



23E80101 Qualitative Business Research Methods

Writing up qualitative research

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Agenda

1. Feedback time
2. Structure and contents of a research paper (thesis)
3. Breakout room discussion
4. A look back on the course objectives



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Typical structure of an academic article

- **Regardless of discipline**, academic articles generally contain the following sections:
 - Abstract
 - Introduction
 - Literature review/Theoretical background
 - Methods and context
 - Findings
 - Discussion
 - Limitations and further research
 - References

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Introduction

- The writer's introduction is the first section of the paper. Although not always labeled, it generally **introduces the topic, the thesis, and tells readers why the research is important**

Selling Pain to the Saturated Self

REBECCA SCOTT
JULIEN CAYLA
BERNARD COVA

How can we comprehend people who pay for an experience marketed as painful? On one hand, consumers spend billions of dollars every year to alleviate different kinds of pain. On the other hand, millions of individuals participate in extremely painful leisure pursuits. In trying to understand this conundrum, we ethnographically study a popular adventure challenge where participants subject themselves to electric shocks, fire, and freezing water. Through sensory intensification, pain brings the body into sharp focus, allowing individuals to rediscover their corporeality. In addition, painful extraordinary experiences operate as regenerative escapes from the self. By facing the consciousness with grueling unpleasantness, pain provides a temporary relief from the burdens of self-awareness. Finally, when leaving marks are awarded, pain helps consumers create the story of a fulfilled life. In a context of disenchanted physicality, market operators play a major role in selling pain to the saturated selves of knowledge workers, who use pain as a way to simultaneously escape reflexively and craft their life narrative.

Keywords: extraordinary experience, pain, embodiment, ethnography, sociology of consumption, experiential consumption, knowledge work

Pain is a fundamental facet of human existence. We have all felt it. We have all suffered from it. Pain has such power that even a simple injury can render us incapable of functioning in the world. Consumers spend

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Elvira Fischer served as editor and Robert Kozminski served as associate editor for this article.

billions of dollars every year on medication and health care for just this reason—to alleviate pain. The simultaneous appeal of pain-inducing consumer experiences is then a confounding phenomenon. Obstacle races that induce extreme physical pain and exhaustion are marketed as a challenge. On one hand, consumers seek medication to soothe their pain. On the other, many consumers are willing to pay for experiences that are marketed as intensely painful. How can we make sense of this paradox?

Although pain is a central facet of the human condition, it remains undertheorized and under-theorized within the social sciences" (Green 2011, 378), especially in consumer research. Consumer researchers have long acknowledged that consumers may seek physically and emotionally painful experiences (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982), but the topic of pain itself has rarely been addressed.

Our research puts forward a more comprehensive understanding of pain and its role in extraordinary experiences. We develop our insights from an ethnography of Tough Mudder, a particularly grueling adventure challenge involving a series of approximately 24 different obstacles.

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Introduction

Typical structure:

1st paragraph

Use of hooks, mysteries, an opening vignette from the data

2nd paragraph

The research gap & what this paper does & research questions

Mention of context, method, and analytical lens (optional)

