

## Chapter 15

### Reading and Writing Social Research

## Chapter Outline & Key Terms

### Outline:

- Introduction
- Reading Social Research
- Using the Internet Wisely (skipped)
- Writing Social Research

### Key Terms:

- Abstract
- Plagiarism
- Research monograph
- Search engine
- URL

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## How to Read Social Research

- Begin with the abstract.
- Skim the piece.
- Read the conclusion to get a good sense of what it is about.
- Form questions as you read and take notes.

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## How to Write Social Research

- Begins with good writing.
- Write to communicate, not to impress.
- Be aware of the audience and the purpose in writing the report.
- Avoid presenting someone else's words or thoughts as your own.

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## Components of Reports

1. Title
2. Abstract/Executive Summary
3. Background/Literature Review
4. Theoretical Framework
5. Method
  - a. Design
  - b. Measurement
  - c. Sampling
  - d. Data Collection
6. Data Analysis and Findings
7. Conclusions and Discussions
8. Appendix
  - a. Tables
  - b. Figures
  - c. Questionnaires
  - d. References
  - e. etc.

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## Research Reports

- Should include an account of the study design and execution.
- The analysis of a report should be clear at each step.
- Conclusion should be specific but not overly detailed.
- Researchers need to provide details, integrate supporting materials, and draw explicit conclusions.

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## Ethics of Reading and Writing Social Research

- There is a risk of reviewing literature with a bias toward reports that support a favorite point to view.
- The power of the internet for expansive searches can allow selective picking of supportive research literature.
- Researchers must exercise professional honesty in representing the history of findings in a particular area.

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## Abstract

- A summary of a research article. The abstract usually begins the article and states the **purpose** of the research, the **methods** used, and the major **findings**.

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## Literature Review

- Organize your search of literature around key concepts you wish to study.
- Once you identify a useful book or article, note which publications its author cites.
- You may discover citations that appear often, suggesting they're core references within the subject matter.
- Once you've identified potential resources, read them and find anything of value to your project.

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## Theoretical Framework

1. Can you identify the theoretical orientation?
2. Is the author attempting to refute a theory?
3. Is a theory or hypothesis being tested?
4. In what way has the theoretical orientation shaped the methodology used in the study?
5. Is the methodology used appropriate to the theoretical issues involved?

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## Research Design

1. Was the purpose of the study: exploration, description, explanation, or a combination?
2. Who conducted the research?
3. What was the unit of analysis?
4. If longitudinal data were collected, have comparable measurements been made at each point in time?
5. If a panel study has been conducted, how many people dropped out during the study?

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## Measurement

1. What are the names of the concepts under study?
2. Has the researcher delineated different dimensions of the variables?
3. What indicators have been chosen as measures of those dimensions?
4. What is the level of measurement of each variable: nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio?
5. Have composite measurements (indexes, scales, or typologies) been used?

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## Sampling (1)

1. Was it appropriate to study a sample, or should all elements have been studied?
2. Has the appropriate sample design been used?
3. What population does the researcher want to draw conclusions about?
4. What is the researcher's purpose?
5. If a probability sample has been selected, what sampling frame has been used?
6. What specific sampling techniques have been employed?

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## Sampling (2)

7. How large a sample was selected?
8. Assuming that the respondents are representative of those in the sample, what sampling error do you expect from a sample of this size?
9. Has the researcher tested for representativeness?
10. Do the studied individuals represent the larger population from which they were chosen?
11. Have subjects and observations been selected in such a way as to provide a broad overview of the phenomenon being examined?

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## Survey (1)

1. Does the study stand up to all the relevant questions regarding sampling?
2. What questions were asked of respondents?
3. If closed-ended questions were asked, were the answer categories appropriate, exhaustive, and mutually exclusive?
4. If open-ended questions were asked, how have the answers been categorized?

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## Survey (2)

5. Are the questions clear and unambiguous?
6. Were the respondents capable of answering the questions asked?
7. Are any of the questions double-barreled?
8. Do the questions contain negative terms?
9. Is there a danger of social desirability in the questions?
10. How would you yourself answer each item?
11. Has the researcher conducted a secondary analysis of previously collected data?

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## Experiments

1. What is the primary dependent variable in the experiment? What is the stimulus?
2. What other variables are relevant to the experiment?
3. How has each variable been defined and measured?
4. Has a proper control group been used?
5. Have there been pre- and posttest measurements of the dependent variable?
6. What is the chance of a placebo effect in the experiment?
7. Are there any problems of internal validity?
8. Are there issues of external validity?

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## Content Analysis

1. What are the key variables in the analysis?
2. What is the source and form of data being analyzed?
3. Is the time frame of the data being analyzed appropriate to the research question?
4. What is the unit of analysis?
5. Has an appropriate sample been selected?
6. Have the appropriate statistical techniques been used?

