

**Title: Business Research Methods (7<sup>th</sup> ed.)**  
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Presumably this text was sent to LTSN Maths, Stats & OR because it's been published as part of McGraw Hill's Statistics and Probability series. However, although the intended readership of the text is not explicitly stated it is clear that the text is aimed at the general undergraduate business studies student and not at the specialist maths/stats/OR student. Accordingly, I've considered the text from two slightly different perspectives.

The first considers the value of the text from the perspective of service teaching: teaching business and management students about maths/stats/OR. The second considers the value of the text from the perspective of teaching maths/stats/OR students about the role and use of quantitative techniques in wider business decision making.

The text is written by two US academics and is clearly aimed at the US market. The text is structured into four – fairly traditional - parts with individual chapters in each part.

### **I Introduction to Business Research**

- Chapter 1 Research in Business
- Chapter 2 Addressing Management Problems with Scientific Thinking
- Chapter 3 The Research Process
- Chapter 4 The Research Proposal
- Chapter 5 Ethics in Business Research

### **II The Design of Research**

- Chapter 6 Design Strategies
- Chapter 7 Sampling Design
- Chapter 8 Measurement
- Chapter 9 Measurement Scales

### **III The Sources and Collection of Data**

- Chapter 10 Exploring Secondary Data
- Chapter 11 Survey Methods: Communicating with Respondents
- Chapter 12 Instruments for Respondent Communication
- Chapter 13 Observational Studies
- Chapter 14 Experimentation

### **IV Analysis and Presentation of Data**

- Chapter 15 Data Preparation and Description
- Chapter 16 Exploring, Displaying, and Examining Data
- Chapter 17 Hypothesis Testing
- Chapter 18 Measures of Association
- Chapter 19 Multivariate Analysis: An Overview
- Chapter 20 Presenting Results: Written and Oral Reports

A set of over 20 business cases including McDonalds, Xerox, Ramada. NCR is included as a separate section. In addition there is an extensive set of appendices including Core Business Reference Sources (both printed and electronic) and Selected Statistical Tables.

The CD-Rom that accompanies the text includes the Glossary, data files, PowerPoint presentations, and exhibits index and the Business reference Sources.

There is also an Instructor's Resource Guide and an Instructor's Videotape Supplement that accompany the text but these were not available to the reviewer.

The content as such is both predictable for a text of this type and relatively comprehensive. On the quantitative side topics such as exploratory data analysis are covered, as are data presentation methods, inferential statistics and hypothesis testing, correlation, regression and measures of association and multivariate analysis. Somewhat strangely, one of the appendices covers decision theory, which seems somewhat out of place whilst another covers 'advanced' nonparametric tests which could more usefully be covered in the main text. However, there are a number of areas from OR which would add value to the text: the basics of project management in a research project context; the use of cognitive mapping to help scope a research project; an introduction to systems thinking; an introduction to multi-criteria decision analysis in the context of complex decision making.

Each chapter in the text follows a standard structure and format.

The chapter starts with a "Bringing research to life" case study/vignette. This is a case study that develops throughout the text and involves two individuals who start working together on a specific research project: a customer service manager in an IT business and a freelance consultant/researcher brought in to help the business undertake research into customer attitudes and satisfaction. The two individuals are deliberately stereotyped and as opposites. The (female) manager is portrayed at having excellent person-to-person skills, as

well as personal skills, has little quantitative background and is a great believer in qualitative information. The (male) consultant/researcher is introduced as an analytically-retentive anorak/geek who surrounds himself with all the latest IT gadgetry and is obsessed with hard data and analysis. As the case study unfolds on a chapter-by-chapter basis it develops predictably into a mutual improved understanding of the two polarised perspectives in terms of business and management decision-making. Fortunately, the authors resisted the temptation to have the two characters ride off into the sunset together!.

From a student learning perspective, the developing case study probably works very well. It helps business students (who in my experience at least have little expressed interest in robust quantitative analysis and modelling) understand the role and contribution of such techniques in the wider research and decision making process. It also helps the more specialist maths/stats/OR student appreciate that to a manager such tools and techniques do not occupy a central position of importance in their universe but are – at best – a means to an end of problem solving and decision making.

Throughout each chapter use is also made of:

- Snapshots which are short, focussed illustrations on real-world applications supporting that part of the text. These are helpful in reinforcing the message that organisations actually use these approaches and techniques
- Tips, which are practical ideas at actually applying specific concepts and techniques
- Case illustrations which use extracts from company literature and reports to highlight approaches and techniques

Each chapter concludes with a list of key terms which are defined in a separate end-of-text glossary; a list of the case examples used in the chapter; discussion questions; suggestions as to which of the cases included at the end of the text can be used to test understanding of the chapter; reference notes; further reading.

The material generally is easy to read and is presented in a logical and structured manner. The use of cases, illustrations etc centrally helps break up the text as well as bring it to life in terms of its practical application to organisations. Inevitably, however, given the US focus of the text, some of the case study illustrations will mean little to UK students.

The chapters that focus on the more quantitative aspects of the research process are well-written and the role of, and need for, quantitative approaches is generally well-explained. The use of illustrative data sets, calculations and computer output helps the student appreciate why these techniques are needed, how they can be used and how they can be evaluated and assessed.

So, is the text worth buying/recommending?

Well, I shall be buying a copy for my bookshelf. There's a lot of material that can be used to bring a sense of reality to what can very often be quite abstract concepts and techniques and the huge number of case study illustrations will be a useful resource for my own teaching.

Recommending it to students, however, is a different matter. It's difficult to see from a UK context where such a text would find a suitable home.

Business students who need a "good" text, particularly on the wider use of quantitative techniques in business decision making, would probably do better with a UK publication that better matched a typical syllabus and with one that was less concerned with "research" as such.

Maths/Stats/OR students would probably find that the text contained little new in the way of "theory" although it certainly would be useful as a supplementary text at helping them better understand the role of that theory and the quantitative analyst in business decision making. This is where the text does particularly well but it is unlikely to be enough to persuade undergraduate students to buy it.

Note: The McGraw Hill website details an 8<sup>th</sup> edition of this text with a later publication date and a different ISBN. The table of contents is identical although the page length is shorter at 640pp. It is not clear how this edition varies from that reviewed here.