Academic Research & Writing

Developing Research Ideas and Writing

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Undergraduate Diploma in Business Administration

TEXT Books for this module….

Core textbooks

- McMillan, K. and Weyers, J. (2013). How to Write for University: Academic Writing for Success. Pearson.
- Pears, R. and Shields, G. (2019). Cite Them Right. The Essential Referencing Guide. Macmillan Education

Supplementary textbooks

- Bailey, S. (2019). The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students. 3rd ed. Routledge.
- Cottrell, S. (2019). The Study Skills Handbook. 5th ed. Red Globe Press.
- Locker, K. O., & Kaczmarek, S. K. (2014). Business Communication: Building Critical Skills. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Swetnam, D. and Swetnam, R. (2020). Writing Your Dissertation. 3rd ed. Plymouth: How to Books.

Process of Identifying and Developing Research Ideas

Identifying and developing research ideas is the first stage of the research process. It involves finding a topic that is interesting, relevant, and worth investigating, then refining it into a clear and manageable research problem.

- **Choose a Broad Area of Interest:** Start with a subject that interests you or is relevant to your field of study.

Example: Education, healthcare, business, or technology.

- **Review Existing Literature:** Read books, journal articles, reports, and credible online sources.

This helps you understand what has already been studied and identify gaps in knowledge.

- **Identify a Research Problem:** Look for issues, unanswered questions, or challenges within the topic.

A good research problem should be significant, clear, and researchable.

- **Narrow the Topic:** Focus on a specific aspect of the broader topic.

Example:

Broad topic: Social media.

Narrow topic: The impact of social media on university students' academic performance.

- **Develop Research Questions or Objectives** Formulate questions that guide the study.

Example:

How does daily social media use affect students' grades?

What are students' perceptions of social media as a learning tool?

- **Evaluate Feasibility** Ensure the study can be completed with the available time, budget, resources, and access to participants or data.
- **Refine the Research Idea** Discuss the idea with supervisors, lecturers, or colleagues and make improvements based on feedback.
- **Formulate a Research Title and Hypothesis (if applicable)** Create a clear, concise research title.

If conducting quantitative research, develop a hypothesis that can be tested.

Identify business problems and opportunities within digital marketing contexts

What is a business problem? It is an issue or challenge that affects business performance and needs to be solved.
Examples of declining sales, low customer engagement, poor website conversion rates, ineffective social media campaigns, and customer retention issues.

Distinguishing symptoms from root causes.

What is a business opportunity? Identifying opportunities created by emerging technologies, changing consumer behaviour, market gaps, and new digital platforms.

Examples such as AI-powered marketing, influencer marketing, personalisation, and omnichannel customer experiences.

The Digital Marketing Environment

Components of digital marketing, including:
Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Social media marketing
Content marketing, Email marketing, Mobile marketing, E-commerce, Digital analytics,
Common challenges and opportunities within each area.

Identify business problems and opportunities within digital marketing contexts

Sources for Identifying Research Problems - Industry reports and market research, Company case studies, Customer reviews, and online feedback. Website and social media analytics, Academic literature and previous studies, News articles and emerging industry trends.

Techniques for Identifying Problems and Opportunities - SWOT analysis, Customer journey mapping, Competitor analysis, Gap analysis, Data analytics and performance metrics.

Transforming Business Problems into Research Ideas

Moving from a practical issue to a researchable problem. Defining the scope of the research. Developing clear research objectives and questions.

Examples of Research Topics

The impact of AI chatbots on customer satisfaction.

Factors influencing consumer trust in social commerce.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing on purchase intention.

Evaluating a Research Topic

Original and researchable. Supported by sufficient literature and data. Feasible within available time and resources. Valuable for both academia and industry.

Formulate a Research Problem and Justify its Significance

A **research problem** is a clear, specific, and researchable issue, gap, or challenge that requires systematic investigation to generate new knowledge, solve a practical problem, or improve understanding of a phenomenon.

Stage	Example
Research Area	Digital Marketing
Research Topic	Social Media Marketing
Research Problem	Many SMEs invest in social media marketing but experience low customer conversion rates.
Research Question	What factors influence customer conversion through social media marketing among SMEs?

Develop clear research aims, objectives, and research questions

Once a research problem has been identified, the next step is to define what the study intends to achieve. This is done through:

- Research aim
- Research objectives
- Research questions

These elements provide the direction for the entire research project.