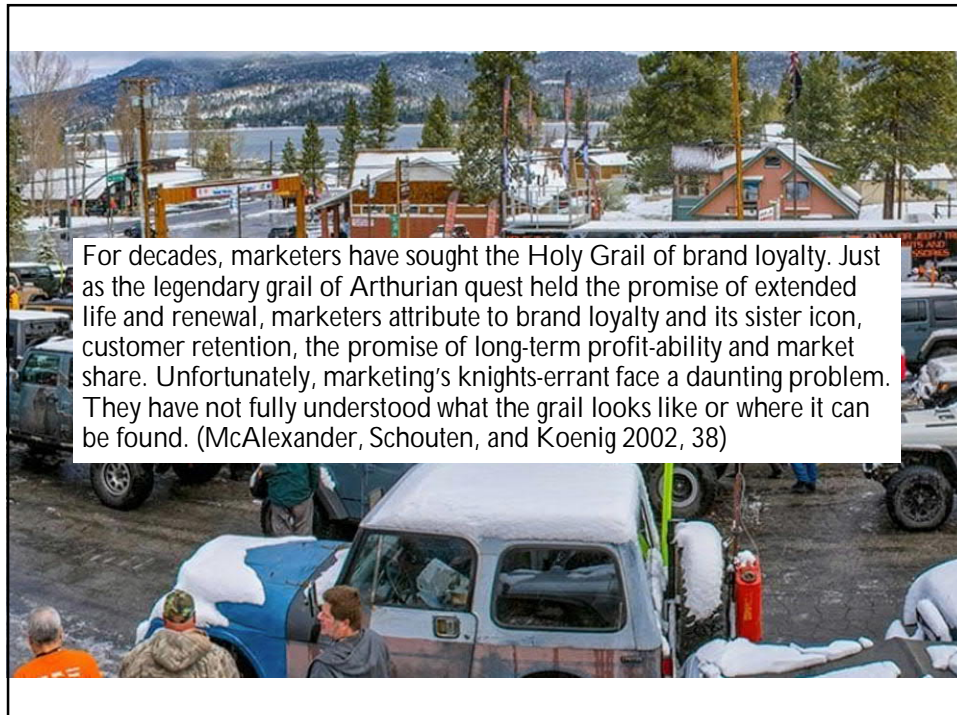
3rd paragraph

Brief introduction of findings (if not already in 2nd paragraph) and contribution to existing literature

4th paragraph

“The rest of this paper unfolds as follows. First, we... Then,...”

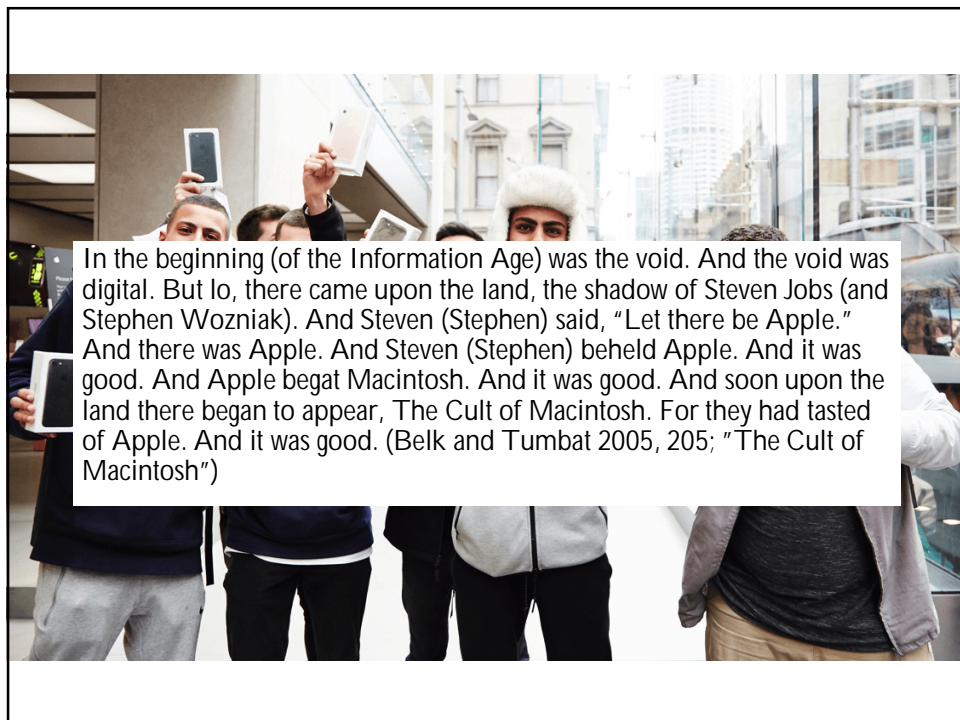
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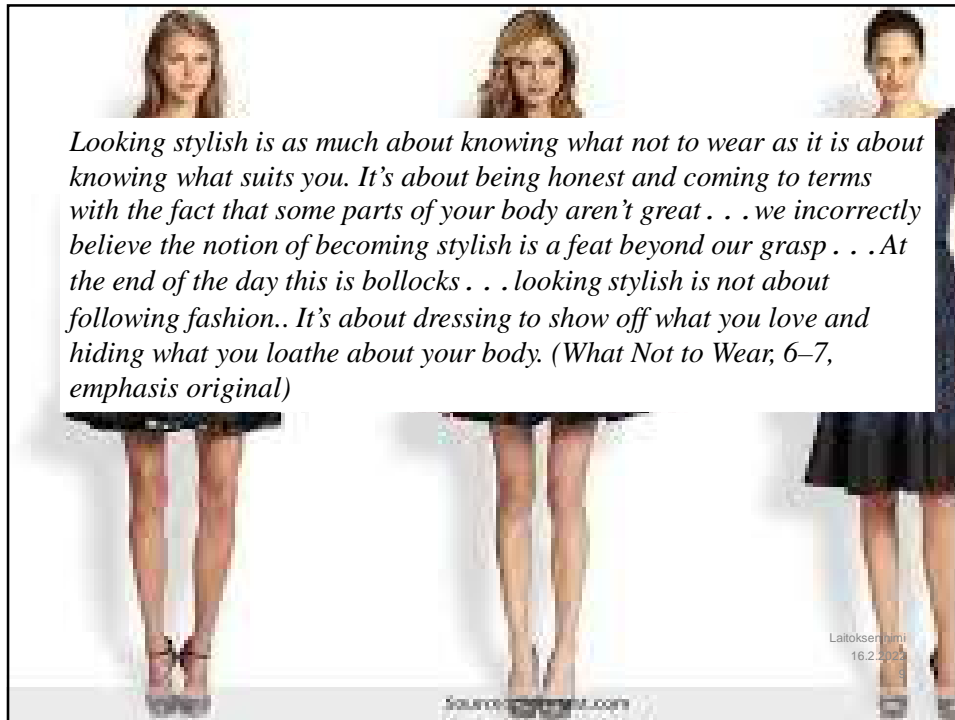
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Lit review/theoretical background

