Introduction to

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

JOHN C. REINARD

Introduction to Communication Research

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PREFACE

Research is not library work.

Nor is it statistics.

Nor is it field observation.

Research is an argument. In particular, communication research is a process by which we answer questions and try to draw conclusions from information gathered about message-related behavior. The tools of scholarship (libraries, statistics, and field work) are ways we attempt to find high-quality evidence. Thus, this book attempts to train students to gather research evidence, to develop research arguments, and to think critically about them. In short, this book is designed to teach students how to "do scholarship." It teaches students how steps in scholarship are essential parts in making cases and offering research conclusions.

This book represents the product of many years of experimentation with instruction of the introductory research methods. In fact, for years "underground" copies of the materials in this book and related resources were used to teach highly successful classes at nearly a dozen Western universities. Such experiences led to refinements that are reflected in this book and instructor's manual. Experience has shown these materials to be suitable for substantive courses taught at the sophomore and junior levels. The point of view of this book—though compatible with all instructors with whom the author has come into contact—is focused on meeting student needs, not to impress professors.

This book is written for—and to—students who are taking their first course in research methods. Its chief objective is to equip students to be critical users of the broad realm of communication research. By the end of the course, students should know how to do a few things. First, they should know how to present and evaluate a research argument. They should know how to construct an argument from literature, not just know what a literature review looks like on the surface. Since most of the classes that follow the research methods course require students to do research-based writing, they need to know how to complete the process of drawing conclusions and making arguments from the literature. Second, the students must know how to deal with the brass tacks of research: they must know how to isolate a problem statement; they must know how to distinguish independent and dependent variables; they must know how to criticize and evaluate definitions; they must know what theories are and why they are important; they must learn how to use the library; they must know the methods of sound research and standards for evaluating and proposing worthwhile studies; they must know how to compose scholarship; they must understand how to collect data and execute a logical

design; they must understand the rudiments of data analysis. This list is not a random collection, but an explicit set of learning criteria for courses in which this book is most appropriate.

This book emphasizes understanding of concepts blended with a clear set of survival skills needed by students. Traditionally, writers of research methods textbooks have faced a dilemma of sorts. On one hand, to deal with research, all the possible methods often have been reviewed. The students sometimes have formed the impression that research methods are so overwhelming that the subject is beyond their understanding. On the other hand, those books that have attempted to be very selective in their coverage have left out reference materials students needed when reviewing research in the library or when undertaking proposals for future research projects. This textbook includes key survival information followed by "Special Discussions," which are clearly identified as enrichment information. By focusing on the needs that students have indicated in past classes, this book has been designed to develop basic skills of scholarship while also surveying major approaches. It is a serious attempt to present a student-adapted set of broadly-based and comprehensive materials for the unique needs of the undergraduate research methods course.

Four qualities distinguish this undertaking from others in the field.

- It introduces students to the diversity and methods (both introductory qualitative and quantitative) of research in the field. The material, though challenging in its breadth, is dedicated to the sophomore and junior level students' needs to deal with research in the field.
- It very deliberately takes a critical thinking approach to introducing strategies of qualitative and quantitative research in communication. Students learn how research arguments are made and how to evaluate them.
- It is designed to prepare students to do rudimentary research and to criticize scholarship.
- Since communication research courses serve students from several communication areas—including speech communication, journalism, telecommunications, public relations, and speech and hearing science—examples from all these areas are deliberately included in discussions of content.

This textbook is divided into four sections that correspond to the major units successfully taught in introductory communication research methods courses. The first section deals with an "Introduction to the Field" of communication as a research area. Students are guided through two chapters that introduce communication research as a distinct form and that review the issues involved in composing the communication research problem, using hypotheses, and isolating types of variables.

The second part of the textbook, "Understanding Rudiments of Research Reasoning," establishes a point of view for the book and addresses the hands-on skills that undergraduate students need almost immediately. The section is composed of four chapters. The first deals with "Using Communication Research Sources" and focuses on library research skills and strategies. The second discusses the composition of communication research including the anatomy of research articles and the mechanics of writing different forms of scholarly and classroom reports. The third emphasizes the critical thinking skills that are taught in the introductory research methods course. The nature of the research argument is described, evaluation of evidence used by researchers to make their claims is explained, and standards to critique these efforts are mentioned. The location of research arguments is reviewed and the major forms of reasoning used to draw research conclusions are addressed. Finally the

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unique flaws in research reasoning are mentioned. This chapter brings home the theme that research is an exercise in critical thinking. The fourth chapter concerns conceptualizations in communication research including use of theory and definitions.

