UNIT 2: SECONDARY RESEARCH

QUESTION #2.1: What is the difference between primary research and secondary research?

SHORT ANSWER: Primary research is where you get the original data yourself, while secondary research is where you find data that have been collected and tabulated by someone else.

Gathering secondary data should be the starting point for all social scientists. Scientific knowledge is cumulative. Whatever new discoveries you make will build upon what others have done before. If your discoveries are great, they will become a block in the pillar of knowledge, and future scientists will build upon your work. Even if future scientists reject some present theories for explaining the data, the data themselves do endure, and will have to be explained by future theories (or refuted by more precise data coming from future methods of measurement).

QUESTION #2.2: What should I start with: primary research or secondary research?

SHORT ANSWER: Usually start with secondary research.

Primary research usually takes longer, and requires more effort and money. Before you invest your time, effort, and money, see what has already been done. Perhaps you will find data which have already been collected which provide direct answers to your questions.

Most likely, you will not get such a direct answer. However, doing the secondary research first also enables you to see where the field of consumer behavior is going, which questions were answered long ago, and which are considered most important today. In this way, this prepares you for your own primary research by making sure that it will be relevant.

Rather than thinking of secondary research and primary research as a linear sequence of required tasks to be performed step-by-step, it would be better to think of this as an alternating cycle, going back and forth between them. After you conduct your primary research, you will probably find it necessary to go do more secondary research to help explain your findings.

QUESTION #2.3: What should I look for when doing secondary research?

SHORT ANSWER: both data and theory

Remember that scientific knowledge has two essential components: data and theory. Data are the bits of faculty information. Theories are conceptual models used to describe, interpret, understand, predict, and control. Data without theory are meaningless trivia. Theory without data is idle speculation.

Every time you find data in secondary research, and before you start your own primary research, ask yourself some questions.

Is my proposed research still necessary? It is possible (though not likely) that your research turned up some data that matched precisely what you were going to look for in your own primary research. Does that fact mean that your proposed research would not be at best a replication?

Could I research the same topics, but with a different population? Perhaps the published research was done in one country, and your primary research would be in another. This would be a great opportunity for comparison.

Could I research the same topics, but with different measurements? Especially if the research you found is old, do you have access to newer and more precise methods of measurement?

In addition to looking for relevant data, you should be looking for relevant theories. Just as you will adjust your own primary research after you find comparable data, newly discovered theories will allow you to reframe what you are studying and perhaps come up with an entirely new design.

QUESTION #2.4: Where do I look for secondary research?

SHORT ANSWER: libraries and the internet

Libraries and the internet are both collections of data and theories. One key distinction (at least in the past) was that libraries had information in print form (physical books and periodicals) while the internet provided digitally encoded sources. Today that distinction is disappearing, because many libraries use electronic databases and digital sources, and some internet sites (e.g., Bookboon) provide downloads of printable books in .pdf form.

My recommendation is that you start your secondary research in a library. The key factor is not a preference for print over digital, but the fact that many libraries have a person, a reference librarian, who can help you on your search. Many reference librarians are not only experts in how to find print materials in a physical library, but can also guide your search of internet resources as well.

QUESTION #2.5: What do I look for in the library?

SHORT ANSWER: reference works, books, and periodicals

The best guide will be a local librarian who is familiar with the materials available at that particular library.

In general, it is best to start with reference works. These include encyclopedias (e.g., *Britannica*), annual collections of data (e.g., almanacs, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*), and a variety of industry guides. Do not assume that two libraries will have the same set of reference works. Consult the local reference librarian to find out what an individual library has. Furthermore, do not assume that reference works will be in plain view of library patrons. Many reference works are considered quite valuable so they are kept behind a desk. Because many reference works come out with new editions every year or so, most libraries do not keep previous editions on the shelves available to patrons. The library may still have previous editions, but someone will have to get them from a remote storage area. Even after you obtain a specific reference work, ask the librarian's help in finding what you need. Each reference work has a table of contents or index that is laid out differently and may direct you to page numbers or section numbers.

Also seek the librarian's help in finding books. He or she might remember a specific book title or author's name. Other ways to find books in a library catalog would be to do a subject search or key word search. Again, the librarian can give valuable insight into how to conduct such a search.

Periodicals are published on a frequent and regular basis, which might be daily (newspapers), weekly, monthly (magazines), quarterly or annually (scholarly journals). Even more so than with reference works and books, these periodicals probably have something directly relevant to your topic of interest. However, it is usually more difficult to find the specific article, published in a specific issue of that periodical. Here, again, you must seek the help of the reference librarian. Most periodicals have assembled large indexes which catalog their previous articles by topic and author. Unfortunately, these periodical indexes are usually not available on the internet. There are either available in print form in the library, or else there is an electronic data base, but this can only be accessed by someone who has a special code (which might be your librarian).

QUESTION #2.5: What do I look for on the internet?

SHORT ANSWER: sites that have credible information and scholarly theories

Look for the same things that you would look for in a library. As time goes on, many of the reference works, and even books and periodicals, that used to be found only in a library can now be found on the internet. Your reference librarian may be helpful in guiding your internet search strategies.

