduate courses.

Students unfamiliar with the library will need some general orientation instruction. The library staff will be able to clarify such matters as the use of the library catalog, location of periodicals, and any special location symbols used in the library.

Some chapters include exercises that require students to use several annotated sources. Generally, these questions hypothetically place students in a specific course and present a need to acquire information for a specific project. For example, "You are preparing to lead a discussion on the effects of cartoon violence on children in your Group Communication class. . . ." These assignments lead students to important communication research sources and provide perspective on how the sources are useful in a variety of courses and situations. Questions reiterate points made in the text of the chapter and show how the sources can be used to build a comprehensive bibliography on a chosen communication topic. Answers to the Exercise questions for Part Two are available to instructors from the authors. Chapters in other sections of the book include exercises for classroom discussion.

Users of previous editions will notice a new chapter about searching the Internet, a worldwide information superhighway. We have also updated all sources, adding new ones and eliminating

some older materials, and have changed several Exercise questions. There have been some changes in APA style since the last edition. We explain these changes and the new reference style in Appendix A.

We are grateful for the comments and suggestions of several people who helped us refine our ideas throughout our four editions: Alan Albarran, Southern Methodist University; Alison Alexander, University of Georgia; Steven Beebe, Southwest Texas University; Roger Desmond, University of Hartford; William Donahue, Michigan State University; James Fletcher, University of Georgia; Karen Foss, University of New Mexico; Claudia Hale, Ohio University; Peter Hamilton, Pittsburg State University; Eva McMahan, University of Alabama; Dale Hample, Western Illinois University; Fred Hilpert, California State College–Stanislaus; Ken Ksobiech, Marquette University; Marilyn Mathias-Root, Boston University; Andrew Rancer, University of Akron; Lawrence Rosenfeld, University of North Carolina; Edward Springer, Villanova University; James Witterbols, Niagara University; Janet Yerby, Central Michigan University; and Stephanie Zimmerman, San Jose State University.

R.B.R.

A.M.R.

L.J.P.

Introduction

We believe that university students actively seek to master the available tools when learning about the field of communication. The library contains many of these communication research tools. Our aim is to introduce these tools to you and to explain how they can be used to help increase your knowledge of communication. How much effort you give to this learning process will determine how much you personally gain.

Introduction

This book is divided into three main parts. In Part One, we explain why and how communication research is done. After surveying the field of communication, we look at the research process, selecting and narrowing research topics and questions, searching the literature, and using computers to search databases and access information on computer networks.

In Part Two, we explore the available types of communication research sources or reference materials. We consider general communication research sources such as subject handbooks, textbooks, encyclopedias, and annual reviews. These materials are helpful in defining subjects or topics you may wish to investigate. We also examine finding tools such as bibliographies, guides to the literature, indexes, and abstracts. These tools are needed to locate sources and materials. In the next two chapters we discuss more specific communication research sources, namely communication periodicals (scholarly journals and professional magazines) and information compilations (collections, statistical compendia, government publications, yearbooks, directories, dictionaries, and manuals). These periodicals and compilations are important for finding primary and factual data and for developing research projects.

In Part Three, we explain how to design and conduct research investigations and how to complete literature reviews and other

projects. The final chapter ties together the ideas presented throughout the book.

Because we try to highlight a representative sample of references in each chapter, not all works important to the study of communication can be discussed at length. Numerous sources, though, are listed at the ends of the chapters and are indexed at the end of the book. The sources we have selected do not constitute an exhaustive list. We chose them because they represent the many diverse areas of communication research, they are written in or translated into the English language, and they are available at many college and university libraries. We also identify some specific sources, such as archival and legal references, which are available via specialized libraries, because they are accessible and of particular utility to communication researchers.

As with any book, materials become dated, and new or revised sources become available between the time a book is written and is available for use. You will undoubtedly uncover other important bibliographic tools in your literature searches. As you do, just add them in the chapters and to the source index for quick reference in the future.

We mentioned earlier that a major goal is to introduce and explain bibliographic tools that are available for investigating communication topics. In so doing, we hope we will accomplish a secondary goal of reducing the anxiety many students feel when researching a communication topic for the first time or when confronted with so much information that they don't know where to start. We anticipate that this book will be a useful starting point and a reference guide and that it will assist you in learning about communication.