The third section of the book emphasizes the "Design of Research" of both qualitative and quantitative studies (though most space is spent on quantitative methods since neophyte students usually are least conversant with these tools).The primary task in this section lies in presenting essential materials that students need to know without ignoring other unique applications that have invigorated the field. Six chapters are dedicated to these research building blocks. The first two deal with conducting textual analyses of messages and undertaking participant observation studies. The third and fourth chapters discuss designing descriptive empirical research (including questionnaire and interview studies) and conducting experimental studies. The remaining two chapters involve sampling and measurement in communication research. In each case, examples across the broad realm of communication studies are covered.

The fourth part of the book concerns "Statistical Analysis of Data." The individual chapters involve traditional topics of such an introductory treatment. The first chapter addresses beginning descriptive and correlational statistics. The second chapter introduces the logic of statistical hypothesis testing and applies it to the case of comparisons between two means. The final chapter extends significance testing to cases that go beyond two means, including analysis of variance and chi square test applications. This final chapter includes "survival guide" introductions to advanced statistics that students may read but should not be expected to use in the introductory course.

To assist students, the textbook format is designed to promote efficient study and review. Several features should make this work convenient for students. Each chapter

- starts with an outline of all major topics
- begins with an orienting paragraph to describe the thrust of the chapter
- ends with a list of key terms to review when studying the chapter
- includes margin notes to point out important concepts covered in the text
- presents special boxed discussions at different locations in the text to identify additional valuable enrichment materials
- highlights key terms in boldface the first time they appear
- relies on tables when they may reduce otherwise extended text discussions
- concludes with a chapter summary/study guide that students will find very helpful when reviewing for examinations

Many people helped me develop this work. My sincere thanks must go to my own teachers of research methods. These teachers included not only those who provided instruction in empirical methods, but those who directed my studies in rhetorical theory, argumentation, and qualitative methods. The students in my introductory research methods courses over more than the last decade deserve thanks since this book reflects the product of experimention to find ways to teach this course most effectively. I wish to thank Stan Stoga of Brown & Benchmark for advancing this project and providing me with the gift of his candid insights and thoughtful encouragement. My special thanks also is extended to Mary Rossa of Brown & Benchmark who shepherded me through the extended final phase of the work and helped me adapt this manuscript to its current size and approach. I am very grateful to the scholars and teachers who reviewed drafts of this work and provided invaluable advice and support for the direction of this project: John D. Bee, University of Akron; Judith Dallinger, Western Illinois State; Lyle Flint, Ball State University; William J. Schenck-Hamlin, Kansas State University, and Judy R. Sims, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. I appreciate the encouragement of my colleagues at California State University, Fullerton, who both welcomed this work's completion for use in our own classes and urged me on. Finally I wish to thank my family. Without their willingness to permit my dedication of many hours, it would not have been possible to complete this volume.

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SECTION I

Introduction to the Field

1

The Role of Research in Communication

2

Communication Problem Statements and Hypotheses

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CHAPTER 1

The Role of Research in Communication

The purpose of all higher education is to make men aware of what was and what is; to incite them to probe into what may be. It seeks to teach them to understand, to evaluate, to communicate.

–Otto Kleppner

WHAT IS RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION?
- Research
- Communication Research

THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH
- The Challenge of Breadth
- The Multiple Methods Challenge
- The Scholarly Rigor Challenge
- The Personal Challenge
- The Ethical Challenge
- The Structure of the Field Challenge

BEFORE WE GET STARTED . . .

Welcome to communication research! Though you may be skeptical, "doing" communication scholarship is an exciting and very satisfying personal experience. Rather than just accepting what others tell you, you will learn how we draw conclusions in our field. You will see how research should look so that you can evaluate work that often gets passed off to us. Along the way, you will learn how to improve your thinking, your scholarly writing, and your ability to evaluate research arguments. Getting there can be challenging, but it is well worth the trip. This book does not assume that you have any background in research methods—just an interest. To get started, you need to know why you are here and what communication research is. This chapter is designed to get you moving in the right direction.

WHAT IS RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION?

A field defines itself by its research. Research determines what content is taught in courses, the social contributions the field makes, and the sort of publicity an area gets.

Research

research defined

Research is the systematic effort to secure answers to questions. These questions are not mundane ones, such as, Have you seen my keys? or Want to see a movie? Instead, research questions deal with issues requiring reference to data[1] and information, such as: Did Patrick Henry deliver the "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!" speech?[2] Do women self-disclose private information more often than men do?[3] and Do people who arrive "fashionably late" to parties receive higher credibility ratings than people who arrive on time?[4] Research is not an "ivory tower" pursuit by a few elect scholars. It is a very practical effort to get answers for questions. Research usually requires examining past inquiry into the issue. We often rely on reports found in libraries to learn about related work and to avoid repeating past mistakes. Regardless of sources of information, all research involves gathering information that goes beyond our personal feelings or hunches. We search for some light on the facts of matters when we do research.