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## Data Analysis (1)

1. Did the purpose and design of the study call for a qualitative or a quantitative analysis?
2. How have nonstandardized data been coded?
3. To what extent were the codes based on prior theory and generated by the data.
4. Has the researcher undertaken all relevant analyses?
5. Does a particular research finding really matter?

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## Data Analysis (2)

6. Has the researcher gone beyond the actual findings in drawing conclusions and implications?
7. Are there logical flaws in the analysis and interpretation of data?
8. Have the empirical observations of the study revealed new patterns of relationships, providing the bases for grounded theories of social life?
9. Are the statistical techniques used in the analysis of data appropriate to the levels of measurement of the variables involved?
10. If tests of statistical significance were used, have they been interpreted correctly?

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## Appendix: What to include in your group report & presentation?

1. [Title](#)
2. [Abstract](#)
3. [Introduction](#)
4. [Methodology](#)
5. [Findings](#)
6. [Conclusion](#)
7. [Appendices](#)

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## 1. What to Include in the Title?

- Dependent variable(s): required, e.g.,
  - "Television Channel Loyalty ..."
- Independent variable(s): optional, e.g.,
  - "The Impact of xxx on yyy ..."
  - "Difference in yyy between/among xxx ..."
- Location: optional
- Time: optional
- Methodology: optional, e.g.,
  - "A Survey of ..."
  - "An Experiment of ..."
  - "A content Analysis ..."
  - "A Secondary Analysis of ..."

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## 2. What to Include in the Abstract?

- Intended for non-academic readers, such as governmental officials, business executives, journalists, and the like, using **non-technical** terms to describe the **purpose**, **methods**, and **findings** of the study.

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## 3. What to Include in the Introduction?

- Purpose of the study: exploratory, descriptive, and/or explanatory of what phenomenon/issue/problem?
- Previous studies: what relevant studies, if any, have been done on the above topic; what we have known and unknown on the topic?
- Conceptual Framework and hypothesis

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#### 4. What to Include in the Methodology?

- Measurement
  - Wording of the questions and answers
  - Forma of the questions and answers
  - Creation of index/scale/typology
- Sampling
  - Study population
  - Sampling design
  - Selection of sampling units at each stage
- Data Collection Procedure
  - Who did what to whom in what way, when, where, with what outcome (response rate and sampling error)

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#### 5. What to Include in the Findings?

- Evaluative analysis of the final sample: required
  - How is the sample distributed in terms of key demographic characteristics?
  - How does the sample compare with the study population in terms of these characteristics before and after weighted?
- Descriptive (univariate) analysis of the DV: required
  - The mean, median, mode, or percentage of the dependent variable(s) of the sample
  - The above characteristics of the population, as projected from the sample at the 95% confidence level
- Explanatory (bivariate) analysis of the DV: required
  - Is each of the IV in your hypothesis/es related to the DV?
- Explanatory (multivariate) analysis of the DV: optional
  - Are two or more IV related to each of the DV?

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#### 6. What to Include in the Conclusion?

- Summary: a brief synthesis of the main findings of the study (no need to repeat everything already reported in the findings; highlight the most important, striking, or unexpected)
- Implications/recommendations: discusses the social meanings of the findings., e.g.,
  - Anything particularly worth attention or action from the government, businesses, the media, the public?
  - Anything helpful to address the identified problem or issue?
- Limitations and suggestions for future research, e.g.,
  - Anything needed to know but not available from the study?
  - Anyway to improve the study in the future?

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#### 7. What to Include in the Appendices

- Tables and/or charts: required; but no need to presents the same data in both a table or a chart
- References: desirable but optional
- Wording of Measurement (i.e., the relevant part of the questionnaire): required
- Any other relevant supporting materials: optional

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#### 7.1 Tips for Creating Tables

- No need for one univariate analysis (e.g., frequencies of a DV)
- One table for several parallel DVs
- One table for each of the bivariate/multivariate analyses
- For bivariate/multivariate tables, put IV in the columns and DV in the rows

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#### How to Run SPSS Crosstabs?

1. Move the DV in "Row(s)"
2. For bivariate analysis, move the IV in "Column(s)"
3. For trivariate analysis, move the direct IV in "Column(s)" and the control IV in "Layer 1 of 1"
4. In "Cell", de-select "Counts/Observed" and select "Percentages/Column"

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### Which Direction to Calculate the Percentages?

