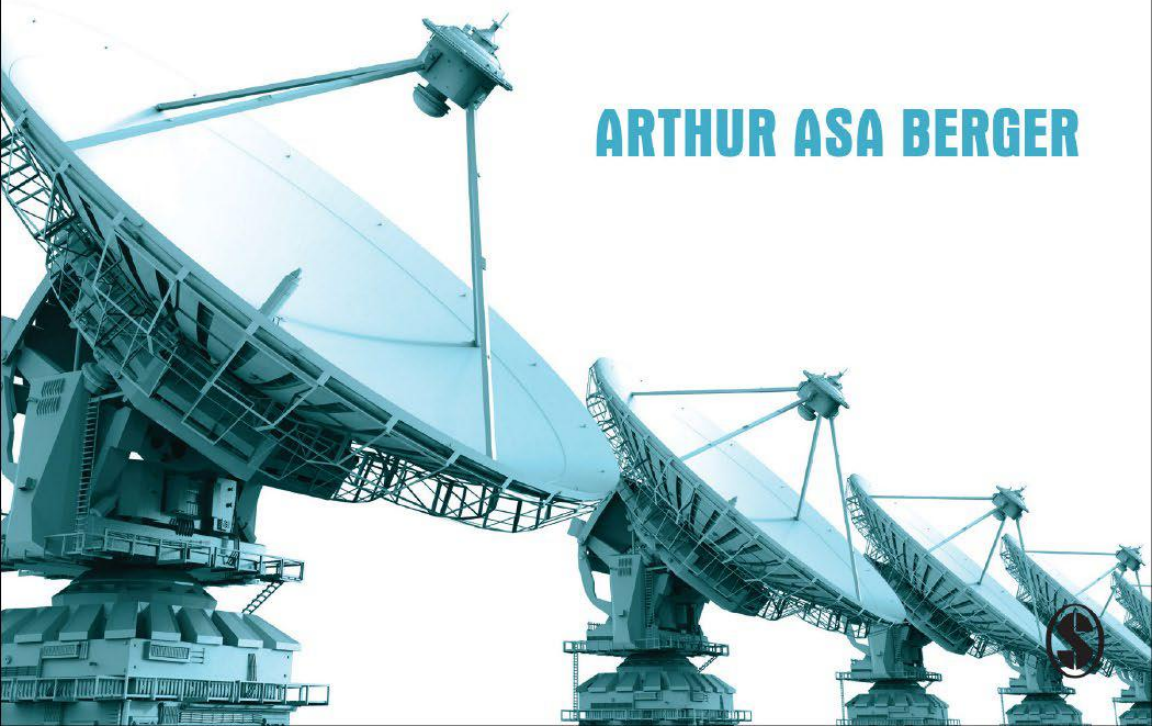
FIFTH EDITION

Media and Communication Research Methods

An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

ARTHUR ASA BERGER



MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS

Fifth Edition

This book is dedicated to the memory of my University of Minnesota mentors David Noble and Mulford Q. Sibley.

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS

Fifth Edition

Arthur Asa Berger

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Preface to the Fifth Edition

We live in a world of endless changes. As Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, put it, "the only thing that is constant is change." Nobody saw smart speakers like Amazon's Echo or Google's Home Mini coming, but once they arrived millions of people purchased them. These devices are yet another example of things we didn't know we needed until someone invented them. The most outstanding example of this is the iPhone, which ushered in a smartphone revolution. And smartphones keep changing, with new models and developments in technology coming all the time. Digital devices need to keep changing, to incorporate new scientific developments, and so do books.

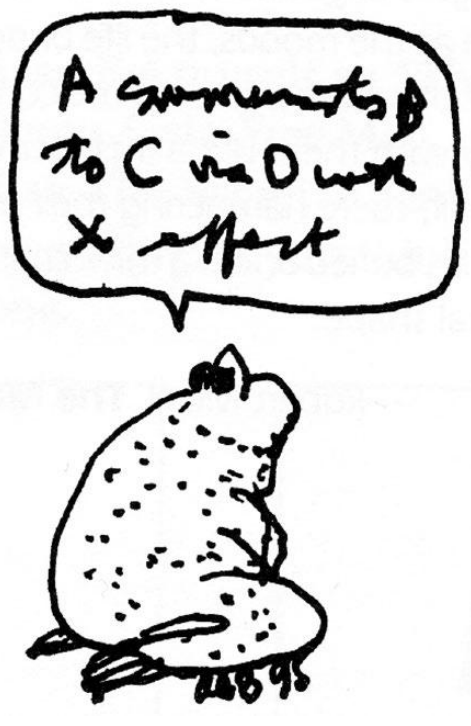
One thing that I've learned over the years is that a textbook is never really finished. As soon as you publish a book, any number of new topics suggest themselves and new social and cultural phenomena involving the media need to be covered. Since I published the fourth edition of this book, we are now worried about teenager addiction to smartphones, toddlers using the Internet, fake news, the Russian use of social media to intervene in our 2016 election, and countless other matters of concern. The book publishing industry is changing rapidly as well, as bookstores go out of business one after the other. Publishers increasingly put out electronic books in addition to printed books and perhaps, in the near future, instead of printed DTBs—"dead-tree books."

In this fifth edition of my book you will find:

- New images and quotations
- New discussion of binary oppositions and culture
- An expanded discussion of social media

- Updated charts, statistics, references, and bibliographies
- New discussion of surveys and the 2016 presidential election
- New material on teenage addiction and smartphones
- New discussion of critical thinking and research
- A discussion of the Cambridge Analytica "fiasco"

I have deleted some material included in the fourth edition, here and there, to make room for new material, and I've been selective in what I added to the book. I was guided in this task by suggestions from a number of scholars who reviewed the fourth edition. I hope you will find this new edition of *Media and Communication Research Methods* useful, interesting, and maybe even entertaining—and that it will help you become a more informed media and communication researcher.



A Communicates B to C Via D with X Effect

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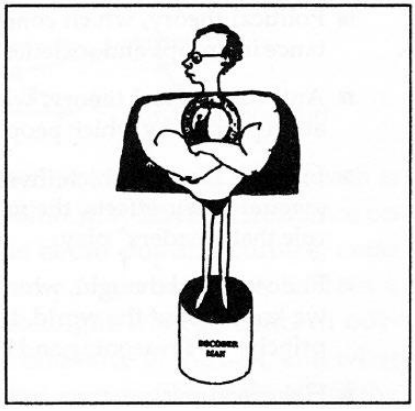
At this moment he wished to be a man without qualities. But this is probably not so different from what other people sometimes feel too. After all, by the time they have reached the middle of their life's journey few people remember how they have managed to arrive at themselves, at their amusements, their point of view, their wife, character, occupation and successes, but they cannot help feeling that not much is likely to change any more. It might even be asserted that they have been cheated, for one can nowhere discover any sufficient reason for everything's having come about as it has. It might just as well have turned out differently. The events of people's lives have, after all, only to the least degree originated in them, having generally depended on all sorts of circumstances such as the moods, the life or death of quite different people, and have, as it were, only at the given point of time come hurrying towards them—Something has had its way with them like a flypaper with a fly; it has caught them fast, here catching a little hair, there hampering their movements, and has gradually enveloped them, until they lie, buried under a thick coating that has only the remotest resemblance to their original shape.

—Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (1965, p. 151)

Introduction

In this introduction, I describe myself as "The Man Without Quantities" or, in comic book lingo, Data-Free Man. In the past, I have sometimes described myself as The Secret Agent and at other times as Decoder Man. So you are getting, if you think about it, three "superheroes" for the price of one.

The Secret Agent



Decoder Man

❖ ROUND UP THE USUAL SUSPECTS

There are, psychologists tell us, people who have multiple identities or multiple personalities. I have an analogous problem, although *problem* probably isn't the right word: I tend to see things not "from both sides now," as the song goes, but sometimes from 5 or 10 "sides," points of view, or disciplinary perspectives. I suggest that doing this, using a multidisciplinary perspective, often offers us better ways of making sense of phenomena such as television commercials, common

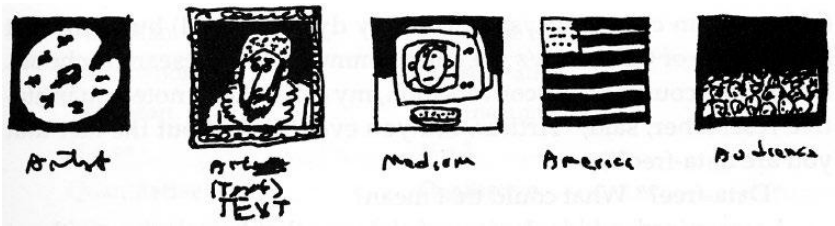
objects, **fashions**, popular culture, and humor than a single or unitary perspective does.

In a sense, when I find something I wish to analyze, I say to myself, "Round up the usual disciplines," and begin, often using a number of complementary perspectives. These disciplines include the following:

- *Semiotic theory*, which deals with signs and how we find meaning in phenomena such as films, songs, fashions, advertisements, and so on
- *Aesthetic theory*, which deals with how lighting, color, cutting, sound, music, camera shots, and related matters generate ideas, feelings, and emotions in audiences
- *Psychoanalytic theory*, which deals with unconscious elements in our thinking and behavior
- *Sociological theory*, which deals with institutions and groups and matters such as race, **gender**, religion, and class
- *Political theory*, which concerns itself with power, control, and resistance in groups and societies
- *Anthropological theory*, which focuses on culture and the enculturation process by which people are taught to fit into their cultures
- *Literary theory*, which investigates how literary works (of all kinds) generate their effects, the various artistic devices writers use, and the role that "readers" play
- *Philosophical theory*, which concerns itself with matters such as how we know about the world, the status of knowledge, ethical issues, and principles of reasoning and logic
- *Historiography theory*, which studies change over time—what happened, how it happened, and theories and suggestions about why it happened
- *Comparative theory*, which deals, when considering media, with how a given text (such as the film *Skyfall*) or other phenomena are perceived and the role that a given text plays in different societies and cultures

These methods are at the heart of a new subject or "metadiscipline" (some people say I never met a discipline I didn't like, but I swear it's

not true) called cultural studies, which, as I see things, developed out of an old one—popular culture. Cultural studies eliminates the boundaries between elite arts and popular arts, but what it represents, I would suggest, is really a formalization (and perhaps an elaboration) of what people who had been studying the mass media and popular culture were already doing. Or should have been doing. In the late 1960s, for example, I used to teach a course called "The Arts, Popular Culture, and Society."



There are, I suggest, a number of focal points one might consider when doing cultural criticism. These are shown in Figure 0.1.

Figure 0.1 Focal Points Model

In this model, everything is connected to everything else, which is meant to suggest that each of the focal points may have an influence on each or all of the others. When we write about popular culture, mass communication, or media culture, we may focus on a text, such as a film or television program, but we also might want to concern ourselves with the creator(s) of the text, the audience of the text, and what impact the text might have on society and culture (the "effects" of the text). Communication researchers generally focus on one or more aspects of the communication process, such as sources, messages, channels/media, encoding and decoding, audiences/receivers, feedback, barriers and obstacles to communication, and communication contexts.

❖ APPLYING THE FOCAL POINTS MODEL TO MEDIA

In doing our research, we can direct attention to each of the focal points and deal with one or all of the topics listed in Table 0.1, which suggest some of the avenues of exploration possible in media and communication research.

Table 0.1 Topics for Exploration in Media and Communication Research

Artwork/ Text	Audience	America	Artist	Medium
Apply critical techniques to the work	Focus on cultures and subcultures	Study social functions of media	Investigate kinds of artists	Use transportation theories
Consider the work's genre	Analyze uses and gratifications	Relate national character to the work	Analyze demographics of artists	Study effects on audiences
Deal with intertextual connections	Conduct demographic analysis	Study changes in society due to the work	Analyze psychographics of artists	Study effects on America
Analyze style of the work	Conduct psychographic analysis	Explain role of subcultures	Study critical beliefs of artists	Study effects on artists
Make content analysis of the work	Relate to taste cultures	Tie to postmodernism and media	Study gender and creativity	Tie to effects on the work or other works
Study psychology of the work's creation and the work itself	Make comparative study of audiences	Compare to other countries	Consider impact of fads and fashions	Study impact of new media

In addition, we can deal with various combinations of the focal points in our research, such as the following:

Art and Audience
Art and Artist
Art/Artist and Audience
Art/Artist and Media

Art and the Media	Art/Artist and Society
Art and America	Art/Artist/America and Media

In short, we can use any number of combinations of focal points, depending on what we want to investigate.

❖ HOW I BECAME A MAN WITHOUT QUANTITIES

In 1984, a colleague and I were having a chat. We were standing in one of the corridors of the expensive and very plush (although, in certain ways, remarkably dysfunctional) building that houses one of California's premier communication research schools. During the course of our conversation, my colleague, a noted quantitative researcher, said, "Arthur, did you ever think about the fact that you are data-free?"

"Data-free?" What could that mean?

