

# METHODS TO IMPROVE OUR FIELD

**Edited by** Aaron D. Hill, Aaron F. McKenny,  
Paula O’Kane and Sotirios Paroutis

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN  
STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT

**VOLUME 14**

# METHODS TO IMPROVE OUR FIELD

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT

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- Volume 3: Research Methodology in Strategy and Management, 2006
- Volume 4: Research Methodology in Strategy and Management, 2007
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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN STRATEGY AND  
MANAGEMENT VOLUME 14

# METHODS TO IMPROVE OUR FIELD

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Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

Editorial matter and selection © 2023 Aaron D. Hill, Aaron F. McKenny, Paula O’Kane and Sotirios Paroutis.

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80455-365-7 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80455-364-0 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80455-366-4 (Epub)

ISSN: 1479-8387 (Series)



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Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



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# INTRODUCTION TO METHODS TO IMPROVE OUR FIELD

Aaron D. Hill, Aaron F. McKenny, Paula O’Kane  
and Sotirios Paroutis

**Keywords:** Research methods; management; strategy; methodology; methodological innovation; scientific rigor

## INTRODUCTION

It is our pleasure to introduce Volume 14 of the *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management (RMSM)* book series. This volume comes at a time when public confidence in science and scientific research has been shaken by questions of replicability (e.g., [Shrout & Rodgers, 2018](#)) and questionable research practices (e.g., [Banks et al., 2016](#)). Research methods feature centrally in these concerns and so play an important role in restoring confidence in scientific research. Being a field with considerable potential for deriving practical implications from our research, addressing these challenges and the role of research methods in solving them head-on is critical.

One specific challenge researchers face arises from applying familiar methodological approaches to new questions. It is tempting to take for granted our familiarity with the method and therefore to recycle approaches we have used in the past without updating our understanding of the technique. Scholars continue to refine these methods to improve many aspects of the validity of the insights they provide (e.g., reliability; trustworthiness; rigor); the improvements can contribute to both an ever-growing gap between researchers’ skills and methodological best practices as well as create researcher frustration with staying up-to-date. Both the gap and frustrations are perhaps understandable given that many times these new methodological advancements are embedded in empirical manuscripts unfamiliar to researchers who focus on different topical areas.

A second challenge faced by researchers arises from the emergence of new methods. These new methods often enable researchers to ask novel and

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**Methods to Improve Our Field**

**Research Methodology in Strategy and Management, Volume 14, 1–4**

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**ISSN: 1479-8387/doi:10.1108/S1479-838720220000014001**

interesting questions while also providing more rigorous tests of well-worn understandings. However, the newness of these methods is also frequently accompanied by a lack of lucid and practical guidance for management and strategy researchers. Unaddressed, the lack of guidance can lead to difficulties in understanding the techniques' relevance and/or inappropriate application of the technique.

*RMSM* is well positioned to help make in-roads into both challenges. As we continue to develop *RMSM* as a key methodological resource for researchers in strategy and management, we see an opportunity to present manuscripts that address the weaknesses and bolster the strengths of familiar approaches. Contributions in this area refine established methods to address present challenges or synthesize existing improvements. We also showcase the works of authors who are introducing new methods (and methods new to management research) to our field in ways that are accessible to management researchers and offer clear research opportunities. These points are the foci of Volume 14 of the *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management* (*RMSM*) book series, a volume emphasizing how methods can be employed to improve our field.

The *RMSM* series is supported by world-leading authors and editorial board members known for their excellent research, community contributions, and leadership. We are pleased to continue counting on excellent scholars who have given their time and talent in serving as reviewers for the series, including: Thomas Allison, James (Jim) Combs, Kevin Corley, Russell Crook, Timothy (Tim) Devinney, Richard Gentry, Robert (Bob) Gephart, Karen Golden-Biddle, Jennifer (Jen) Howard-Grenville, Paula Jarzabkowski, Scott Johnson, Jason Kiley, Ann Langley, Jane Lê, Karen Locke, Xavier Martin, Jose Molina-Azorin, Torsten Pieper, Jesse Pirini, Michael Pratt, Vasudha Rao, Jeremy Short, Anne Smith, and Sara Walton.