	Column Percent			Row Percent		
Internet use?	Beijing	Guang-zhou	Total	Beijing	Guang-zhou	Total
Yes	30% (300)	24% (360)	26% (660)	45% (300)	55% (360)	100% (660)
No	70% (700)	76% (1140)	74% (1840)	38% (700)	62% (1140)	100% (1840)
Total	100%	100%	100%	40%	60%	100%
N	1000	1500	2500	1000	1500	2500

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### Which Direction to Present the Percentages?

IV in Columns				IV in Rows		
Internet use?	Beijing	Guang-zhou	Total	Internet use?		Total
				Yes	No	
Yes	30%	24%	26%	Beijing	30%	70%
No	70%	76%	74%	Guang-zhou	24%	76%
Total	100%	100%	100%	Total	26%	74%
N	1000	1500	2500	N	660	1840

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### A Standard Bivariate Table (for Nominal DV and IV)

DV	IV			Total (optional)
	1	2	3	
1	?%	?%	?%	?%
2	?%	?%	?%	?%
3	?%	?%	?%	?%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	?	?	?	?

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### A Standard Bivariate Table (for Nominal IV & Interval DV)

	IV		Difference
	1	2	
DV Mean	?	?	?
N	?	?	

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### A Standard Trivariate Table (for Nominal DV and IV)

DV	Control IV=1		Control IV=2	
	Direct IV=1	Direct IV=2	Direct IV=1	Direct IV=2
1	?%	?%	?%	?%
2	?%	?%	?%	?%
3	?%	?%	?%	?%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	?	?	?	?

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### An Alternative Trivariate Table (for Nominal DV and IV)

	Direct IV=1	Direct IV=2	Total
	<i>Control IV = 1</i>		
DV=1	?%	?%	?%
DV=2	?%	?%	?%
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	?	?	?
<i>Control IV = 2</i>			
DV=1	?%	?%	?%
DV=2	?%	?%	?%
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	?	?	?

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### A Standard Trivariate Table (for Interval DV & Nominal IV)

	Control IV=1		Control IV=2	
	Direct IV=1	Direct IV=2	Direct IV=1	Direct IV=2
DV Mean	?	?	?	?
N	?	?	?	?

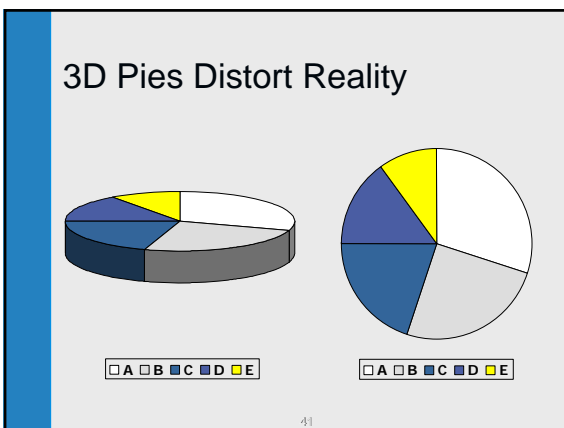
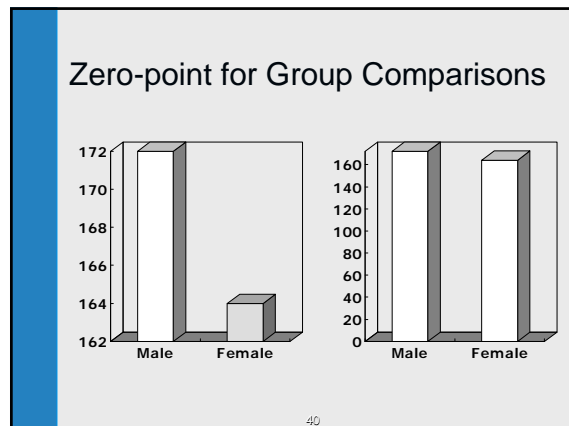
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### An Alternative Trivariate Table (for Interval DV & Nominal IV)

	Direct IV=1	Direct IV=2	Total
<i>Control IV = 1</i>			
DV Mean	?	?	?
N	?	?	?
<i>Control IV = 2</i>			
DV Mean	?	?	?
N	?	?	?

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- ### 7.2 Tips for Creating Charts
- Always label the title, x-axis, and y-axis
  - Always set the minimum of y-axis at 0 ("Zero-point" principle)
  - Use "pie" for nominal variables with 6 or fewer categories and don't use 3-D format
  - Use "bar" for nominal variables with any number of categories
  - Use "historam" for interval variables
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- ### 7.3 How to Cite References
- Why references are needed? To prevent plagiarism
  - Use the APA (American Psychological Association) Style:
    - In the main body: "... (Zhu & He, 2002) ..."
    - In the reference list:
      - Zhu, J. J. H., & He, Z. (2002). Article title. *Journal*, vol., pages.
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