I recognized, suddenly in an epiphany, that I was a man without quantities. During the course of my academic career, I have argued that the dynamics of the McDonald's corporation and its fast-food outlets were similar to the methods of evangelical religions; that television commercials showing "muscle" cars crashing through roadside signs and similar barriers represented, symbolically, the deflowering of virgins; and that our passion for using deodorants to remove body odor was tied, ultimately, to Puritanism, perfectionism, and a fear of death. I have also hypothesized, in an article in *Rolling Stone*, that traditional white or "American" bread reflected our lack of ideology in America, where political parties often compromise on important issues. (Nowadays, there is a revolution in American bread, and we're seeing hard-crusted breads in many American bakeries and stores, a trend that reflects, I suggest, the fact that our politics is also getting more ideological.) I have also written about the importance of language in shaping people's consciousness. For example, a masculine identity is part of so many words dealing with women, such as *women, she, her, female, menstruate*, and *menopause*. (The science that explains the power of language to shape consciousness is, of course, semantics.) All of these arguments I made without using statistics or "data" in the sense that quantitative researchers use data. (Recall my "usual suspects.")

❖ DATA MAN VERSUS DATA-FREE MAN

Let us assume, using the perspective found in comic books, that we have two heroes, both of whom are researchers—Data Man and

Data-Free Man. There are considerable differences in the way our two heroes see and make sense of the world, which I have sketched out in this chart of complementary opposites.

Data Man	**Data-Free Man**
Information	Interpretation
The mean	The meaning
$N = \infty$	$N = 1$
Quantitative	Qualitative
Ingenuity in design	Ingenuity in analysis
Focus on audience	Focus on artwork (text)
Statistics	Concepts from various domains
Quantifiable subjects	Subjects useful for theorizing
Certainty but triviality	Uncertainty but significance
Getting data a problem	Getting ideas a problem
American pragmatic tradition	European philosophical tradition
Counts all grains of sand in the universe	Sees the universe in a grain of sand

This chart oversimplifies things, of course, but it does show how different the orientation of quantitative and qualitative scholars can be.

Quantitative researchers often use sophisticated statistical methods, but they sometimes (maybe often?) are forced to deal with relatively trivial matters—ones that lend themselves to quantification. Qualitative researchers, at the other extreme, often deal with important social, political, and economic matters and use concepts and theories from psychoanalytic thought, Marxist thought, semiotic thought, and the like—which may yield interesting ideas but are highly speculative and do not give certainty. This polarity is a gross simplification, but thinking about these two extremes can help us see the "middle ground" more clearly.

For Data Man, designing research so that one gets good data (and not the wrong data) is very difficult. For Data-Free Man, applying the right concepts correctly and "not going off the deep end" is the problem. The optimal situation is to figure out how to compare statistics and quantitative data with qualitative and theoretical material. The best scholars do this. They occupy some middle ground between the two extremes I've sketched out. But it isn't easy being both Data Man and Data-Free Man at the same time.

Consider economics, probably the most scientific of the social sciences. Economists, using the same data—statistics from various governmental agencies, for example—often disagree about what they mean. So you can't escape from some kind of interpretation and "going beyond" one's data. (And that's assuming that the data are accurate and correct.)

❖ KINDS OF QUESTIONS RESEARCHERS ASK

The questions we ask shape, in large measure, the research methods we use and our findings. Here are some questions you can use in planning your research and writing about it.

Types of Research Questions	Examples
Broad, diagnostic overview questions	"How do you interpret?" "How do you make sense of . . . ?"
Action or decision questions	"What should be done about . . . ?" "What would you do in this situation?"
Synthesis questions	"How does this relate to . . . ?" "What connections can you make between this and . . . ?"
Priority or ranking questions	"What's the most important aspect of . . . ?" "What's the central issue in . . . ?"
Justification questions	"Why do you believe?" "What support or evidence do you have for . . . ?"
Clarification questions	"What do you mean by . . . ?" "How do you define . . . ?"
Hypothetical questions	"If X were the case, what would it mean?" "What if . . . ?"
Application questions	"How can we use this concept to explain . . . ?" "How can you apply this concept?"
Summarizing questions	"What have we learned from . . . ?"

❖ CONCLUSIONS OF A MAN WITHOUT QUANTITIES, WHO IS ALSO A PRACTICING THEORETICIAN

I am, as I have explained, a man without quantities, and since I am "data-free" and have no statistics to "massage," I cannot, so the logic of quantitative researchers suggests, do research. A number of years ago, when I told a colleague of mine that I had written a book called *Media Research Techniques*, he laughed and said, "What do you know about research, Arthur?"

Since I've published more than 100 articles and more than 70 books (this book is the fifth edition of my 35th book, it turns out), if I don't do research, I must at the very least have a really fantastic imagination. Maybe being data-free is actually a kind of postmodernist stance? Maybe qualitative scholars should best be seen as fiction writers? Fiction writers use stories to convey truths about

people—and isn't truth what we're after? I may be data-free, a man without quantities, but I like to think that I, and other qualitative researchers, have qualities—imaginative, literary, artistic, ethical, and otherwise—and that these qualities count for something. But I am not as data-free as I pretend.

If you wish to get in touch with me, thanks to the magic of e-mail, you can do so easily now at arthurasaberger@gmail .com . . . but if you are a student, don't expect me to help you with your homework.

❖ INTRODUCTION: APPLICATIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Find two articles on media and society—one that Data Man would enjoy and one Data-Free Man could relate to—and compare them. Which one do you find more compelling? Which is more interesting? Which has more important implications? Explain your answer.

2. The theme of this introduction, "The Man Without Quantities," is based on a famous novel by Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (1965). Let me add another paragraph that comes after the material I quoted earlier:

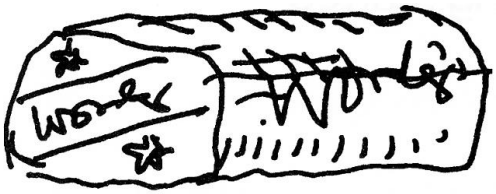
> And then they only dimly remember their youth when there was something like a force of resistance in them—this other force that tugs and whirrs and does not want to linger anywhere, releasing a storm of aimless attempts at flight. Youth's scorn and its revolt against the established order, youth's readiness for everything that is heroic, whether it is self-sacrifice or crime, its fiery seriousness and its unsteadiness—all this is nothing but its fluttering attempts to fly. Fundamentally it merely means that nothing of all that a young man undertakes appears to be the result of an unequivocal inner necessity, even if it expresses itself in such a manner as to suggest that everything he happens to dash at is exceedingly urgent and necessary. (pp. 151–152)

What response do you have to this passage? Do you think Musil is correct about people becoming stuck like flies on flypaper? Does he understand young people? Would you describe him as a pessimist or a realist? Explain your answers.