The diligent work of our reviewers and authors means that we are able to continue to produce high-quality chapters. We are also pleased to include many world-leading scholars as among the authors who have published in *RMSM*: Federico Aime, Brian Boyd, Harry Bowen, Russell Crook, Kathleen Eisenhardt, Teppo Felin, Nicolai Foss, Ken Frank, Bob Gephart, Dennis Gioia, Joe Hair, Michael Hitt, Ann Langley, John van Maanen, Nathan Podsakoff, Phillip (Phil) Podsakoff, Jason Ridge, Myles Shaver, Wei Shen, Jeremy Short, James Westphal, Margarehe Wiersema, and Larry Williams, among many others. Publishing in *RMSM* continues to mean being in good scholarly company!

The quality of *RMSM* papers that result from the excellent author and reviewer contributors directly translates into conversation and citations. For example, notable papers appearing in *RMSM* include: [Combs, Crook, and Shook's \(2005\)](#), work "The dimensionality of organizational performance and its implications for strategic management research"; [Podsakoff, Shen, and Podsakoff \(2006\)](#) on "The Role of Formative Measurement Models in Strategic Management Research"; and [Hitt, Boyd, and Li's \(2004\)](#) "The state of strategic management research and a vision of the future," among others. *RMSM* is also home to the influence work of [Felin and Foss \(2006\)](#) on "Individuals and Organizations: Thoughts on a Micro-Foundations Project for Strategic

Management and Organizational Analysis” and the work of [Ridder, Hoon, and McCandless \(2009\)](#) on “The theoretical contribution of case study research to the field of strategy and management.”

This year, we are also pleased to continue with four editors who worked together with Jane Lê and Anne Smith on version 13 of the *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management*. Aaron Hill, Aaron McKenny, Paula O’Kane, and Sotirios Paroutis have diverse methodological interests and expertise along the continuum of qualitative and quantitative approaches methods. Aaron Hill will end his term on the editorial team while the other three will be joined by John Busenbark for volume 15.

## VOLUME CONTRIBUTIONS

As emphasized in prior versions of *RMSM*, we see research methodology as important as ever. Methodological publications are “an essential outlet for contributions about important and timely methodological issues in the strategy and management fields” ([Lê, Smith, Crook, & Boyd, 2019](#), p. 1).

We kick this volume off with **Katrina Prichard** (this volume) who reimagines secondary data in an increasingly digitized world, drawing attention to issues with existing data typologies and discussing these in relation to making digital data feel real. The chapter by **Yulia Taylor, Fiona Edgar, and André Everett** (this volume) dovetails this work, drawing attention to interpretative phenomenological analyses (IPA) which places emphasis on deep examination of the relationship between individuals and their environments, and see the researcher as a second-hand observer in the qualitative data collection process. The work by **Shane Reid, Aaron McKenny, and Jeremy Short** (this volume) identifies the fragmented nature of best practices for the rigorous application of dictionary-based computerized text analysis and synthesizes these practices into a step-by-step guide for management research. **D. J. Schepker and Paul Bliese** (this volume) draw attention to the importance of considering time in strategy and management. They examine several variants of growth models using mixed effects models and show how these can be utilized by strategic management researchers to analyze changes in outcomes over time. **Steven Hyde, Eric Bachura, and Joseph Harrison** (this volume) discuss a technique of growing prominence – machine learning – while offering critical guidance on a theory-driven approach for using the methodology in management and demonstrating the efficacy of the tool in a way that can guide future research. In a related line of work, **Andreas Schwab, Yanjinkham Shuumarjav, Jake Telkamp, and Jose Beltran** (this volume) explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can be used in management research to measure psychological constructs and offer an example demonstrating how AI-based image analysis can be used to ascertain aspects of entrepreneurs’ emotional state. The volume concludes with the work of **Timothy Madden, Laura Madden, and Anne Smith** (this volume), who discuss the novel use of PechaKucha presentations as a way to generate and analyze participant-generated video data, in which participants tell their

own stories. We truly hope that you will find the collection of works in volume 14 to help improve our field and be as excited about trying to apply the insights going forward as we are.

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

In closing, we also want to connect volume 14 with the prior iteration of *RMSM*, volume 13, where the focus was on the upheaval and opportunity that the global pandemic has brought to our research community. As we set the foundations for further research work into the future, we can better also reflect and appreciate the role that methods play in improving our field. Considering the role of updated and new methodological tools in our data collection, analysis, and presentation of our data is a primary way to help find new ways to address past and current puzzles but also build avenues for addressing new puzzles.

