

Module	Research Methods
Course code	BAJH-RM
Credits	10
Allocation of marks	60% Continuous Assessment
	40% Final Examination

Intended Module Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, the learner will be able to:

13. Understand the purpose, value and role of research
14. Demonstrate knowledge of the wide variety of information sources available to communication researchers
15. Gather authoritative evidence to support findings
16. Demonstrate appreciation of the ethical considerations of conducting research
17. Apply, interpret and assess some quantitative and qualitative methods of research
18. Comment critically on how media audiences are measured.
19. Discuss and comment on the relationship of research to the modern news media.
20. Discuss the impact research and surveys can have on both media and the wider society, with particular reference to political opinion polls and other examples.
21. Undertake a basic media research project.

Module Objectives

This module examines a number of research methods that have been used by media outlets, reported on by media organisations and applied to media content. Topics include designing questionnaires, quantitative content analysis, interviewing (with specific focus on social research), focus groups and observation methods.

The module aims to familiarise learners with the main research theories and concepts and to enable learners to acquire skills in the research process including planning, data collection and analysis. The module also addresses the issue of ethics in research and the role and responsibilities of the researcher as distinct from a journalist.

Journalists encounter research related topics in various aspects of their work both in terms of media products they create and how they relate to the consumers and purchasers of those products and this module introduces these research methodologies.

Module Curriculum

Introduction to Research Methods and Ethical Concerns

This section of the module introduces key words in research methods such as 'quantitative', 'qualitative' and 'sample' and explain what research involves. An important part of this introductory lecture is a description of common ethical principles and a discussion of how they can be applied to research projects. This topic looks at various experimental research including the work of Stanley Milgram and also look at different ethical guidelines in use today. Examples of Consent Forms & Information Sheets are shown.

Deciding What to Research and How to Begin

This section looks at how to source information effectively. It also includes information on how to reference work correctly and covers topics such as:

- Sources of documents and issues such as authenticity and credibility
- Planning effective searches on the internet
- Using search engines effectively
- How to plan a project
- Referencing

This topic is crucial to the successful completion of the assignment component of this section of the module.

Quantitative Content Analysis

This topic describes the origins of quantitative content analysis and outlines the main strengths and drawbacks of the method. In this section, we also look at how practically to undertake a quantitative content analysis and examine an example of research that used this method.

- Definition of what it is
- History of its use
- Advantages and disadvantages
- How to do it
- Examples of Quantitative Content Analysis

Excerpts from the Glasgow Media group (www.glasgowmediagroup.org), in particular, *Making a Drama out of a Crisis: Authentic Portrayals of Mental Illness in TV Drama* (Greg Philo, Lesley Henderson, Katie McCracken, June 2010) are analysed as part of this section.

Survey Research

This topic identifies the advantages and disadvantages of survey research and the many forms it can take including self-completion questionnaires and online surveys. It also examines factors that may impact on surveys as a research strategy such as sampling and response rates. In this section we also look at *Growing Up in Ireland*, a national study of children which takes place over seven years and follow the progress of two groups of children; 8500 nine-year-olds and 11,000 nine-month-olds and we look at the surveys used and the data that emerged as part of the research with nine year olds.

The Art of Interviewing and Focus Groups

In this topic we examine the many different types of interviews and how and why they are used. The advantages and disadvantages of in-depth interviews (the most common type of research interview) are identified and discussed. A practical example of the use of interview as a research method is also analysed and considered in this section. This topic also examines what a focus group is before discussing the role of the moderator and how focus

groups work, the history of focus groups in research, their uses and what can and should be done before a focus group takes place.

Participant observation and observation methods

This section defines participant observation and examines its relationship to other types of observation methods. Different types of observation; simple, experimental, participant observation are identified and explained. The history of observation methods is outlined and a definition of participant observation and its advantages and disadvantages are detailed and discussed.

Political opinion polls

The use of opinion polls in the reporting of party politics and elections has had a profound impact on how the media and political parties interact, not just in Ireland but internationally. In the coming weeks we see many opinion polls reported in the Leinster House elections. In this topic we look at these trends and examine the impact of political opinion polls on how the media report on political issues and also on how political parties behave. We look at in particular the Irish case but also study examples from Britain, the USA and other states.

News Framing

Often journalists and media workers can view, participate and report on seemingly straight forward news events but produce differing observations about not just the context or value of the event but also the actual structure or nature of the event itself. In this case we engage in a small piece of media research and see can journalists ever fully produce a straight story. We look also at the theories of Bell, Entman, Druckman and Tankard.

Writing About Research

Another effect of our information and measurement obsession is the emergence of the concept of infotainment - the presentation of information as entertainment. Reporting on research and survey findings has become a staple element of modern reporting, but are we accurately reporting on the information presented or are there other questions that journalists should be asking? We introduce also the work of Philip Meyer on Precision Journalism