The nature of research
The nature of research within the creative industries
The importance of research within the creative industries
The practitioners: Rachel Cooper on credibility in creative research

CONTEXT

The role of research in the creative industries has a diverse background. Research methods have been borrowed from the fields of visual research, sociology and management. This section of the book begins with an overview of the field of research within the context of the creative industries, and then goes into detail about the stages involved in undertaking a research project within this field. It also investigates the skills required in creating a conceptual research framework, and highlights the importance of understanding the value of teamwork and autonomy.
The nature of research

We constantly try to understand our environment and how our world appears to our senses. We tend to do this in three ways: experience, reasoning, and research. This means that sometimes we know what is happening because we’ve had experience of it before, sometimes we can reason why it is happening and at other times we need to find out by searching for information. We know that these ways of understanding are not separate in real life, but often overlap. And when we try to make sense of what is happening, in our day-to-day life we depend a lot on experience and the value of our experience, which should not be underestimated. Experience is valuable within research because it gives us a source from which we can devise our hypothesis or research questions. However, we need to recognise that experience has limitations too, if we are attempting to find out the ultimate truth about a phenomenon.

What is research?

In our everyday life, we come across the word ‘research’ on a daily basis. When we watch a television programme which discusses the level of unemployment or factors in the economy, research normally provides the data upon which the report is based. When advertisers refer to users’ opinions on the results of using a product, research normally provides the data upon which the claims for the product are based.

Many of us criticise such uses of data because it can be difficult to understand how these claims are made and what processes and analysis the researchers have actually undertaken. This makes it hard for us to evaluate how accurate the information really is.

It is perhaps all too easy to collect facts without having a clear purpose or objective, to list the facts we have researched without evaluating or interpreting them, or to use the word ‘research’ just to get ideas noticed. In order for our audience to find our research credible, believable and relevant, we need to ensure that our research presents a systematic and organised way of finding answers to significant or pertinent questions in the following way.

- Systematic: research needs to be systematic.
  A definite set of procedures and steps should be followed. Completion of a number of stages in the research process is essential if the most accurate results are to be recorded.

- Organised: research must be organised, structured and methodical. It is a planned procedure, not a spontaneous one (even though the plan can change from time to time). It is focused and limited to a specific scope.

- Question: research is focused on relevant, useful and important questions. Without a question, research has no focus, drive or purpose.
  However, realising the importance or relevance of your findings is arguably one of the most important factors.

- Answer: whether it is the answer to a hypothesis or even a simple question, research is successful when we find answers. Sometimes the answer is no, but this is still an answer.

But research is not always as straightforward as indicated. There may be stages in the inquiry where you may not be quite sure what you are looking for; or, having found something that you were not looking for, you will then need to find out how important or relevant this finding is. Sometimes, this can prove to be the most exciting aspect of research.
There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after.

— J.R.R. Tolkien
Figure 2
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

OPENING UP
- Reflect, read, question, ‘make strange, stand back, look closely, resist quick decisions

SHARING
- Write up, report, publish

FOCUSING IN
- Identify the question, hypothesis or focus
- Aim for clarity of terms

ANALYSING THE DATA
- Finding out what the data mean

OPENING UP AGAIN
- Review the literature
- Look at the focus again

OPENING UP AGAIN
- Review the literature
- Look at the focus again

COLLECTING THE DATA
- Collecting what you need to answer your question

ENTERING
- Gaining access to the research site
- Observing ethical protocol
- Being transparent

This diagram gives you an idea of the cyclical nature of research. Research is an iterative process, so although the arrows in the diagram show the cyclical nature of research you can go back and forward from one stage to another to achieve clarity and understanding in your project.