
Literature review

Preview

Introduction

While discovery is at the heart of research, nearly all significant discoveries take place within a context. Anyone who is interested in gaining a serious understanding of business issues will relish the opportunity to carry out a literature search and review. This is an opportunity to begin to develop specialised knowledge and to explore the context of your interest.

In the case of the Australia Council for the Arts, the federal government's arts advisory and funding body, sharing knowledge is one of the aims and ethical responsibilities of the organisation. New insights into the arts, its managers and its audiences are often published to benefit the public arts sector. In sporting clubs, published research by managers into player fitness will suggest strategies or solutions which other clubs can adopt or develop. In turn, the next wave of discoveries will again increase the body of specialist knowledge. This process is ongoing but it does depend on having access to relevant and stimulating studies which suggest further development—knowing where and how to find these studies is the essence of the search.

A literature search and a literature review are therefore the foundation upon which to build research. The search delivers the building blocks and the review demonstrates a detailed awareness of the nature of the information. Together they result in a comprehensive understanding of the literature and deliver professional confidence and informed practice.

The literature search

In the process of building knowledge, the literature search is a fundamental requirement of all research projects. It is part of any research process and follows the definition of a topic and the preliminary gathering of data. It has two practical aims:

- to identify published information into the same, similar, or related areas of interest; and
- to sharpen the focus of the research topic.

The effective literature search identifies relevant secondary sources. This is information which has been published (as distinct from primary source material which is raw data) and which familiarises the researcher with the latest information available. A comprehensive search therefore benefits any project by enhancing an understanding of the problem, but may also, in some cases, have the unwelcome consequence of demonstrating that your chosen topic is neither original nor feasible. Let's hope this isn't the case.

Clearly, books, journals, newspapers and annual reports hold countless words and graphics which may be important to your proposed study. The terminology we use—'literature search'—does have academic connotations and in some cases may give the impression that

material from nontraditional sources, like the Internet, may not be acceptable. This is not the case.

Another important thing to remember about literature searches is that your research has firm parameters established by time and space, and that more often than not you will be unable to see everything in the world published on the subject of your choice. Therefore, determining which is the most effective way to pursue the literature search is one of the most important decisions you will make.

Undertaking the literature search

Although libraries are still the researcher's best friend, the availability of information in the world today means that literature searches are no longer confined to the traditional library.

The Deakin University Library not only houses a comprehensive collection of books, but is also a useful gateway to other archives through the interlibrary loan facility and the Internet. Getting to know the online catalogues and databases will save you time and allow you to perform a very comprehensive search. Other services, like the automated ordering system, are of immense value, particularly if you do not live close to the campus.

To see what resources the library offers to students generally, go to <http://www.deakin.au/library/libservices.html>. For services to off-campus students particularly, go to <http://www.deakin.au/library/ocserv.html>.

Usually it is most beneficial to start with the specialist literature in your area of interest. The articles you find will then lead to other references through their footnotes or suggest other relevant issues to investigate.

The Deakin University Library has produced a comprehensive online guide to sources. These are updated regularly and contain pointers to:

- finding books;
- finding periodical articles;
- Internet sites;
- background information;
- facts and figures;
- people and organisations; and
- using other libraries.

Two specialist databases are:

- *Business Australia Ondisc* (BAOD) which includes material related to arts and entertainment management and indexes material from 1982 onwards; and
- *Family History Ondisc* which includes material on museums and museums management which documents journal articles and books on a wide range of relevant issues.

Both can be found at <http://www.deakin.edu.au/library/silverpl.html>.

Time management

Online databases may be an efficient way to find references which you think may be useful, but in most cases the articles you identify will not be available online. This means either

visiting a library or making use of an ordering service, something for which you will have to allow time.

There are a number of things to consider concerning using your research time effectively. First, there is little point assuming that your local library, or even the University library, will necessarily carry the obscure journal that you might need. So, before visiting any library, you will need to ascertain where the journal is held. You can use the library system for this because it allows you to connect to a large number of other library catalogues. Next, you will have to decide the best way of gaining access. Clearly, if the only holding is on the other side of the country, your access arrangements will be different to the way you approach a library in your own area. Before you visit any library, find out whether you are able to photocopy material yourself or whether there are restrictions.

Like most activities, research can be both exhilarating and frustrating, and, as any experienced researcher knows, what looks good and sounds relevant may turn out to be a dead-end. This can be particularly galling when you've spent valuable time finding the piece. But, like any shrewd prospector, with careful thought and planning you should be able to identify and mine a rich loam.

