

Introduction to Communication Research

Introduction to Communication Research Methods

(A concise, organized guide for students and beginners)

1. What Is Communication Research?

Aspect	Description
Definition	Systematic inquiry into how messages are created, transmitted, received, and interpreted.
Purpose	• Explain communication phenomena • Predict outcomes of communication processes • Improve practice (e.g., media production, public relations, health campaigns).
Scope	Interpersonal, group, organizational, mass media, digital, intercultural, health, political communication, etc.

2. The Research Process – Step by Step

1. Identify a Problem / Question

- Start with a *gap* in knowledge or a practical issue.
- Formulate a clear, focused research question (e.g., “How does Instagram use of hashtags affect political engagement among young adults?”).

2. Review the Literature

- Locate scholarly articles, books, reports, and credible web sources.
- Summarize what is known, note contradictions, and justify your study.

3. Develop a Theoretical Framework

- Choose theories that explain the phenomena (e.g., Uses & Gratifications, Social Identity Theory).
- Use the framework to generate hypotheses or propositions.

4. Choose a Research Design

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- **Quantitative** (surveys, experiments, content analysis) – emphasizes measurement, statistical inference.

Methods

- **Qualitative** (interviews, focus groups, ethnography, discourse analysis) – emphasizes meaning, context.
- **Mixed?Methods** – combines both for richer insight.

5. Select a Sampling Strategy

- **Probability sampling** (simple random, stratified, cluster) ? generalizable results.
- **Non?probability sampling** (convenience, purposive, snowball) ? depth, specific populations.

6. Collect Data

- **Surveys** – online platforms (Qualtrics, Google Forms), paper questionnaires.
- **Experiments** – lab or field, manipulate independent variable(s).
- **Content Analysis** – coding of media texts, social media posts.
- **Interviews / Focus Groups** – semi?structured, audio?recorded, transcribed.
- **Observations** – participant or non?participant, field notes.

7. Analyze Data

- **Quantitative** – descriptive stats, inferential tests (t, ANOVA, regression, SEM), software (SPSS, R, Stata).
- **Qualitative** – coding, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, software (NVivo, ATLAS.ti).
- **Mixed** – integrate findings through triangulation or joint display.

8. Interpret Findings

- Relate results back to theory and literature.
- Discuss implications for practice, policy, and future research.

9. Report & Disseminate

- Academic paper (IMRaD structure), conference presentation, white paper, infographic.
- Follow ethical standards (APA, MLA) and citation guidelines.

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3. Core Research Designs in Communication Methods

Design	Key Features	Typical Uses
Survey Research	Structured questionnaires; large samples; cross-sectional or longitudinal.	Audience attitudes, media usage patterns, public opinion.
Experimental Design	Random assignment; manipulation of IV; control group.	Causal claims about message effects, framing, persuasion.
Content Analysis	Systematic coding of texts/media; can be quantitative or qualitative.	Media representation studies, agenda-setting, discourse