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# REIMAGINING SECONDARY DATA IN A DIGITAL AGE

Katrina Pritchard

## ABSTRACT

*In this chapter, I explore traditional notions of secondary data in qualitative research and consider the ways in which these are continually being reimagined in the digital age. I situate this discussion in respect to data typologies and, more reflexively, in relation to our need as researchers to make data real. I consider contemporary understandings of reuse in relation to secondary data, focusing particularly on qualitative interview data. Recognizing those who are already forging a path, I then suggest how we might move beyond notions of reuse and reimagine secondary data in the digital age. To illustrate these points, I highlight relevant studies drawing data from a range of online spaces, and finally summarize key considerations and challenges.*

**Keywords:** Data typologies; secondary data; digital data; data management; online research; data reuse

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore traditional notions of secondary data in qualitative research and consider the ways in which these are continually being reimagined in the digital age. I situate this discussion in respect to data typologies and, more reflexively, in relation to our need as researchers to make data real. I consider contemporary understandings of reuse in relation to secondary data, focusing particularly on qualitative interview data. Recognizing those who are already forging a path, I then suggest how we might move beyond notions of reuse and reimagine secondary data in the digital age. To illustrate these points, I highlight relevant studies drawing data from a range of online spaces, and finally summarize critical considerations and challenges. This chapter draws on my own experiences as a qualitative researcher, connecting these to published

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Methods to Improve Our Field

Research Methodology in Strategy and Management, Volume 14, 5–22

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ISSN: 1479-8387/doi:10.1108/S1479-838720220000014002

methodological discussions. My aim is to offer readers a starting point; to scatter some seeds of curiosity (or even doubt) and spark an interest to explore these issues further; both through reading (including those cited here) and reflexive engagement.

## TROUBLESOME TYPOLOGIES

I begin by considering how we as researchers view the notion of data. As researchers we extract words, numbers, images, or other entities from some source or other. We call these words, numbers, images, or other entities data and then through various further methodological interventions, we abstract meaning, offer insights, and develop our theoretical, conceptual, empirical, and/or practical contribution. Our identity as researchers is very much vested in this abstraction of meaning; after all this is the essential basis of our research contribution. Perhaps then it is unsurprising that we pay much more attention to critically unpacking and debating the processes of extraction and abstraction (our research methodologies) than we do the notion of data itself. Indeed, as researchers we tend toward reifying data as a form of academic latent energy, as capable of great things. [Markham \(2018\)](#) calls attention to this dual orientation, suggesting that data operate not only as the fundamental building block of empirical research but also as ideology. As [Flick comments \(2019, p. 714\)](#) “data do not exist as data, but are produced, selected and made up for the research they are used in.” Thus, our views on data and the labels we attach to them are not means of simply naming but also a powerful, value-laden system which shapes research. It is in relation to this broader context that I unpack data labels, such as primary and secondary, in this chapter.

In recent years, data (as both ideology and building block) have spread far beyond the realm of academic research. Data are now both big and big business. Through this development of the data economy, we are now much more aware of how we might be represented, scammed, and even cloned ([Brynjolfsson & Kahin, 2002](#)). Data, it seems, have taken on a life of their own. Consequently, there is increasing attention paid to data forms, ownership, and usage, across a range of contexts including public media. This attention to ownership in general, and the rights of individuals more specifically, has rippled back toward researchers across all academic fields. Questions of research ethics for strategy and management scholars that might once have been perceived as a tick box exercise at the start of a questionnaire or interview study have become a significantly more complex undertaking for researchers and participants alike ([Whiting & Pritchard, 2017](#)). This general discussion of data might seem like an unnecessary preamble. However, I hope it serves to suggest that before focusing on data typologies, we should first pause to think about data ideology; how this frames our understanding and impacts our activities – as both consumers and researchers.

So, to return to troublesome typologies. Given the potential vastness of data, typologies provide a means of classifying by some agreed, often broad, notions of similarity or difference. Perhaps the most common is that between quantitative

and qualitative data; in which “qualitative data is defined by what they are not: numeric” (Whiting & Pritchard, 2020, p. 57). Indeed, both these broad categories do not themselves say very much about the nature, form, or use of these data. Of course, as introduced above, we have recently seen the addition of another label: that of big data (Dutton, 2013). Gartner (n.d.) define big data as comprising the three V’s: volume, velocity, and variety, while more detailed typologies have built on these alliterative characteristics (Chen & Hsieh, 2014). Yet the label “big” is fundamentally problematic since it prompts the question: how big? Using a relative label is unhelpful not least since the size of what might be accepted as denoting “big” is continuing to grow (Floridi, 2012), as Deloitte reviewed back in 2014 (Davenport, 2014). Moreover, while many are broadly comfortable with accepting a division between quantitative and qualitative, it is very difficult to define the opposite of big data. Perhaps an alternate categorization of small, slow, and simple might be inferred, though many authors use labels such as traditional or typical as a means of differentiation.

