

Introduction

Social science methodology can be said to have entered our consciousness by the late 19th century when Emile Durkheim penned *The Rules of Sociological Method*, laying the foundation for the systematic understanding and analysis of social phenomena. From that time, it has seen continuous growth characterized by an exponential development over the last few decades of the 20th century. The development came in terms of both the width and the depth of our methodological know-how. The broad range of methods applicable in the wide circle of social science disciplines, and the sophistication and level in the advancement of some analytical approaches and techniques, would have been unthinkable merely a few score years ago. FOCUS GROUP and THICK DESCRIPTION, for example, have virtually become lingua franca among many social science researchers, regardless of their disciplinary orientation. The methods for dealing with MISSING DATA and NONRESPONSE, to take other examples, have advanced so much that specialized workshops on such issues are a perennial favorite among analysts of SURVEY DATA.

It is only natural, at the beginning of a new century, for us to take stock of the entire spectrum of our social science methodological knowledge, even though it is impossible and impractical to include every method that has ever been used in the social sciences. The cardinal aim of this encyclopedia is to provide our readers—be they students, academics, or applied researchers—with an introduction to a vast array of research methods by giving an account of their purposes, principles, developments, and applications. The approximately 1,000 entries, many of which are extensive treatments of the topics and contain recent developments, can be of great use to the novice or the experienced researcher alike.

To accomplish this goal, we offer two major types of entries: Some contain only a definition of no longer than a paragraph or two. These give the reader a quick explanation of a methodological term. True to

the encyclopedic form, many other entries are topical treatments or essays that discuss—at varying lengths, often with examples and sometimes with graphics—the nature, the history, the application, and the implication of using a certain method. Most of these entries also give suggested readings and references for the reader to pursue a topic further. These are part and parcel of the encyclopedia and are invaluable for those who would like to delve into the wonder world of research methods. To help provide a more complete explanation than is often achieved within the scope of a single article, we employ small capital letters, such as those appearing in the first paragraph of this introduction, that refer the reader to related terms that are explained elsewhere in the encyclopedia.

With such a variety of specialized essays to write, we are fortunate to have been able to count on the support of our board members and authors, who contributed many a coherent introduction to a method with definitiveness and thoroughness, often with great flair as well. Sometimes, topics are treated in such a novel way that they are not only pleasurable but also thought-provoking to read. For instance, entries such as the essay on ECONOMETRICS by Professor Damodar Gujarati are a pleasant surprise. Rather than merely introducing the topic with the types of methods and models that econometricians use and nothing else, Gujarati takes us on a journey from the ordinary to the extraordinary. He begins with three quotations that illustrate the broad scope of econometrics; here the simple, usual approach of using quotations accomplishes the seemingly undoable task of defining the terrain on which econometricians work and play. He then walks us twice through the research process, from economic theory to data and models to analysis, once in principle and the second time with an example. Such a process is what many of us preach every day but seldom think of when writing an essay for an encyclopedia. Gujarati uses the ordinary process of going about economic research to achieve an extraordinary,

profound impact—an impact that will leave a reader thinking about, instead of just the methods and models, the fundamental purpose of econometrics. Entries like this give us knowledge and food for thought.

The diversity of our entries is also great. To take one of many possible contrasts, some of our entries deal with very philosophical issues, such as POSTSTRUCTURALISM, that might appear to be out of step with a set of volumes concerned with methods of research, whereas others discuss advanced statistical techniques that might similarly be viewed as not part of social science research methodology. However, we have taken the view that both are necessary. On the one hand, all researchers need to be aware of the EPISTEMOLOGICAL issues that influence both the nature of RESEARCH QUESTIONS and the ASSUMPTIONS that underpin aspects of the research process; on the other hand, we all need to be aware of the full panoply of ways of analyzing

quantitative data, so that the most appropriate and robust techniques can be applied in different situations. It is only when we are knowledgeable about the choices available to us—whether epistemological, statistical, or whatever—that we can completely develop our craft as social researchers.

Examples of excellent treatment of a whole host of topics abound in the following pages and volumes. By assembling into one encyclopedia entries of varied origin that serve different research purposes, we, the editors, hope that readers will come to appreciate the rich heritage of our social science methodology and, more importantly, will be able to benefit from this immense source of methodological expertise in advancing their research.

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