



## Resource Review

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<b>Name of reviewed item:</b>	Researching Communications: a Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis 2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition
<b>Author(s) / Editor(s):</b>	David Deacon, Michael Pickering, Peter Golding & Graham Murdock
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### Review:

Researching Communications (Second Edition) is an ambitious book that "sets out to explain and illustrate the entire range of methods necessary to research communications" (Deacon et al 2007: vii). Written by established authors with extensive research and teaching experience in media and communications, and with both undergraduate and postgraduate media and communications students in mind, this book is largely successful in providing a comprehensive introduction to communications research. Organised around fifteen coherently structured chapters with each chapter containing a summary and key points section at the end, the authors introduce and then go on to demonstrate (with the use of applied examples) the strengths and limitations of a range of media and communications research methods. Every chapter deals with a specific aspect of media and communications research in a detailed and lucid manner offering concise commentaries on handling qualitative and quantitative data in a range of contexts including still and moving image analysis, interviewing and questionnaires, observation and conversation analysis. Supported with case studies, graphs, charts, illustrations, diagrams and still images drawn from examples of research past and present, each chapter carefully presents a particular method, places it into a context and illustrates its practical uses in researching media and communications. Updated material from the first edition includes expanded sections on the Internet, archival research, online databases and various software packages along with a focus on some recent case studies and current issues and debates in media and communications research. This format works well wherein classic examples from the field such as Barthes' (1973) reading of the Paris Match cover sit alongside textual analysis of on-line multi-player virtual environments, providing a neat balance between the 'old' and the 'new' in media and communications research. Chapter Fifteen (*Beyond Methodology*) offers a tidy

conclusion to the book and is extremely useful in outlining the 'what, how and why' of researching communications with fairly detailed sections covering the politics of research, ASA guidelines on ethics for research, and BSA guidelines on avoiding sexist, racist and disablist language. A substantial glossary of terms with key words highlighted in bold print to enable cross-referencing with other entries is also a useful feature of this book making it the ideal resource for students, researchers and lecturers alike.

The key strengths of this book are built on clear explanations of the relationship of theory to research, the strong emphasis placed on practical application (the 'how to') of the methods and techniques discussed and the guidance given in relation to the stages of the research process. What is also refreshing, is the stance adopted by the authors in relation to the practicalities of 'doing' research and their emphasis on approaching communications research as an "interdisciplinary space" (p.2). The authors specify that the main purpose of the book is to "encourage undisciplined research in a disciplined way" (p.11) and, in doing so, provide a useful counterpoint to the tendency in some research methods books of maintaining boundaries between approaches resulting in the 'boxing-off' of research techniques and strategies. Arguably, in the current climate of inter-disciplinary knowledge and research the rigid compartmentalising of research methods is neither desirable nor defensible and the authors appear to be embracing this position wholeheartedly.

Throughout the authors are keen to stress their desire to encourage the mixing and synthesising of methods and techniques where potentially fruitful combinations and cross-fertilisation might produce useful insights and new understandings but, at the same time, they are careful to spell out incompatibilities (philosophical and methodological) where they exist. To this end, Chapter One (*Approaching Research*) outlines the philosophical foundations, methods and theoretical frameworks of Positivism, Interpretivism and Critical Realism clearly and coherently, avoiding unnecessary jargon where possible and specifying similarities, overlaps and differences where applicable. The general theme then is one where the combination of methods, where appropriate, is advocated rather than discouraged. For students and researchers undertaking primary research this approach is to be welcomed. The 'academic apartheid' between quantitative and qualitative research methods should certainly be 'relaxed' where appropriate enabling researchers to move beyond this unhelpful dichotomy.

The second edition of *Researching Communications* should prove to be every bit as successful as the first edition in terms of providing a comprehensive overview of just about all of the key research methods and approaches in the study of media and communication processes. But this book is much more than simply a stage-by-stage practical guide to different research methods because it also contains useful advice and guidance on the philosophical foundations of research methods, theoretical frameworks, tips for critically evaluating research and general guidance on the practical constraints involved in actually conducting research. In this way, the authors provide a cohesive guide to negotiating the complexities of research and finding an agreeable balance between philosophical concerns and the more pragmatic decisions that have to be made when actually 'doing research'. In conclusion, *Researching Communications* is both a valuable reference book and a practical guide that will serve students undertaking dissertation work at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels well. It will also be a valuable source text for lecturers teaching modules on media and communications research. The potential use value of this book may also be extended to students and lecturers outside of the immediate remit of media and communications courses. Students and researchers in the fields of sociology, social psychology or history, for example, who may require a broad but sufficiently detailed practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis for research purposes will also benefit from this book and what it has to offer.

## References

Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*. Paladin.