3. Examine the focal points model in Figure 0.1. Which of the focal points or which combination of them interests you the most? Explain your answer.
4. Investigate communication models and then try your hand at creating a model that deals with the media, communication, and society. What problems did you encounter in creating your model?

Part I

Getting Started



Our conceptions arise through comparison. "Were it always light we should not distinguish between light and dark, and accordingly could not have either the conception of, or the word for light. . . ." "It is clear that everything on this planet is relative and has independent existence only in so far as it is distinguished in its relations to and from other things. . . ." "Since every conception is thus the twin of its opposite, how could it be thought of first, how could it be communicated to others who tried to think it, except by being measured against its opposite?"

—Sigmund Freud, "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" (1910/1963a, p. 47)

All research methods involve compromises with reality. Researchers prefer more than one method whenever possible, because human thought and behavior are too complex for any one method to capture fully. Also, when different methods converge on the same insight, the researcher can feel greater confidence in its soundness. . . . The most limiting aspect of research, however, does not stem from inherent compromise but from human nature. That is, the person using a method—rather than the method itself—most determines both the benefits and problems that the method will generate. These limitations come largely from the inappropriate matching of a method to a problem. Sometimes, too, researchers forget or ignore the compromises that a method entails and present findings as more robust and reliable than warranted.

—Gerald Zaltman, *How Customers Think: Essential Insights Into the Mind of the Market* (2003 pp. 72–73)

1

What Is Research?

CHAPTER 1 FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Why does the author say that we all do research all the time?
- What is the difference between scholarly and everyday research?
- What role does cultural studies play in research?
- What did Nietzsche say about the role of interpretation?
- What is the difference between diachronic and synchronic research?
- What role do binary oppositions play in the way the mind works?
- What are the two systems that shape our thinking and behavior according to Daniel Kahneman?
- What's the difference between "dry" and "wet" Japanese?
- How does **qualitative research** differ from quantitative research?
- What are the five aspects of communication discussed in this chapter?

A certain look comes over the faces of some of my students when they hear the word *research*. Their eyes glaze over, and their faces take on a pained expression as if they had a migraine or a bad stomachache. They see the required course on research as some kind of an ordeal they must survive before being allowed to take the courses they want and go on to live a normal life.

❖ WE ALL DO RESEARCH, ALL THE TIME

Yet curiously, many students in my internship courses, when they describe what they do in their internships—that is, when they are out there in the "real world"—talk about looking for information and data, finding material on this or that subject, getting names and addresses—in other words, **research**. It turns out that research is one of the most valuable courses students take, as far as practical use is concerned, but there's something about the term *research* that generates lumps in throats and expressions of pain.

What is research? Literally it means "to search for, to find" and comes from the Latin *re* (again) and from *cercier* (to search). In French, the term *chercher* means "seek." In the most general sense, research means looking for information about something.

Like Molière's character Monsieur Jourdain, who didn't realize he was always speaking prose, most of us do what could be called "research" all the time—even though we may not think of what we are doing as research. For example, when people decide to buy a computer, they generally try to get some information about the brand and models of the computers they are thinking of buying. They may look in computer magazines, they may check in *Consumer Reports*, and they may ask their friends who have computers about the particular kind of computer they have. This is research.

Let me offer another example. In one of my classes, during a break, several of my students were discussing a professor. "What's he like?" asked one student. "Oh, he's easy," someone said. "He gives you a preliminary exam, and then in the real exam, he always asks one of the questions in the preliminary exam. I'd take him." This was information of value to the student who was thinking of taking a course with that professor. This is research.

So, in our everyday lives, we are always doing research, even though we don't think of what we are doing as such. We do this research because we have choices to make about matters such as what we want to buy, what we want to take at college (and with whom

we want to take the courses), and where we want to live. Even when we have limited budgets, generally speaking, we still have choices to make.

A SHORT THEATRICAL PIECE ON RESEARCH

Grand Inquisitor:	*Who is John Q. Public?*
Arthur:	Nobody! It's just a name we use for the ordinary American.
Grand Inquisitor:	*Why is his middle initial* Q*?*
Arthur:	That's an interesting question. You can find out if you do a bit of research.
Grand Inquisitor:	*Is John Q. Public related to Joe Sixpack?*
Arthur:	Some people think they're both the same person. You can find out if you do some research.
Grand Inquisitor:	*Why do people do research?*
Arthur:	To find the answer to questions that interest them or problems they want to solve, like what does the *Q* in John Q. Public stand for? Or should I attend college, and if so, which college, and what should I major in? Or should I get married to X? Or what kind of car should I get?
Grand Inquisitor:	*When do people do research?*
Arthur:	All the time.
Grand Inquisitor:	*How do you do research?*
Arthur:	That's the $64,000 question.

❖ SCHOLARLY RESEARCH IS DIFFERENT FROM EVERYDAY RESEARCH

A number of differences between everyday research and scholarly research need to be considered. Scholarly research is, generally speaking, more systematic, more objective, more careful, and more

concerned about correctness and truthfulness than everyday research. Notice that I've not said anything about data and numbers and statistics. That's because a great deal of research doesn't involve such matters.

Think, for example, of what historians do. There are, of course, some quantitative historians who do use statistics, but for the most part, historians read documents (e.g., speeches, letters, diaries, news reports) and, on the basis of their reading, try to describe what happened and why it happened; they focus on economic, political, and social considerations. Because there's no way to be certain about why things happened (and in some cases even what happened), there are lots of controversies in history, and different historians offer conflicting explanations of, say, the significance of the American Revolution or the causes of the American Civil War.

❖ CULTURAL STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Or take **cultural studies**, a rather amorphous multidisciplinary field that investigates everything from elite fiction to comics, television, films, music, and everyday life. Scholars who write in these fields usually base their analyses on the concepts, ideas, and theories of philosophers, psychologists, social scientists, linguists, and others with a more theoretical bent. Many cultural studies scholars base their analyses on concepts taken from thinkers such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, and the French scholars Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard.