1. Research Aim

A research aim is a broad statement describing the overall purpose or intention of the study. It explains what the researcher hopes to accomplish.

The characteristics are -

Broad and general, directly addresses the research problem, usually written as a single statement, begins with action verbs such as *to examine, to investigate, to explore, to assess,* or *to evaluate*

For Example

Research Problem -

Many SMEs invest in influencer marketing but are uncertain whether it improves customer purchase intention.

Research Aim -

To examine the impact of influencer marketing on customer purchase intention among SMEs in Malta.

2. Research Objectives

Research objectives are the specific steps that must be completed to achieve the research aim.

The characteristics are -

Specific and measurable, Clearly stated, Logically sequenced, Usually 3–5 objectives, Begin with action verbs

For Example

Research Aim:

To examine the impact of influencer marketing on customer purchase intention among SMEs in Sri Lanka.

Research Objectives:

To identify the factors influencing customer trust in influencers.

To examine the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention.

To analyse the effect of influencer content quality on customer engagement.

To determine whether customer engagement influences purchase intention.

3. Research Questions

Research questions are the specific questions the study seeks to answer.

The characteristics are -

Derived directly from the objectives

Clear and focused

Researchable

Not answerable with a simple "yes" or "no"

For Example

Research Questions:

What factors influence customer trust in influencers?

How does influencer credibility affect customer purchase intention?

What is the relationship between influencer content quality and customer engagement?

Does customer engagement influence purchase intention?

Common Mistakes

Writing objectives that do not support the research aim.

Having too many objectives.

Using vague verbs such as *understand* or *know*.

Writing research questions that are unrelated to the objectives.

Creating yes/no questions.

Writing objectives that cannot be measured.

In a nutshell,

Research Problem → Research Aim → Research Objectives → Research Questions

The Structure and Purpose of a Research Proposal

A **research proposal** is a formal document that outlines a planned research study. It explains

what the researcher intends to investigate,

why the study is important, and

how the research will be conducted.

The Structure of a Research Proposal

Section	Purpose
Title	Clearly indicates the focus of the study.
Introduction/Background	Provides context and introduces the research area.
Research Problem	Explains the issue or gap that the study will address.
Research Aim and Objectives	States the overall aim and specific objectives of the study.
Research Questions (or Hypotheses)	Specifies what the research seeks to answer or test.
Literature Review	Reviews existing studies, identifies gaps, and establishes the need for the research.
Conceptual/Theoretical Framework	Presents the theories or concepts guiding the study (if applicable).
Research Methodology	Explains the research design, data collection methods, sampling, instruments, and data analysis techniques.
Ethical Considerations	Describes how ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection will be addressed.
Expected Outcomes/Significance	Explains the anticipated contributions to theory, practice, or policy.
Timeline	Shows the planned schedule for completing the research.
References	Lists all cited sources using the required referencing style (Harvard).

How to write a background and rationale for a study

The **background and rationale** section explains the context of your study, what is already known about the topic, what is missing in the existing knowledge, and why your research is needed.

1. Introduce the Topic

Begin with a broad overview of the subject and explain its importance.

2. Provide Background Information

Summarise relevant theories, previous studies, statistics, or trends. This shows your understanding of the topic.

3. Identify the Research Gap

Explain what previous studies have not addressed or where there is conflicting evidence.

You can use phrases such as:

"However, few studies have examined..."

"Existing research has primarily focused on...“

4. Explain the Rationale

State why your study is necessary and how it will contribute.

5. End with the Purpose of the Study

Conclude by linking the background and rationale to your research objectives.

Sample Background and Rationale

Businesses increasingly rely on digital technologies to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and remain competitive in rapidly changing markets. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in particular, contribute significantly to economic development through employment creation and innovation. Despite these benefits, many SMEs experience challenges in adopting digital technologies because of financial constraints, limited technical expertise, and organisational barriers.

Previous studies have identified several factors that influence technology adoption, including organisational readiness, management support, perceived usefulness, and employee skills. While these studies provide valuable insights, much of the existing research has focused on large organisations or has been conducted in developed economies. Consequently, there is limited understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in different contexts.

This gap highlights the need for further research to examine the factors that influence digital technology adoption among SMEs. Understanding these factors can help business owners, policymakers, and technology providers develop strategies that encourage successful implementation of digital solutions and improve organisational performance.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing digital technology adoption among SMEs and provide recommendations that support informed decision-making and enhance business competitiveness.

THANK YOU