

Introduction to Media Research Methods

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Key concepts, approaches, and practical steps for studying media phenomena.

1. Why Study Media?

Reason	What It Means for Research
Social Impact	Media shape opinions, norms, and behavior.
Economic Role	Advertising, distribution, and content creation drive markets.
Technological Change	New platforms (e.g., streaming, VR) constantly alter how we communicate.
Policy & Regulation	Understanding media effects informs legislation and public policy.

2. Core Research Paradigms

Paradigm	Ontology (Nature of Reality)	Epistemology (How We Know)	Typical Methods
Quantitative	Objective, measurable	Empirical, statistical inference	Surveys, experiments, content coding, big?data analytics
Qualitative	Constructed, subjective	Interpretive, meaning? focused	Interviews, focus groups, ethnography, textual analysis
Critical / Cultural	Power?laden, contested	Ideological critique, reflexive	Discourse analysis, critical theory, audience reception studies
Mixed? Methods	Both/bridging	Sequential or concurrent integration	Combines surveys + interviews, content analysis + focus groups, etc.

3. Research Design Steps

1. Define the Problem & Research Question

Introduction to Media Research Methods

- Use *PICO* (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) for empirical studies or *RQ* format for exploratory work.
- Example: “How does algorithmic recommendation affect news diversity among 18-24 year-olds?”

2. Select a Theoretical Framework

- Media Effects (e.g., agenda-setting, cultivation)
- Uses & Gratifications
- Reception Theory
- Political Economy of Media

3. Choose a Methodology

- **Quantitative:** Survey questionnaire, experiment, secondary data mining.
- **Qualitative:** Semi-structured interview guide, participant observation protocol.
- **Content Analysis:** Codebook development, reliability testing (Cohen's κ .70).

4. Sampling Strategy

- **Probability** (simple random, stratified, cluster) → generalizable results.
- **Non-Probability** (convenience, purposive, snowball) → depth & context.

5. Data Collection

- **Digital tools:** Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, APIs (Twitter, YouTube).
- **Field tools:** Audio recorders, video cameras, observation checklists.

6. Data Analysis

- **Quantitative:** Descriptive stats, inferential tests (t, ANOVA, regression, SEM).
- **Qualitative:** Thematic coding (NVivo, Atlas.ti), narrative analysis, grounded theory.
- **Content:** Frequency counts, sentiment scoring, network mapping.

7. Interpretation & Reporting

- Link findings back to theory & research question.
- Discuss limitations (sampling bias, measurement error, temporal relevance).
- Suggest implications for practitioners, policymakers, and future research.

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4. Major Methodologies in Media Research

Method	When to Use	Key Strengths	Typical Output
Survey Research	Large populations, attitude/behavior measurement	Generalizable, statistically robust	Cross-sectional or longitudinal data tables, regression models
Experiment (Lab / Field)	Causal inference, testing media		