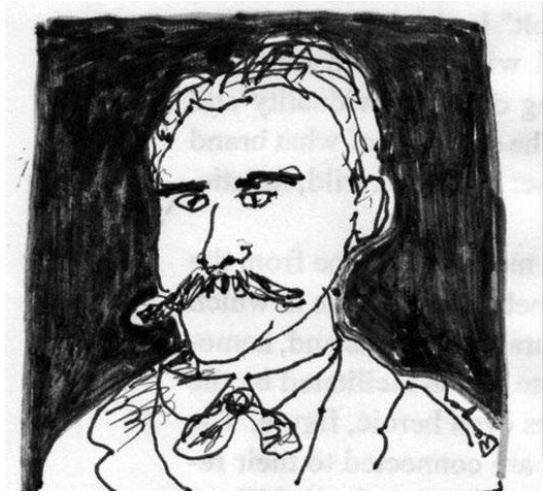
In their book *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* (2001), editors Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner explained how cultural studies approaches help us better understand the role of popular culture and the media and other forms of communication. They discuss the role that the media and culture play in socializing people to accept the rules, conventions, and codes found in their cultures and the ways that the media indoctrinate people into political and socioeconomic systems. Pop culture, the media, and advertising, among other things, play an important role in providing role models, gender models, and lifestyle models for people to imitate. The narratives found in pop culture or **mass**-mediated culture help shape the sensibilities of those exposed to these narratives, as they are found in texts such as jokes, commercials, comic books, films, television shows, and popular fiction.

Durham and Kellner (2001) wrote the following:

> With media and culture playing such important roles in contemporary life, it is obvious that we must come to understand our cultural environment if we want control over our lives. Yet there are many approaches to the study of media, culture, and society in separate disciplines and academic fields. . . . We would advocate the usefulness of a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of media, culture, and society, yet we do not believe that any one theory or method is adequate to engage the richness, complexity, variety, and novelty displayed in contemporary constellations of rapidly proliferating cultural forms and new media. (p. 1)

It is because of the complexity of studying media, communication, and culture that I offer chapters on research methodologies that can be combined, in many cases, to offer more complete and more interesting analyses of the topics investigated than single-disciplinary approaches.

Because interpretations of these theorists differ and the applications of their ideas vary, we find considerable controversy in cultural studies and in other humanistic disciplines. But we also find controversy in the social sciences, such as economics, sociology, and political science, where a great deal of the research involves numbers. Economics is generally considered the most rigorous of the social sciences as far as gathering hard data is concerned, but we discover that given the same data, economists often differ on how they interpret these data.



Friedrich Nietzsche

❖ NIETZSCHE ON INTERPRETATION

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed that everything boils down to interpretation. As he wrote in his *The Will to Power*,

> Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—There are only *facts*.—I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.
>
> "Everything is subjective," you say; but even this is interpretation invented and projected behind what there is.—Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis. . . . In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. (Benson, 2016, No. 481)

Nietzsche suggested we cannot know facts, only perspectives. There is, he said, "no limit to the ways the world can be interpreted." He focused on what he called "perspectivism," a notion that informs much postmodern theory—a topic to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9. Nietzsche may have overestimated the importance of interpretation, but it is correct to say that, in the final analysis, after social scientists have collected their data, they have to interpret these data, and generally there is more than one way to interpret the data.

Everyday Research	Scholarly Research
Intuitive	Theory based
Common sense	Structured
Casual	Systematic
Spur of the moment	Planned
Selective (often)	Objective
Magical thinking	Scientific thinking
Flawed thinking at times	Logical to the extent possible
Focus is personal decisions	Focus is knowledge about reality

As the preceding table shows, there is a considerable difference between what I've described as everyday research and scholarly research. In our everyday research, we are often very casual in our

methods, and sometimes, when we want to convince ourselves that something we want to do should be done, we are very selective as well. That is, we neglect information that might convince us that a course of action we want to take is wrong. This is known as "selective inattention," which can be understood to mean ignoring information that wouldn't support your research or your wishes.

Sometimes our everyday research is tied to "magical thinking," which can be defined as believing that "wishing makes it so" or, for example, that we can, through force of will, cause something to happen. Perhaps you know someone who hopes to become a movie star without taking acting classes or being rejected at audition after audition.

Our everyday research generally involves personal matters—things we might want to do or products we might want to purchase. In many cases, we make our decisions based on advertising or something else that has an emotional appeal, which colors our decisions. We want to do something and look for information to support our desire. So the research we do, on the personal level, at times is not a matter of seeking truth but of finding support and justification.

Scientific thinking is the opposite; it seeks truth and accepts information that runs counter to one's wishes and desires. It is logical and bases its conclusions on rigorous thinking and honesty. Of course, people trying to be scientific and systematic and honest sometimes make mistakes, too, but the emphasis is on honesty, accepting the results one finds, and careful and logical reasoning. Much everyday research exists to justify prior decisions, whereas scientific research is disinterested and honest, accepting what it finds and not stacking the deck to get a desired result.

I can remember reading about some interesting "everyday" research a copywriter named Martin Solow conducted. He was invited to a gathering at a friend's house and asked his hosts about how they decided which products to purchase. Inevitably, they told him they paid no attention to advertising and bought most of their products based on what was recommended in *Consumer Reports*. He described how he conducts his research in his article "The Case of the Closet Target" (Solow, 1988). Once inside a house, he excuses himself and goes to the bathroom to investigate what products his hosts use:

> Once in the large bathroom, the door safely locked, I open the medicine cabinet and survey the contents: Colgate toothpaste, L'Oreal hairspray; Trac II shaving cream and the new Gillette Trac II razor; Ban Roll-on Deodorant (for him, I guess) and Arid Extra-Dry (for her—or maybe vice-versa); Bayer aspirins. (p. 428)

The moral of this story is that we often deceive ourselves and think we are making or have made rational decisions about products we buy when, in reality, we've been influenced by the numerous advertisements and commercials to which we've been exposed. When people say, "I am aware of advertising but not influenced by it," they are fooling themselves.

❖ PROBLEM OF CERTAINTY

Although it is a big generalization, it's fair to say that we seldom (perhaps never) get certainty from our research. Even when we have statistics, the way we interpret these statistics is open to disagreement. This explains why scholarly disciplines are full of disputes and why scholars seem to spend so much time arguing with other scholars (who disagree with their findings or their methodologies or both).

Just because we can't be certain of our interpretations of **data** or **texts** (the term used for works of elite and popular art, such as operas, plays, poems, films, television programs, paintings, and comic books), doesn't mean that anything goes and we can offer interpretations without giving good reasons for them.

It is our research, I would suggest, that supplies us with the "reasons" we use when we argue about how to interpret a film or a bunch of statistics. It's best to think of academics as spending their careers trying to prove that their way of looking at whatever portion of the world they look at is correct. They do this by writing articles and books in which they explain their ideas and theories and offer support for them. They also critique scholars with different methodologies and points of view. Thinking doesn't make it so, however. You have to have some kind of **evidence** that a reasonable person can accept. And that evidence comes from research. How good that research is (is it reliable?) and how well the research is used are another matter.