We have already emphasised that research projects are usually conducted within tight resource parameters. Therefore, at a certain stage you will have to stop searching and start analysing. This point will vary from project to project and is usually determined by the literature itself (and your own progress). From careful reading you should know whether there are any publications that you still need to see. Of course, your research doesn't really stop until the end of the project, and you can continue to add new sources as you go.

The literature review

The purpose of a literature search is to identify and consult previously published research on the particular topic you are interested in. Analysing this material provides the basis on which you can clearly state how your proposed topic will either add to the body of knowledge, address a new problem, or revisit an issue in need of reassessment. The literature review is therefore a piece of writing in which you report on the strengths and limitations of the sources you have consulted, and demonstrate the importance of your inquiry.

Analysis

At the beginning of your project, when your knowledge is weak, it may sometimes be difficult to judge your sources. On the other hand, the early literature review does provide the opportunity to identify gaps or areas of underdevelopment in the source material. It does not take a great deal of knowledge to spot inconsistencies or contradictions, to identify distinguishing characteristics, to see obvious strengths and weaknesses, or to compile a list of questions which flow out of your reading and suggest new avenues of inquiry.

Although you are probably familiar with the process of analysing source material, it is worthwhile revisiting some of the key factors in this important activity. If your project is to be comprehensive and useful you need to have seriously considered what research has been conducted by others and what conclusions they have drawn. In this respect, it's often useful to organise your source material chronologically, from the earliest work to the most contemporaneous. This means that as you methodically work your way through the material

you can follow the development of the ideas, and gain a thorough understanding of the parameters, structure and quality of the debate.

The four basic things to look at in any source are the structure, the key points, the conclusion and what is missing:

- *The structure:* This is the organisation of the material. Look at sub-headings and illustrations to gain a sense of the methodology. Note down which issues are foregrounded, and consider the source of data and techniques of data gathering. Ask yourself, does this seem like the appropriate methodology for testing this hypothesis or investigating this issue?
- *The key points:* Read the text carefully and systematically. Distil the key points.
- *The conclusion:* Determine the author's primary argument (and secondary arguments) and assess whether or not the evidence they proffer supports their conclusion. Think about how this view relates to other views or opinions which you have read or observed. Experienced researchers often find it beneficial to find out more about the author's background. This may help explain why they have taken a particular line or used a particular kind of methodology.
- *What's missing:* As you begin to gain a feel for your topic you will start to realise that most studies are not the last word on the matter. Think about what is not included, what would have made the argument stronger, and what requires further investigation.

Writing it up

The literature review is both a summary and a discussion of previous research, and therefore, writing it up can only begin after a researcher has gained a thorough understanding of the source material.

In some cases the analysis of the material will lead to the documentation of a sequence of events. This example of a literature review is based on information drawn from catalogues, exhibitions and reports:

In respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, Australian museums began to implement training and development programs in the late 1970s (Lofgren & Specht, 1979). Thus far, essential changes have occurred in the following areas: documentation and inventories of state and nation-wide ethnographic collections (Meehan & Bona, 1986); the renovation of storage facilities, establishment of restricted access areas for secret/sacred items, and return of cultural property and policy formation in this area (Anderson, 1986, 1990a, 1990b); the representation of indigenous peoples on staff, boards and advisory committees (Sculthorpe, 1989); the redefinition of permanent displays (Hemming, Jones & Clarke, 1989) and contemporary art exhibition initiatives (Sutton, 1990). The Australian Museum's Aboriginal Collections Policy Document, in contrast to past guidelines, now announces that 'collections emphasis will be on contemporary culture' (Tacon, 1993:4). Nationwide, Australian 'museums support the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination in respect of cultural heritage matters'(CAMA, 1994:9).

(McAlear 1996, pp. 92-3)

In this particular case there is no attempt to discuss the sources in terms of any particular point of view or argument. Rather, the writer has used the sources to outline the ways in which Australian museums embraced Aboriginal issues over a period of time. This piece documents events, although, strictly speaking, this is not a review but rather a chronology or summary of events. The value of this piece is that it clearly shows what was done, when it

was done, and by whom. It therefore provides a sound basis for asking further questions such as what kind of training programs were developed?, how have permanent displays been redefined?, or what has been the effect of the Australian Museum's new policy?. A section like this may also be necessary to provide a context for other elements of a review.