basic research distinguished

from applied research

Sometimes people distinguish between two types of research. We conduct **basic research** to learn about relationships among variables, regardless of any immediate commercial product or service. Most of the things we call "pure" scientific research fall into this category. Though researchers hope to make useful contributions, no economic payoffs are imminent. We conduct **applied research** to develop a product or solve an immediately practical problem. When communication researchers survey employee attitudes as part of a consulting contract, the work is considered applied research. Even so, trying to separate basic and applied research causes problems. Regardless of whether pure or applied research is involved, the methods of inquiry *are identical.* Furthermore, last year's basic research may be today's source of new products. Work that was originally initiated to find out how to store information in digital form is now the basis for patents on satellite transmission of television signals. Though the terms have their place, for our purposes, it is enough to know that good research can be basic or applied.

Communication Research

communication research defined in New Orleans conference

Regrettably, many people have difficulty separating communication research from work in psychology, sociology, or literature. They figure that since "*meanings are in* people" (Berlo, 1960, p. 175), any study of people is communication research. Straightening out this exaggerated view has taken some serious thinking. In 1968 a group of communication scholars met in New Orleans under a grant from the National Science Foundation to wrestle with the basic issues of distinguishing communication research and instruction. They concluded that "research in speech-communication focuses on the ways in which messages link participants during interactions" (Kibler & Barker, 1969, p. 33). The scope of our research area was clear. Other fields might study personality traits, trends in society, or the beauty of poetry. But communication research is a specialty that studies message-related behavior.

SPECIAL DISCUSSION 1–1
Behavior of Researchers

It is possible to overstate the matter, but there is a set of norms—almost a culture—that distinguishes people who do research. In his book, *Foundations of Behavioral Research* (1986, p. 9), Fred Kerlinger described these characteristics.

Universalism: Scientific laws are the same everywhere. A scientific law states a relation between phenomena that is invariable under the same conditions.

Organized skepticism: Researchers are responsible for verifying the results on which they base their work. [Researchers do not accept claims blindly. They question research claims and offer criticism for each other.]

Communality: Researchers are willing to share knowledge freely and contribute to public knowledge. [Researchers are expected to put some evidence on the line. Failure to share research fully with others violates this norm.]

Disinterestedness: Researchers must ban ulterior motives and be relatively free from bias. Any known or possible biases must not be admitted. ["Disinterested" does not mean "uninterested." Disinterested only means that one can be impartial because one does not have a personal or financial stake in the outcome. Certainly, researchers do not study matters without passion. They care. But they must be willing to let their conclusions be influenced by the data and by the data only. If a researcher receives a grant from sponsors who specify the results they wish the researcher to find, the researcher loses the "disinterest" that separates research from ordinary pandering.]

communication studies message-related behavior as a specialty

Communication might be defined as ''the process by which participants transact and assign meaning to messages'' (Reinard, 1991, p. 4). You may have been asked by a relative or an acquaintance what your major is. When you answered, ''communication,'' you may have received a puzzled expression in response. Unless you explain things, they may have thought that you were learning to install telephones. Thus, you may share with them that you are training to be a ''message specialist'' or ''message scientist.'' You can also explain that your concentration in communication prepares you in a specific area of communication. To be clear, you need to explain that a **message** is the set of verbal and nonverbal cues communicators exchange. **Verbal cues** are the words people use in communication. Sometimes people confuse ''verbal'' cues with ''spoken'' cues (as in the phrase ''verbal agreement''). Yet, spoken cues are called ''oral cues'' (from the ''orifice'' or mouth). **Nonverbal cues** are communication elements beyond the words themselves. Variations in voice, facial expression, gesture, movement, touch, timing,

message defined

verbal cues distinguished

nonverbal cues defined

physical closeness, media treatments, and format are all nonverbal cues. Taken together, these verbal and nonverbal cues provide plenty for us to study.

THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Communication covers a very broad set of topics, and no single research method is embraced by the field. To study communication—even its specialties of journalism and speech and hearing science—we must have very broad knowledge. This breadth both challenges students and invites them to enter the field and make contributions.

The Challenge of Breadth

The number of communication applications can seem enormous, but there really is a rational order to it. James H. McBath and Robert C. Jeffrey (1978), were asked to identify the professional areas in communication on behalf of the Speech Communication Association and the National Center For Educational Statistics, which were trying to organize information about careers in many fields. The list of communication specialties now used by the NCES is shown in table 1.1. The left column shows the official taxonomy.[5] In the column to the right you will see some of the sorts of research claims that are made in each of these areas. As you can tell, each area is broad enough to permit inquiry into many interesting issues.