Particularly in qualitative research, a further debate has centered on the nature of data in relation to the researcher and the processes of collection. This highlights whether data can be said to occur naturally or are produced through the process of research. Such understandings of natural are often interpreted to mean as occurring in ordinary processes or practice, events that would have occurred in any case even without the researcher’s presence. In turn, this has developed to include the notion of everyday online as a source of natural data (Kiyimba, Lester, & O’Reilly, 2018). Yet, as many authors reflect, the idea of any pure form of interaction or activity outside of research seems at odds with an understanding of the processes of social construction. This suggests that any interaction is shaped by such an array of influences to seek the natural and assume this remains untouched by research processes seems a fool’s errand (Flick, 2019).

Qualitative and quantitative – big or not, natural or not – data categories or typologies are fraught with conceptual and practical issues. So, as I return to the main topic of this chapter, secondary data, I begin with unpacking the typical contrasting categorizations of primary and secondary data, not least since understandings of these labels shape fundamental aspects of the research process.

## SECONDARY DATA AS REUSE

A common understanding of secondary data rests on the idea of reuse: secondary data are that which “was collected by someone else for another primary purpose” (Johnston, 2017, p. 619). In contrast, primary data become a term of double significance in highlighting both the primacy of the researcher and of the resulting data. I want to pause to unpack Johnston’s (2017) widely used (cited over 700 times) definition as this incorporates three important conditions that we might take for granted when using the term secondary in relation to data:

- *Was collected*: the past tense within this definition highlights that in some form or other “data” already exist and have been gathered such that researchers can

review these data and assess their suitability. While beyond the scope of this chapter, much of the work around data repositories rests on this condition (see Corti, 2018).

- *By someone else*: this locates the agency for data collection as outside the current research endeavor that the prospective researchers are at least one step removed from the original data and their collection. However, this leaves it open as to whether the “someone else” is an academic researcher, market research agency, or even someone (or something) starting a “tell us your. . .” thread on Twitter. Indeed, a noted variation is as to whether “someone else” might include the revisiting of a data set later by the original researcher or member of the original research team (see Dick, 2013).
- *For another primary purpose*: this is usually taken to mean for some other research project but as with the Twitter example above you can now see how this might be interpreted very broadly, and indeed the information on that previous purpose may or may not be apparent. It is commonly acknowledged that understanding the other primary purpose is critical to any research design that encompasses reuse or recycling.

At this stage, if nothing else, the above unpacking starts to flesh out the questions that must be considered when planning a research project that involves data reuse. The following historical note can also inform how we unpick our thinking and assumptions about secondary data and how this is changing with discussions of open research in contemporary academia.

Secondary data have a long history, particularly emerging in the post-World War II era and Sherif (2018) suggests projects incorporating secondary qualitative data have been around since the 1960s. Many national and international surveys are now developed to provide general and sometimes quite specific secondary data for the research community, often incorporating large samples and repeated measures (Cole, Wathan, & Corti, 2008). For example the UK data service (UK Data Service » About us) “is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to meet the data needs of researchers” and includes “major UK government-sponsored surveys, cross-national surveys, longitudinal studies, UK census data, international aggregate, business data and, qualitative data.” For services such as these, it is not simply data that are available but detailed technical information on the research instruments, processes, sampling, etc. In many cases, reuse of various sorts is built into the research design process from the beginning and there are often vibrant communities of researchers who can advise and assist working with these established data sets. These communities provide essential support networks for researchers embarking on such projects.

While preexisting qualitative data sets are less readily available, research funding bodies are increasingly nudging researchers in this direction (Heaton, 2008). Calls for open data sometimes go beyond research reuse and advocate access across a wide range of stakeholders (Chauvette, Schick-Makaroff, & Molzahn, 2019). Typical concerns raised for qualitative data reuse include ethical issues, the lack of contextual understanding by new researchers, the less