

MODULE:	RESEARCH METHODS
CODE:	BAJH-1-2-10
Number of Credits	4 semester credits / 6 quarter units
Stage:	I
Theme	Media Skills
Assessment Weighting:	Exam (40%) Project (60%)

Overview and Aims

This course will examine a number of research methods that have been used by media outlets, reported on by media organisations and applied to media content. Topics include quantitative content analysis, interviewing with specific focus on social research, focus groups and observation methods. The course aims to familiarise students with the main research theories and concepts and to enable students to acquire skills in the research process including planning, data collection and analysis. 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.

On successful completion of this module students will:

- Understand the purpose, value and role of research
- Possess knowledge of the wide variety of information sources available to communication researchers
- Know how to gather authoritative evidence to support findings
- Appreciate the ethical considerations of conducting research
- Understand, apply, interpret and assess some quantitative and qualitative methods of research
- Understand and comment critically on how media audiences are measured.
- Discuss and comment on the relationship of research to the modern news media.
- Understand the concept of news origination, news selection, news framing and infotainment.

- Through the study of political opinion polls and other examples grasp the impact research and surveys can have on both media and the wider society.
- Undertake a basic media research project.

Module Content

Introduction to Research Methods and Ethical Concerns

This section of the course will try to offer answers to questions such as: What does research involve? Why do research? How has research been used /abused? What are ethical principles and how can they be applied to research? This section will look at various experimental research including the work of Stanley Milgram and also look at different ethical guidelines in use today.

Sourcing Information

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
- Referencing

The Art of Interviewing

- Defining structured interviews
- How to do an in-depth interview
- What is a life history?
- Access and Sampling Issues
- Ethical issues

Focus Groups

- Definition of what a focus group is

- Characteristics of a moderator
- Advantages and disadvantages
- Uses of a Focus Group
- Pre-research phase of a focus group

Ethnography/ participant observation

- What is ethnography?
- History of its emergence
- Different types of observation – simple, experimental, participant observation
- Defining participant observation and examining what it involves
- Advantages and disadvantages

Quantitative Content Analysis

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

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 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 will look at in particular the Irish case but will also study examples from Britain, the USA and other states.

Measuring media audiences

Who is watching, listening, reading and using your media product is a crucial question

and substantial resources are expended by media companies answering this question. In this topic we study how television, radio, newspaper and other media audiences are measured, by examining the TAM, JNLR and JNRR and other measures.

We also examine the effects that these audience measures are having on the makers of media products and discuss some academic readings on how theoretical approaches to how audiences understand media products and what they do with them.

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.

Surveys and infotainment

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?