The Multiple Methods Challenge

communication uses both qualitative and quantitative tools

In studying literature, qualitative methods most often are used. In history, the historical method is employed. In psychology, the experiment holds a prominent position. Yet, communication researchers use all methods to answer questions. Thus, modern students are exposed to many methods. Though single studies may use multiple methods, for the most part, a piece of research tends to rely on qualitative *or* quantitative methods.[6]

Qualitative Methods

qualitative methods defined and isolated

Qualitative methods of study use descriptions of observations expressed in predominantly non-numerical terms. Sometimes qualitative methods make passing reference to statistics (as when TV critics refer to Nielsen ratings of various programs), but statistics are largely secondary to the attempt to answer research questions. Table 1.2 lists some chief types of qualitative methods.

qualitative research emphasizes description or interpretation of communication events

There is more to qualitative methods than the type of data alone—though the type of data plays a very big part.[7] Most qualitative research in our field tends to *describe* or *interpret* communication exchanges. These studies try to describe the human condition by using general views of social action. They may critique communication by relying on standards of excellence derived from a body of existing theory. Researchers who use qualitative methods try to interpret the meanings to be found in communication exchanges. They often look at individual examples of communication research, rather than trying to find patterns that run across individuals. Our language is very broad, but the differences in emphasis will become pronounced as we continue.

TABLE 1.1 Broad Areas of General Communication

Communication Taxonomy (McBath & Jeffrey, 1978)	Description (Crawford, 1980, with permission)
1. The Broad Areas of Mass Media Communication:	
Advertising	The study of mass media methods of influence to promote a product, service, or cause
Communication Technology	The study of the mechanisms and technologies of mass media
Communication Policy	The study of public policy and regulation of mass media communication and freedom of speech
Film as Communication	The role of popular and technical cinema in society
Journalism	The study of the methods of reporting and organizing news for presentation in print media
Public Relations	The study of methods of managing publicity and press relations for an organization, person, or cause
Radio	The study of the methods and uses of radio communication
Television	The study of the methods and uses of televised communication
2. Specific Areas of Speech Communication Research:	
Code Systems	The study of the uses of verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs in human communication
Intercultural Communication	The study of communication among individuals of different cultural backgrounds
Interpersonal Communication	The study of communication interactions occurring in person-to-person and small group situations
Conflict Management	The study of the role of communication in the creation and control of conflict
Organizational Communication	The study of interrelated behaviors, technologies, and systems functioning within an organization
Oral Interpretation	The study of literature through performance involving the development of skilled verbal and nonverbal expression based on critical analysis of written texts (aesthetics of literature in performance, criticism of literature in performance, group performance, oral tradition)
Pragmatic Communication	The study and practice of communication, the object of which is to influence or facilitate decision making
Argumentation	The study of reason giving behavior
Debate	The study of decision making in which adversaries present arguments for decision by a third party
Discussion and Conference	The study of methods of decision making in which participants strive by consensus to discuss and explore an issue
Parliamentary Procedure	The study of the means used to handle deliberation in large, legislative bodies through the use of formal rules and procedures to regulate debate and discussion
Persuasion	The study of the methods used to influence the choices made by others

TABLE 1.1 *—Continued*

Communication Taxonomy (McBath & Jeffrey, 1978)	Description (Crawford, 1980, with permission)
Public Address	The study of speakers and speeches, including the historical and social context of platforms, campaigns, and movements
Rhetorical and Communication Theory	The study of the principles that account for human communicative experiences and behavior
Speech Communication Education	The study of communication in pedagogical contexts (communication development, oral communication skills, instructional communication)
Speech and Hearing Science	The study of the physiology and acoustical aspects of speech and hearing (biological aspects of speech and hearing, phonological aspects of speech and hearing, physiological aspects of speech and hearing)

TABLE 1.2 Types of Qualitative Studies

Description	Examples
Historical-critical methods: research designed to describe a period, person, or phenomenon for the purpose of interpreting or evaluating communication and its effects.	*Historical studies:* • Studying whether Lincoln's Gettysburg Address really met with negative reaction at the time it was delivered[8] • Studying the true impact on Americans of Orson Welles's 1938 "War of the Worlds" broadcast • Studying dominant methods of treating stuttering during the last two hundred years *Criticism:* • Evaluating use of argument by Ronald Reagan in his presidential debates • Evaluating whether newspaper reports of the news gave politically balanced reports of the U. S. entry into the Iraq-Kuwait crisis • Evaluating the ethical use of surgery in the treatment of speech-handicapped patients in the nineteenth century
Qualitative observational studies: methods designed to use predominately attribute-type data to interpret contemporaneous communication interactions. *Case studies and interpretive studies:* intensive inquiries about single events, people, or social units (interpretive studies attempt to look for themes or stories that are helpful to 'interpret' or understand the case).	*Case studies:* • Investigating the practice of a successful speech therapist to pick up some pointers • Studying the communication inside a newspaper that is in the process of being sold

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