

**Book Review – Research Methods in the Social Sciences, Written by  
Chava Frankfort-Nachmias, David Nachimas and Jack De Waard. Eighth  
Edition. Worth Publishers 2015, £45 Paperback. ISBN 9781429233002**

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Chava Frankfort-Nachmias et al eighth edition of the commended, 'Research Methods in the Social Sciences', aims to offer researchers a thorough and logical guide to undertaking social research. This edition includes new studies in respect to conducting research in a digital age, computer software packages and more up to date examples on conducting social science research. The text is comprehensive and student-friendly, covering seven main areas of social science research: the scientific approach; the relationship between theory and research; ethics; research design; measurement and quantification; sampling; data collection; and data processing and analysis.

Research methods are a crucial means to conducting research studies (Firebaugh 2008) based on logic and empirical observations (Ragin 1994). The book seeks to meet this challenge through its structure of nineteen chapters and three parts that reflect the logical phases of the research process, which students who might be preparing to conduct their own research project may well find very useful. Each chapter has an abstract, learning objectives, a summary, list of key

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terms for review, study questions, additional research report questions for consideration, and a list of references. This gives the reader an excellent idea of what to expect for each chapter, summarises what the main points are, tests understanding of each chapter, covers what types of questions could be asked in conducting individual research, and provides guidance on where to look for additional information. Examples of existing research studies are also helpful in elucidating the research process, and helping students to think more about how they may conduct their study. The text provides online student resources at the end of each chapter. The eighth edition also includes reference to a companion website to the text and Instructor resources, which are improvements on previous editions as they allow more immediate access to online resources and study aids cited in the text, and more suggestions to instructors on essays and research projects. This is particularly helpful in terms of statistical software packages. While there is mention of quantitative software packages (such as SPSS and STATA), the book does not provide a guide on how to use these, however, there is reference (with SPSS problems) to obtaining these instructions online. The appendices, glossary of terms, and author and subject indices add clarity and are informative.

The first part of the book explores the philosophical foundations of empirical research. It is divided into five chapters which examine the scientific approach to knowledge, conceptual foundations of research, research questions and hypotheses, and ethics in social science research. This sections sets the basis for understanding how theory may be integrated with practice in social science research.

Part two of the book considers the design and structure of research. Social research methodologies can be classified along a quantitative or qualitative component. The authors cover both qualitative and quantitative social science research methods, including survey research, participant observation and ethnography. The second section of the book covers experimental research design, cross-sectional and quasi-experimental designs, data measurement, and sampling designs. The authors explain the process of measurement where the research assigns numerals (either numbers or another symbol) to the empirical properties of variables, in relation to concepts of validity and reliability. They explain which research projects should use either qualitative or quantitative research methods, the advantages and disadvantages of mail survey questionnaires, how to conduct online and telephone surveys, and face-to-face and telephone interviews. While, however, there is information on telephone and “personal” interviews, this book does not provide information on other methods of data collection common within the social sciences, such as focus groups in qualitative and mixed-method social science research.

Data collection and analysis (covered in part three of the book) for quantitative social science research is concerned with the quantification of social phenomena through processes of measurement. Observational methods are examined, including that of triangulation, observation, types of behaviour, timing and recording, inference in observation and controlled observation. Survey research is explored in respect of mail and online surveys, face-to-face and telephone

interviews, with the techniques being compared to provide insight into the advantages and disadvantages of each technique. Questionnaire construction is also examined, and insight into how questions may be formulated and sequenced offered. Constructive information is described on how bias may be avoided in questionnaire construction.

In examining qualitative research strategies, the authors focus on documenting, interpreting and understanding the practices and experience of individuals, groups and institutions being researched. The reasons for using secondary data, and limitations of secondary data analysis are also discussed. Crucially, the authors explore the role of the worldwide web (including the use of Twitter feeds) in conducting social science research and in providing easy access to public and private records, and the role of technology in content analysis. The latter part of the book, chapters fourteen to nineteen, focuses on data processing and analysis and familiarises the student with a variety of approaches and techniques. This includes data preparation and analysis, the univariate distribution, bivariate analysis, multivariate analysis, index construction and scaling methods, and inferences. This section of the text discusses the coding of data, summarising and measuring data, analysing the relationships between two and more variables, and data reduction and hypothesis testing strategies.

The appendices provide very valuable information on writing research reports, and also offers greater detail on the meanings of some of the signs (such as, the summation sign), and terms (such as, areas under the curve and critical values of

F), used in the text. As the authors point out, “research report writing is a specialized skill...” (Frankfort-Nachimos et al. 2015: 425). This section provides insight into the purpose of the research report and what makes a successful report, as well as guidelines on how to structure the report in order to present the research in a consistent and logical manner. It explores how to match one’s report format to the intended audience, and specifies how to write qualitative, quantitative and oral reports. The advice imparted on choosing a manageable topic for research can be helpful for graduate research students. Undergraduate students may find resolutions to their questions, on types of literature reviews and how to construct a literature review, in this section.

The main objective of the eighth edition of this text, is to provide a comprehensive and logical guide to research methods in the social science. The authors largely succeed in their attempt to decipher and simplify the research process, connecting theory, research and practice. Students may find the updates on conducting research online, insights into questionnaire construction and how (and when) to formulate research questions (and hypotheses), discussions on research ethics, the foundations of the scientific approach and the role concepts in research particularly informative. The case studies included in the text could help students understand the application of social science techniques in the wider research and decision-making process. They could also assist students in understanding that research is not abstract, and that organisations actually use the approaches and techniques, identified in the text, in the real-world. The hypothetical questions raised could benefit students and other researchers by helping them to better identify practical potential challenges as they prepare to

set-up their own research study, and understand ways in which these might be addressed. This edition has also adapted to include and illustrate more ways in which the internet has impacted social science research. With an increasing number of students using cheaper online participant panels, web-based survey tools and crowd sourcing techniques, more information on these techniques might have been useful.

Nonetheless, this book offers a comprehensive overview of social science research methods, and is well-structured, covering much of the broad scope of social science research, and providing examples drawn from a wide range of social science disciplines (such as political science, sociology, geography, public policy, economics and so on). Perhaps, less focus on the United States of America in these cases, might have made them more meaningful for United Kingdom and other (international) students. The book is, however, relevant to a wide range of researchers, including novice researchers who may be interested in a comprehensive and cogent guide to conducting social science research. It is easy to read and presented in a logical, structured manner, with the cases and illustrations bringing the text to life in terms of their practical applications. These include illustrative data sets that help the student appreciate the techniques required, and how they can be exercised. There are many text books on social science research methods, however, few make a comprehensive connection between the field and doing the research. This text can, therefore, be very useful for both students and instructors interested in research.

## **References**

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