- A literature review **looks at past research on the topic.** The literature review demonstrates to other researchers that the author is thoroughly acquainted with their topic.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In building the theoretical foundations of our study, we draw from past consumer research on extraordinary experiences, as well as insights from a variety of disciplines on pain, to help us analyze and understand this puzzling phenomenon: why would consumers pay for experiences that are deliberately marketed as painful?

Extraordinary Experiences as Escapes

Extraordinary experiences such as river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993), climbing Everest (Tumbat and Belk 2011), surfing (Canniford and Shankar 2013), and participating in the Burning Man festival (Kozinets 2002) or the Mountain Man Rendez-Vous (Belk and Costa 1998) resemble Tough Mudder. Indeed, these adventures all allow individuals to free themselves from the tedium of the everyday by engaging in an event that is intense and temporally marked-out, which are the defining features of an extraordinary experience (Abrahams 1986). From this perspective, these various activities are escape attempts (Cohen and Taylor 1976) providing relief from the structural demands of institutional arrangements (Turner 1969).

Past scholarship has brought to light various features of contemporary life that individuals are eluding: the repetitive monotony of the "9 to 5 lifestyle" (Arnould, Price, and

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Lit review/theoretical background

Provides a review of the relevant literature to date to justify the existence of the study

Typical to have a brief historical overview, evolution of the concepts

Usually progresses from reviewing to "problematizing" the literature, pointing out where the gap is

"Bracketing" away potential other approaches by saying that this study assumes a particular approach

Research question(s) at the end

In short: "Here's what we already know; here's what we don't know"

Optional: separate section on analytical lens

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THESIS TIP:

For the literature review, make it your goal of identifying 5 papers you want to "dialogue with"; they must be relevant or current, preferably both!



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Methodology

- In this section, you detail how you conducted the research to answer your research question(s)

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

After reviewing past research on pain, we identified a variety of methodological challenges. For instance, if pain is such a personal experience, and if the experience of pain is so difficult to communicate to others (Scarry 1985), how can we investigate and describe this experience? Moreover, what kind of representational strategy can we employ to problematize the body through discourse and beyond the mind/body dichotomy? Dualistic thinking has been so prevalent in shaping Western intellectual history that we still lack the words, concepts, and theoretical frameworks to conform to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological project.