❖ DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC RESEARCH

At the heart of all research is the matter of comparisons. In diachronic or historical studies, we focus on *change over time*, and in synchronic or comparative studies, we study *change over distance*, to put things in rather simplistic terms. This takes us to de Saussure (1915/1966) and his notion that concepts take their meaning differentially. De Saussure

used the term *diachronic* for linguistic study that has a historical focus and the term *synchronic* for linguistic research that is comparative.

As de Saussure wrote (1915/1966),

> Certainly all sciences would profit by indicating more precisely the co-ordinates along which their subject matter is aligned. Everywhere distinctions should be according to the following illustration, between . . . *the axis of simultaneities* . . . which stands for the relations of coexisting things and from which the intervention of time is excluded; and . . . *the axis of successions* . . . on which only one thing can be considered at a time but upon which are located all the things on the first axis together with their changes. (pp. 79–80)

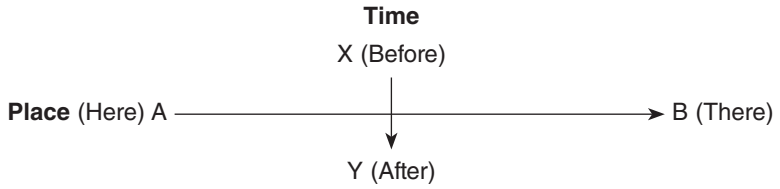
The axis of simultaneity involves comparison in space, and the axis of successions involves change over time. Those are the two general perspectives on which research tends to locate itself.

In experimental research, the comparison is between a *control* group, to whom nothing is done, and an *experimental* group, to whom something is done. The thing that is done to the experimental group is called an *independent variable.* Then, the two groups are measured to see whether the experimental group was affected by the independent variable. For example, a study of the impact of televised **violence** on people would have two groups of people: The experimental group is exposed to televised violence (the independent variable), and the control group is not exposed to televised violence. Then both are tested to see whether the televised violence has had a significant effect.

Figure 1.1 shows the historical and comparative orientations. The horizontal axis is comparative (differences between one place and another), and the vertical axis is historical (change over time).

So we usually find that comparisons are at the heart of most research, just as they are at the heart of thinking and communicating, if de Saussure was correct. The A to B axis is comparative at a given moment in time (for example, the way people do things in the United

Figure 1.1



States and the way people do things in some other country), and the X to Y axis is comparative historically, between an earlier time and a later time (for example, the way we did things earlier and the way we do things now).

When we try to make sense of the world and the information we have obtained (because concepts take their meaning differentially) we are always asking, one way or another, "Compared to what?" Another way of putting this is that facts don't speak for themselves; they have to be put into context and their significance explained. That is where the research report comes in, and the way the report is written plays an important part in how others accept the report. The medium may not be the message, but the way information is conveyed—that is, the quality of your thinking and writing—has a significant impact on how your research is received.

❖ THE WAY THE HUMAN MIND WORKS

Let us return to the way people view the world. According to the humorist Robert Benchley (1920), the world is divided into two groups of people: those who divide the world into two groups of people and those who don't. This division is whimsical and doesn't really tell us very much. In part, that is because we are given a statement about a group of people and then a negation.

The human mind, de Saussure (1915/1966) argued, makes sense of the world essentially by forming **binary oppositions** such as rich and poor, happy and sad, healthy and ill, and tall and short. These oppositions establish relationships in various areas, and it is through *relationships* that we find meaning.

In his book *Semiotics: The Basics*, Daniel Chandler (2017) provides some important insights relative to the problems binary opposition causes:

> Binarism is rightly criticized when it leads to negative stereotyping and when it is uncritically accepted as "the real"—as in common sense assumptions that supposedly either/or oppositions, such as male and female, or heterosexual and homosexual, exhaust the possibilities of the domains they purport to encompass. . . . Conceptual binaries have been prominent throughout history in political rhetoric and propaganda—and have indeed been used to instigate countless wars. However, the oppositions (or whatever kind) which we employ in our cultural practices help to generate order out of the dynamic complexity of experience. Our entire system of values is built upon oppositions, which exist within sign systems rather than in the world. (p. 107)

Chandler cautions us about assuming that bipolar oppositions are adequate to deal with the complexities of human experience and culture, even though we use them to make sense of things in our everyday lives. The opposition "male" and "female," which seemed so obvious to us for many centuries, is inadequate to deal with gender in a world in which we now confront individuals with transgender and bisexual orientations and in which men transition into becoming women and women transition into becoming men. I will say more about gender later in the book.

Facts, by themselves, tell us little. Thus, to say that John Q. Public, who is married and has two children, earns $21,000 a year (a factoid) gives us some information about John Q. Public, but not very much. If we get another fact, that according to the federal government a family of four with an income of $22,500 in America in 2019 is living below the poverty line, then we can see that John Q. Public and his family are living in poverty. We have here some information—how much John Q. Public makes—and a concept—level of poverty—and we can see a relationship between the concept and the information we have.

De Saussure's (1915/1966) great insight is that **concepts** are relational. As he wrote in his book *Course in General Linguistics*, "Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. *Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not*" (italics added; p. 117). In other words, "In languages there are only differences" (p. 120) and, more particularly, oppositions. As he explained, language is based on oppositions. Relationships, then, help us make sense of the world, and the most important relationship, de Saussure argued, is that of binary oppositions.

Let me suggest some of the more important binary oppositions that we deal with in our everyday lives and, where appropriate, the thinkers who have made these oppositions part of our fund of knowledge.

Important Binary Oppositions	
Qualitative	Quantitative
The one	The many (Plato)
Male	Female
Nature	History
Bourgeois	Proletarian (Marx)

(Continued)

(Continued)

Important Binary Oppositions	
Digital	Analog
Gesellschaft	Gemeinschaft (Tönnies)
Raw	Cooked (Lévi-Strauss)
Potentiality	Actuality
I	Thou (Buber)
Ascetic	Hedonistic
Acid	Alkali
Idealism	Materialism
Thesis	Synthesis (Hegel)
Good	Evil
Sacred	Profane (Durkheim, Eliade)
Young	Old
Id	Superego (Freud)
Yin	Yang
Existence	Essence (Kierkegaard)
Dionysian	Apollonian (Nietzsche)
Electronic	Mechanical
Rigid	Flexible
Superficial	Profound
Wet	Dry (Lifton)
Classical	Romantic
Ethical	Aesthetic
Free	Enslaved
Democratic	Totalitarian
Hierarchy	Equality
Fast thinking	Slow thinking (Kahneman)
Western	Eastern

Important Binary Oppositions	
Free market	Command market
Beginning	End
Capitalism	Communism (Marx)

Note: The names in parentheses stand for thinkers who have dealt with these concepts in their work.