Helpful Hints

Students who have used earlier versions of this book have offered some helpful hints. These tips make a lot of sense.

First, get to know the physical layout of the library you will be using. Find the reference section, the reserve desk, and the library catalogs or computer stations. Discover how books and periodicals are arranged in your library. This information is usually available in printed form when you enter the library. Ask about the availability of CD-ROM databases, on-line search services, and accessibility of the Internet. Consult a reference librarian or staff member at an information desk if you have a question, any question.

Introduction

Second, complete the Exercises at the ends of the chapters. Be sure to read thoroughly each chapter before trying to answer the questions. In fact, we constructed the Exercises so that reading the chapter first will be an enormous aid to completing the questions. Students who were looking for shortcuts in the past became frustrated. Your amount of effort will actually be reduced by reading the chapters before trying to answer the questions.

There are no trick questions in the Exercises. Each reference source you are asked to use is explained in the chapter text. Read the *annotations* carefully. The sources that are annotated or described in detail in the text sometimes provide clues for answering the questions. When you locate reference sources that are new to you, examine them carefully. Explore the table of contents, examine the preface and introduction, and look for an index. In so doing, the sources themselves may provide you with a more efficient method of use. If you find yourself spending more than 15 minutes on any one question, your approach to the problem may not be the best. Ask a reference librarian for advice. Also, ask for help when you cannot find a source you need. It may be shelved in a different location in the library.

Third, if you are working on a research paper, literature review, or research prospectus as you read this book, keep in mind the sources you examine as you develop a research topic or question. You might find it advantageous to return to the materials discussed in earlier chapters for a more thorough examination. For instance, the Exercises in Part Two will sometimes ask you to look at only one volume of a multivolume work. Once you have solidified your own research topic, you might want to go back to the other volumes to see if they can help lead you to additional references. Because you already will be familiar with how these sources are used, it will require little effort to check them for pertinent information.

In a similar vein, if you have a clear-cut topic in mind as you progress through the chapters, do not hesitate to examine each source thoroughly as you use the guide. This will save you time in the future. You can easily compile a thorough bibliography as you proceed through the chapters of this book.

Fourth, update the references in this book whenever possible. Students in the past have found that they misplace additional or updated references if they do not add them when they are first located. The space provided at the ends of the chapters and in the index can be used to update and to add references. You may also want to augment the annotations and citations with your own notes on using the materials. In this way, the book will become an even more useful and comprehensive collection of communication research materials.

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PART ONE

Communication Research Strategies

The essence of strategy is careful planning. Accordingly, communication research requires a comprehensive plan of action. Part One focuses on conventional search procedures used to investigate communications topics.

In Chapter 1, we discuss the types of research projects students typically undertake and then describe the general structure of the communication discipline. Next, in Chapter 2, we outline search procedures and provide an orientation to library research. In Chapter 3, we explain the strategies used to search computerized bibliographic databases. And in Chapter 4, we explain how to use the Internet to search other bibliographic databases.

Part One of the book, then, is an orientation to the process of communication research. We include end-of-chapter exercises to help you formulate a strategy—a plan of action—for completing research projects. If you are using this text in a college course, you will find it worthwhile to ask your instructor for feedback about how well you understand the research strategies by discussing your answers to the exercises.

Chapter 1

Studying Communication

Why should we study communication? Those who do will tell you that their work is driven by a need to know more about human interaction and the communication process. To discover how communication works, we need to develop skills for acquiring and using information throughout our professional lives.

Research is often defined as systematic inquiry into a subject. The key word in this definition, *systematic*, points to the need to examine topics methodically rather than to plunge haphazardly into sources. Two major goals in this book are to acquaint you with this step-by-step procedure of inquiry and to provide guidance for following these generally accepted principles and practices of research.

In this chapter, we explain how communication students and professionals become involved in the research process. First, we look at the types of projects that require systematic inquiry in the communication discipline. Then we explore the profession and how the discipline is organized. This will give you an idea of the interdisciplinary nature of communication and a sense of what interests communication researchers.