In order to deal with these methodological issues, we have used a wide range of ethnographic methods, which we detail below and in the following table. As we seek to develop an ethnography that attends to the "physical, material, psychological and emotional dimensions" of pain (Buckingham and Degen 2012, 337), we deploy various types of data collection, including: (1) participant observation; (2) the collection of visual materials; (3) in-depth interviews; and (4) netnography.

Participant Observation

Our lead researcher conducted the bulk of the ethnographic fieldwork, taking on three different roles to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the Tough Mudder experience: as a spectator, a volunteer, and a Tough Mudder participant. As a spectator she was able to take ethnographic field notes detailing the chronology of the event, the interaction between participants and obstacles, and the sensory qualities of the experience itself

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Method and context

“Making context matter”; why this context was ideally suited for this theoretical problem

Can include statistics or relevant historical data

Methodology and justifying its selection

Detailed and chronological description of data gathering

Equally detailed description of data analysis

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THESIS TIP:

The most typical flaw in master's theses is having an insufficient explanation of how the data were analyzed!



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Findings

- The author explains the results of their research
- Quantitative and qualitative studies have different ways of reporting findings (e.g. qualitative → heavy use of quotes and fieldnotes to back up analysis)

FINDINGS

Our findings are organized to describe three complementary levels of analysis. First, we focus on pain as a personal experience, and we show that pain facilitates a reappearance of the body to the participant's consciousness. Second, we describe how pain becomes meaningful and gains significance through an intricate process of ritualization and dramatization. What Tough Mudder is selling is a dramatized pain that symbolizes a rebirth of the individual's corporeality. Finally, we look at what happens in the aftermath of the event. We demonstrate that pain operates very differently during and after the event. When pain floods their consciousness, participants seem unable to



My breathing became ragged towards the top and I tilted my hands as though I were holding hiking poles to maximize the efficiency of my steps. I clung onto the temporal nature of the discomfort. Although it was temporary, I was aware it was building fast, as if I were in a small compartment that was rapidly filling up with water" (field notes 2015).

After another intense training session involving 150 pull-ups, we find her tending to her sore arms. She is not able to type anymore:

"I couldn't straighten my arms. I was in agony, even if I kept my arms bent it still hurt because the tendons around my elbow linked up my arms to my back. I now notice I can't type properly. I loaded up on Chinese remedies, had an agonizing shower then hit the hard pain killers—Ibuprofen" (field notes 2015).

Figure 1 shows her bruised arms covered in dandelion ice, a traditional Chinese remedy for severe muscle bruising. At this particular moment, all her attention is directed to a specific part of her body that aches.

After another training run, the lead researcher also talks about the additional difficulties she experiences walking:

"A colossal mass of agony greeted my ligaments the next morning after training. It made me really appreciate what they do, how they support me, balance and stabilize my entire 5ft8 being, and now I have beaten them into an abyss of fragility and pain. I couldn't walk properly" (field notes 2012).

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"Our informants did or said X."



Introducing the (sub)theme and its claim(s)

Long quote where X is powerfully illustrated



Truncated version of an exemplary (i.e. a really good) quote

Interpretation of the quote through the analytical lens to showcase how X comes across.



Analysis and interpretation of quote

"X could also be done in other ways. Some preferred to... while others..."
For some, X was problematic. For example, Sheila struggled with X."



Transition to boundary conditions

It is important to elaborate dimensions, boundaries, and negative cases!

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Bundling. Another form of modularization is bundling tasks by identifying actions that can be performed concurrently after they have been broken apart (Shove et al. 2012). Long-time cosplayer Mandy used this approach to complete her outfit in time for a con:

Even if you don't feel motivated to physically work on something, try and find work you can do for a different part of that costume or a different costume you might have in mind. So it's like, "Oh, I can't really work on sewing, maybe I'll see if I can figure out what the construction of the back could be" and just write that down on paper. . . If I were to watch TV anyway I can work on something that's handwork; I can't work on a [sewing] machine as well, but spending half an hour sewing one of these [shows her costume's embroidery] I can do.