These oppositions, and a few dozen others, have shaped our consciousness and profoundly affected our history. In a sense, one can argue that much of history involves confrontations between people believing in one or the other side of certain oppositions in this list and some kind of final resolution of the dialectic between them. It is sometimes the case that a person switches from being a liberal to becoming a conservative or a conservative to becoming a liberal, and the same applies for other binary oppositions, for reasons that are not always clear.

❖ OVERT AND COVERT OPPOSITIONS

In many cases, oppositions are hidden in texts and have to be elicited. Let me offer an example. I will quote the first paragraph from an article by Robert Jay Lifton and then show the bipolar oppositions found in that paragraph.

Lifton's (1974) article "Who Is More Dry? Heroes of Japanese Youth" starts as follows:

> In postwar Japan, especially among young people, it is good to be "dry" (or *durai*) rather than "wet" (or *wetto*). This means—in the original youth language, as expanded by the mass media—to be direct, logical, to the point, pragmatic, casual, self-interested, rather than polite, evasive, sentimental, nostalgic, dedicated to romantic causes, or bound by obligation in human relations; to break out of the world of cherry blossoms, haiku, and moon-viewing into a modern era of bright sunlight, jazz, and Hemingway (who may be said to have been the literary god of dryness). Intellectual youth, of course, disdain these oversimplified categories. But they too have made the words *durai* and *wetto* (typical examples of postwar Japanized English) part of their everyday vocabulary, and they find dry objects of admiration in an interesting place: in American films about cowboys and gunmen. (p. 104)

This passage yields a considerable number of oppositions, listed here:

Dry (*Durai*)	**Wet (*Wetto*)**
Young people	(Old people)
Direct	Polite
Logical	Evasive
To the point	Sentimental
Pragmatic	Dedicated to romantic causes
Self-interested	Obligated to society
Sunlight loving	Moon viewing
Hemingway	Haiku
Cowboys, gunmen	"Samurai"

I put *old people* in parentheses because they are not mentioned but are logically present as the "wet" people in Japan, and I put *samurai* in quotations because they are not mentioned in this paragraph but are dealt with, in some detail, later on in Lifton's article.

What we see from this little exercise is that de Saussure's (1915/1966) statement about concepts having meaning differentially is correct. Wet is the opposite of dry, and when we see the term *wet*, it has its meaning because of its relationship with its opposition, *dry*. Thus we get "wet, not dry" and "dry, not wet" when we think of either term.

Oppositions, I should point out, are different from negations. *Healthy* and *unhealthy* is a negation. *Healthy* and *sick* is an opposition; both terms have meaning, and one term is not simply the negation of the other. (There are some scholars who argue that de Saussure's ideas about the mind finding meaning through polar oppositions is an over-simplification, but their arguments are somewhat arcane, and we need not bother with them.)

❖ *THINKING, FAST AND SLOW*

Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist at Princeton University, offers a wide-ranging analysis of how the human mind works in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). In this book he argued that there are two

oppositional systems working in our minds, **System 1** (fast) and **System 2** (slow). He wrote,

> *System 1* operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.
>
> *System 2* allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration.
>
> The labels of *System 1* and *System 2* are widely used in psychology, but I go further than most in this book, which you can read as a psychodrama with two characters.
>
> When we think of ourselves, we identify with System 2, the conscious, reasoning self that has beliefs, makes choices, and decides what to think about and what to do. Although System 2 believes itself to be where the action is, the automatic System 1 is the hero of this book. I describe System 1 as effortlessly originating impressions and feelings that are the main sources of the explicit beliefs and deliberate choices of System 2. The automatic operations of System 1 generate surprisingly complex patterns of ideas, but only the slower System 2 can construct thoughts in an orderly system of steps. I also describe circumstances in which System 2 takes over, overruling the freewheeling impulses and associations of System 1. You will be invited to think of the two systems as agents with their individual abilities, limitations, and functions. (pp. 20–21)

Kahneman (2011) then spent 400 pages showing how System 1 and System 2 shape our thinking and discussed many experiments that deal with the way people think and the way they can be influenced by any number of factors. For example, he discussed what are called "narrative fallacies," showing how flawed stories of the past shape our view of the world and our expectations of the future:

> Narrative fallacies arise inevitably from our continuous attempt to make sense of the world. The explanatory stories that people find compelling are simple; are concrete rather than abstract; assign a larger role to talent, stupidity, and intentions than to luck; and focus on a few striking events that happened rather than on countless events that failed to happen. (p. 199)

What we learn, here, is that we are continually relying too much on System 1 and our intuitions and gut feelings often lead us astray. Kahneman showed how professors of statistics make mistakes in

deciding on the size of their samples due to their reliance on System 1 thinking and how voters also are affected by System 1 thinking. At the conclusion of the book, he pointed out that we must find a way to counter the "cognitive minefield" produced by System 1 and find a way to get System 2 involved, which is not always easy since System 2 takes effort and is stressful. It's easier to identify these minefields when we see others wandering around in them than it is to see the minefields in which we ourselves are caught, but it is the minefields we are in that are most important to us. Those are the ones we must find a way to deal with.

❖ QUANTITY AND QUALITY IN MEDIA RESEARCH

The stage is now set to discuss the basic opposition in media and communication research (and research of all kinds)—the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. I mentioned some of these oppositions in my introduction, but let us return to them again.

The term *quality* comes from the Latin word *qualitas*, which means "Of what kind?" Quality, when it comes to texts carried by one or more of the media, involves matters such as the text's properties, degree of excellence, and distinguishing characteristics. There is an element of evaluation and judgment and taste connected to the term *quality*.

Quantity is a different matter. The term *quantity* comes from the Latin word *quantitas*, meaning "How great?" or, for our purposes, "How much?" or "How many?" When we think of quantitative research in the media and communication, we think of numbers, magnitude, and measurement. Of course, the problem that quantitative researchers often face is that they count only certain things, not everything, and it may be the case that something that cannot be quantified is of great importance in one's research.

Thus, quantitative researchers are sometimes accused of being too narrow, basing their research on what they can count, measure, and observe and neglecting other matters. Qualitative researchers, however, are often accused of "reading into" texts things that are not there or of having opinions or making interpretations that seem odd, excessive, or even idiosyncratic. (The term *idios* means private, and idiosyncratic interpretations of media and texts are highly personal and not defensible.)

Let us look at the two modes of research in terms of the oppositions connected to each of them. These oppositions are somewhat reductionist (that is, I've oversimplified them to make a point), but they direct our attention to important elements in the two kinds of research.