One useful search engine is Ixquick. It has two advantages over Google. One is that it will not track your searches, which could prove advantageous if you are in a country where certain searches can get you into trouble with the authorities. Another advantage is that it is easy to use the advanced search feature which helps you narrow the number of results. Here is a link right to that feature.

https://www.ixquick.com/eng/advanced-search.html?&cat=web&query=

Another useful starting point, especially for scholarly articles and books about business would be Biznar.

http://biznar.com/biznar/search.html?searchMode=advanced&ssid=-e9b39af%3a13ba876f2ff%3a-7001

You could also use the advanced features of Google Scholar.

http://scholar.google.com

I would also recommend the links found at the sites of most government agencies, universities, and professional societies in psychology, sociology, economics, business, management, marketing, advertising, and consumer behavior.

QUESTION #2.6: How do I choose between different sources?

SHORT ANSWER: look for credibility, recency, and methodology

First, start with the assumption that all data from all of your sources are valid. Do all of your data fit together to form a cohesive whole or are their contradictions?

Second, where there are blatant contradictions in the data, you will have to resolve those by using some standards. One of the most important is to decide which source is most credible. Does a source have a motivation to fake data or even to exaggerate (or under-report) certain data? Companies, cities and countries may exaggerate their successes (and minimize their problems) in hopes of keeping stakeholders content. Particularly suspect should be the statements of politicians running for office, lobbying groups, and any agency officials where there is no transparency about how the data were obtained.

Another standard is recency: some data are older (and may now be out of date if the situation in the market is rapidly changing). For example, I would not use data about the percent of U.S. households with landline telephones from 1999, nor would I use 1999 data about the diffusion of cell phones. I would predict that the number of cell phones has increased greatly during this century, and correspondingly, that the number of land lines has gradually diminished from the height of its penetration in the 1990s.

Sometimes, our most credible source gives one answer, while our most recent source gives another, and we must decide which has the better answer. For example, an encyclopedia article may give the size of a certain church as five million worldwide, while the hierarchy of that church may boast a membership of seven million. In order to determine which source is right,

we have to ask several questions. How old is that encyclopedia article: from a couple of years ago or from the 1980s? Does that denomination have a track record of vigorous proselytizing to attract new members (e.g., Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals)? Does that denomination have a higher than average birth rate (e.g., Mormons, Muslims, Latin American Catholics)? Does the church leadership have a motivation to exaggerate? Does the church leadership have a record of credibility in reporting facts about their membership? In short, I would believe the higher membership rates if reported by the Mormon church, but not if reported by some new cult.

The contrast between credibility and recency can best be seen in a comparison of Wikipedia and traditional encyclopedias (e.g., *Britannica*). For recency, you cannot beat Wikipedia. Within minutes of the tragic death of Latina songstress Jenni Rivera, some of her fans had updated the Wikipedia article to carry the details of the plane crash. However, that same ease of access means that anyone in the world can intentionally distort what the article says (or unintentionally propagate a false rumor). Traditional print encyclopedias are great examples of credible information, but may require years in the making. The editors select the best authorities in the world to write each article. Most of these encyclopedias then identify the author (by name or initials) of each article. Therefore, when citing one of these encyclopedia articles, cite it by author's last name, just as you would if you were citing a chapter in an edited book of readings.

Another factor in evaluating data would be the methodology of its collection. Good scientific reporting of empirical research requires that **operational definitions** be reported. An operational definition is a clear statement about how the data were collected: what exactly was counted and how? For example, how do we count church membership? Do we do a headcount of those showing up for weekly services at every local branch and just add up to get the total? (That would miss those who are members, but who did not manage to make it to church that week.) Do we look at the recorded baptisms? If so, that would under-report the membership of certain denominations that only baptize adults (e.g., Baptists), and over-report those that baptize infants (e.g., Catholics) and keep them on the church rolls even if those individuals later convert to some other religion.

So, in order to evaluate secondary research, you need to know how primary research is conducted, and what are the marks of good methodology.

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flashcards & matching1

http://www.quia.com/fc/2522496.html

jumbled words game1

http://www.quia.com/jw/469828.html

millionaire game1

http://www.quia.com/rr/938573.html

summary paragraph1

http://www.quia.com/cz/466019.html

UNIT 2 TERMS: secondary research methods

BIZNAR: a free index of scholarly publications related to business

CREDIBILITY: a source that we can rely on to tell the truth and not distort the facts

DATA: plural word meaning the facts which have been observed

IXQUICK: a search engine that does not track individual searches

METHODOLOGY: the way in which the data were collected; good methodology leads to valid and reliable data

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION: the way that a given variable is measured (or manipulated, randomized, or held constant); e.g., the variable of depression is measured by a score on a scale or a DSM diagnosis

PERIODICAL: a publication which appears regularly, such as a newspaper (daily or weekly), magazine (weekly or monthly) or scholarly journal (monthly, quarterly or annually)

PRIMARY: data obtained by original research activities, whether qualitative or quantitative

RECENCY: research that has been published recently using timely data

REFERENCE WORKS: encyclopedias, almanacs, and directories giving recent information about persons, topics, or industries

SECONDARY: research in which the primary data have been accumulated, tabulated, and analyzed by someone else; secondary research involves going to the library or looking on the internet

THEORY: abstract concepts used by scientists to help understand, predict, and control; data + theory = knowledge