On the other hand, the following section of a review is more analytical and discusses the arguments of the writers:

Collections. There are differing views regarding the types of collection acquisition and management policies that will best serve multiculturalism. One argument supports an inclusive approach which maintains that ethnic material should be incorporated into mainstream collections to avoid 'ghettoisation' and the collection of material purely for ethnic displays. A development of this argument is that ethnic material, when collected separately, should be cross referenced to gender, sexuality, disability etc. (Fussell, 1991). Conversely, Suzy Coleman has argued against ethnic material being included in mainstream acquisition policies on the grounds that curators of monocultural, monolingual backgrounds generally do not have the tools to deal with the complexities of multiculturalism. She argues that curators need policies that draw communities into their institutions to monitor and assist in collecting non-Anglo-Celtic material (Coleman, 1989:85-91).

(Trotter 1996, p. 55)

In this case the researcher has set out to investigate the relationship between multiculturalism and museum acquisitions policy. This is clearly a thorny issue because the researcher has discovered two views in the literature which are completely at odds. This literature review succinctly outlines these opinions as well as including another way of approaching the issue. Note the tone of the writing which is objective and detached, favouring neither approach particularly, simply reporting what opinions have been published.

To provide a another example, here are a few paragraphs from an article by Dr Ruth Rentschler entitled 'Museums and performing arts marketing: A climate of change'. This review presents a summary of the primary question and an overview of previous published sources, while guiding the reader through all the necessary references. The margin notes have been added here to emphasise the key issues.

List previous literature surveys	In the last twenty years, people in museums and performing arts organizations have gradually become aware of marketing as a management tool. In fact, there have been a number of previous literature reviews in this period (see, for example, DiMaggio, Useem and Brown 1978; Fitzhugh 1983a and 1983b; Thomas and Cutler 1993; Williams and Rubenstein 1994; Yorke and Jones 1984). However, none of them reviews the journals selected for this research in the time frame chosen, nor takes the approach of this author.
How this study is different	
Brief description of most significant previous surveys	DiMaggio, Useem and Brown's (1978) ground-breaking review of 270 audience analysis studies identified education as the single most important demographic variable in the profile of attenders, followed by occupation. Their research was focused on audience research. Yorke and Jones (1984) analyzed museum marketing in Britain, focusing on visitor surveys. Williams and Rubenstein (1994) analysed visitor studies with a focus on Canada. They identified the changes in the museum context which have increased interest in visitor studies. Fitzhugh (1983a; 1983b) brings together data from a number of audience studies and develops the strategic marketing implications from them.
Present study is broader and more recent	These reviews are valuable, especially DiMaggio, Useem and Brown (1978) and Fitzhugh (1983a; 1983b). However, their scope is either narrower than the present study or they took place between ten and twenty years ago.

How the present study expands on a particular previous study

Thomas and Cutler (1993) analyzed thirty-one articles on marketing the fine and performing arts which have been published in major marketing journals and proceedings in the past twenty years. They identify the three major areas of arts marketing research from this literature as audience analysis and segmentation studies, marketing mix variables, and marketing planning or policy setting, including the use of marketing research in such efforts. This review is also most useful, but the question immediately asked is: What about the articles in museum management and performing arts management journals? In what way will an analysis of those articles change the focus of the available body of knowledge of marketing in museums and performing arts organizations?

(Rentschler 1997)

In conclusion, it is worth reading this summary of the literature search and review from *Thesis and Assignment Writing* by Jonathan Anderson and Millicent Poole:

The review of literature is a task that continues throughout the duration of a thesis. It begins with a search for a suitable topic. Since a thesis aims to be a contribution to knowledge, a careful check should be made that the proposed study has not previously been undertaken. Although completely new and original problems are rare, a previous study should not be exactly replicated unless the techniques used were faulty, or the findings and conclusions doubtful, or unless some new sources of information have been discovered to provide information about the problem. A good test is whether the problem still requires a solution.

Once a topic has been decided upon, it is essential to review all the relevant material that has a bearing on the topic. This review of the literature is included in the final written thesis as a key section or chapter. It is necessary to show how the problem under investigation relates to previous research studies. In some subject areas it is important to locate the problem within a theoretical framework and, in some cases, the underlying theory needs to be reviewed as well.

(Anderson & Poole 1994, p. 23)

Review

Summary

The literature search and review is a key part of the research process. A successful search will form the foundation of a research project and a review will demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Most importantly, the search and review provides an opportunity for a researcher to gain a level of specialist professional confidence.

In this topic therefore we have looked at how you can conduct a literature search using the online Deakin University Library as a gateway to other resources. We have provided guidance into the analysis of published sources, and provided examples of different literature reviews which will help you to prepare your own.

References

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