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Evaluates	Counts, measures
Uses concepts to explicate	Processes collected data
Focuses on **aesthetics** in texts	Focuses on incidences of X in texts
Theoretical	Statistical
Interprets	Describes, explains, and predicts
Leads to an evaluation	Leads to a hypothesis or theory
Interpretation can be attacked	Methodology can be attacked

It is instructive to look at the kinds of investigations made by qualitative and quantitative scholars in the media. A number of years ago, I received a flyer from the Qualitative Studies Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) calling for papers for the organization's annual conference. The flyer read (in part) as follows:

> Entries may include studies employing any type of qualitative research approach. Essays, analyses, and literature reviews on topics within the interests of the division are also invited. Subjects falling within the Qualitative Studies Division's interests include, but are not limited to, the following:
>
> Popular Culture
>
> Philosophy of Communication
>
> Literary or Textual Analysis of Communications Context
>
> Performance Studies of Mass Communicators
>
> Mythic/Ideological Studies
>
> Media Criticism
>
> Empirical or Theoretical Work in Cultural Studies
>
> Production/Organization Studies of Mass Media

The flyer listed a number of other topics. I offer this list because it gives a good idea of the range of interests of qualitative methodologists, many of which will be dealt with in this book. Under quantitative methodologies, I include experiments, content analysis, surveys, and questionnaires—techniques that lend themselves to statistical manipulations to gain information.

❖ MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

For our purposes, we can focus on five aspects of **communication**:

1. *Intrapersonal.* This area covers things such as talking to ourselves, thinking about how we will respond to situations we expect to arise, and writing in a journal or diary. We are communicating with ourselves.
2. *Interpersonal.* Here, the communication takes place between ourselves and a relatively small number of people. This area includes conversations between two people and conversations with friends at dinner parties. There is interaction among all parties involved.
3. *Small group.* In small-group communication, a person might be teaching a class or talking to a relatively small group of people. The group is large enough that ordinary interpersonal communication cannot take place.
4. *Organizational.* This area deals with how organizations communicate to members of the organization and to other interested parties.
5. *Mass media.* Here we are dealing with radio, television, film, and other media. The communication flows from a sender of messages to a large number of receivers of messages. A great deal of the content of the mass media takes the form of texts—narratives or stories found in radio programs, television programs, films, songs, and music videos. (We also find narratives in personal conversations and many other areas.)

The development of **social media** sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, and video sites such as YouTube and Vimeo means that people now have the capacity to create messages and images that can be seen by huge numbers of people. The fact that most smartphones have decent-resolution cameras and video-taking capabilities has made everyone with a smartphone a potential photojournalist, and sometimes these photos and video uploads go "viral," which means huge numbers of people see them.

Different research methods lend themselves to each of these areas of communication. For example, if you are interested in the narratives carried by the mass media, you will use qualitative or interpretative techniques such as semiotics or ideological analysis, but if you are

interested in the effects of the media, you will probably use quantitative techniques such as content analysis or surveys. In some cases, you might wish to use a number of techniques at the same time.

Marina Zlochin/iStock/Thinkstock

Social media

Source: Marina Zlochin/iStock/Thinkstock.

❖ WHY A BOOK THAT TEACHES BOTH METHODOLOGIES?

There is a logic to teaching both methodologies, for quite often it makes sense to do both a qualitative and a quantitative study research project. Take, for example, a television series about the police. The qualitative researcher might study the metaphors in the dialogue and the narrative structure of the shows in the series, whereas the quantitative researcher might study how many violent incidents occur per minute in the series. It is quite possible that the amount of violence in the series affects the qualitative interpretation of the text or vice versa.

It's reasonable to expect, then, that if a text is so violent it creates psychological distress and a sickening feeling in audiences, quite likely viewers, and perhaps critics, will give negative aesthetic evaluations. It may be that physiological or ethical considerations will shape evaluations of the text and decisions about whether to look at other episodes. In some cases, the intensity of the violence in a given scene (a qualitative measure) may be more important than the amount of violence (a quantitative measure) in the text as a whole. This is why we need to

have a repertoire of analytic and measurement techniques: A diversity of techniques allows us to obtain the full array of information we need or want. It's better to have many arrows (that is, research techniques) in one's quiver than just one.

❖ CONSIDERING RESEARCH TOPICS

Here are some things to consider before undertaking a research project:

- Is the topic interesting?
- Is the problem important enough to bother with?
- Is your hypothesis reasonable and testable?
- Are there ethical problems involved in the research? (For example, will it violate people's privacy? If so, should it be done?)
- Do you have the skills to do the research? For example, do you know enough about statistics to be able to deal with your data (if they require statistical analysis, that is)?
- Is the topic sufficiently narrow and focused so that you can do it in the time and with the funds you have at your disposal?
- Is your methodology the best one to deal with your hypothesis or subject being investigated?
- Does your college or university have library and computer resources that are adequate for your research?

❖ WHAT IS RESEARCH? APPLICATIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Find an article in the *New York Times* based on a scholarly article that deals with social science research on media. Analyze the article and answer the following questions:
   (a) What methodology was used in the research?
   (b) How important is the topic?
   (c) What conclusions were reached?
   (d) Are the conclusions supported by the data? Are the conclusions credible?
   (e) Can one generalize from the research?
   (f) Do the findings have any policy implications?

2. Find the scholarly article on which the *New York Times* article was based and compare the two articles in terms of how accurately the newspaper article conveyed what was in the scholarly article. Did it leave out anything important? Was the news report biased in any way?

3. Investigate smartphones. What have scholars found about the impact smartphones have on American culture and society? Deal with topics such as smartphones and the socialization of young people, smartphones and addiction, and smartphones and politics. On a personal level, which smartphone do you think is "best" for the typical student? What brand and model of smartphone do you have, and why did you decide to purchase it? If you could afford to purchase any cell phone, which brand and model would you choose?

❖ CONCLUSIONS

If we look at research as an attempt to find out about things and people and the complexities of communication, research becomes fascinating. Because of the way the human mind works, we are, in a sense, always doing research—but not always doing scientific and scholarly research. This book offers an introduction to scientific and scholarly research. It functions as a primer and describes the more commonly used techniques for analyzing media and communication.

A number of years ago, I was asked by a German publisher to write a book—with both a historical and a comparative perspective—on techniques used by women who seduce men. This led to a fascinating search to find material I could use and to a book about women who might be called superstar seductresses, covering everyone from Lilith to Madame de Pompadour, from Cleopatra to Monica Lewinsky.

Who says research can't be fun?

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