Mandy employs modularization principles by matching project stages with appropriate motivation levels to maintain leisure time's emotional qualities, pursue small gains, and move the project forward. But she also combines the repetitive task of embroidery with TV watching to fuse cosplay with another leisure circuit. Ivy described a similar practice fusion. She lets her favorite TV shows "pile up" on her DVR and catches up on them during crafting.

Cosplay practices can also be bundled with work circuits. For instance, hunting for costume source materials fills dead time at work: "When not making rounds [at

Introducing the (sub)theme and its claim(s)

Truncated version of an exemplary (i.e. a really good) quote

Analysis and interpretation of quote

Transition to boundary conditions

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Maintenance and the Good Practitioner.

Maintaining a boat was a sign of dedication to sailing itself, a central part of a sailor's identity. Maintenance practices are thus integral to the "sense of common enterprise" (Schatzki 2002, p. 86) for sailors, creating a sense of belonging and affirming shared identities. Though sailors usually work only on their own boats, maintenance is still a social practice as sailors are usually at the boat yard simultaneously. Sailors watch each other working, which diffuses maintenance competence. A good-looking boat is a sign of maintenance competence, signaling a good learning source. Boat clubs understand the value of knowledge sharing during maintenance periods and encourage it. The expectation that a "true" sailor has their boat in tip-top shape also creates social pressures at the boat yard. Our fieldwork confirmed that a badly maintained boat—particularly a hull peppered with barnacles—was a source of shame at the boatyard.

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Maintenance and the Good Practitioner.

Maintaining a boat was a sign of dedication to sailing itself, a central part of a sailor's identity: "It is part of the hobby to fix your boat constantly. In the spring, sailors crawl up from their winter nests and start revealing their boats from under the covers, looking for the toolbox" (Timo). Maintenance practices are thus integral to the "sense of common enterprise" (Schatzki 2002, p. 86) for sailors, creating a sense of belonging and affirming shared identities. Though sailors usually work only on their own boats, maintenance is still a social practice as sailors are usually at the boat yard simultaneously. Sailors watch each other working, which diffuses maintenance competence. Many learn "just by watching what other people do" (Veikko) while others are more proactive: "I'm the kind of guy who just roams around here [at the boatyard] and asks everybody 'what is that?' and 'what should I do with this?'... I don't really have another information source" (Lassi). A good-looking boat is a sign of maintenance competence, signaling a good learning source: "If it looks like it's somehow moldy or rotten and the owner gives you advice, you have to put it into perspective. But if someone has a boat that is in good condition and he tells you something, you can take it a little more seriously" (Kalle). Boat clubs understand the value of knowledge sharing during maintenance periods and encourage it, as Emilia, a boat club chairman, recounted: "We encourage that boaters tell the one next to them that 'hey, you might want to try this.'" Simo agreed that such exchanges are essential as "a lot of tacit information wouldn't spread if no one dared to ask." The expectation that a "true" sailor has their boat in tip-top shape also creates social pressures at the boat yard. Jani, a city official working with municipal harbors, described a disciplinary gaze hovering over the communal terrain: "[People at the boat club] know each other and maintain a certain level of control over their members. If you screw up over there [at the dry dock], everybody knows you." Our fieldwork confirmed that a badly maintained boat—particularly a hull peppered with barnacles—was a source of shame at the boatyard.

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THESIS TIP:

The most common problems in qualitative theses are 1) not showing data, and 2) not interpreting the data (just pasting long quotes)



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Breakout rooms

- In breakout rooms discuss your interview data and the kind of themes you think are emerging from it

Mancaves and masculinity

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Abstract

How do mancaves, male spaces in or around the house, contribute to construction of masculinity? Our research challenges the perspective that male spaces emerge in opposition to the feminine conception of home. Findings from interviews with American suburban men reveal that male spaces represent therapeutic venues that help men in alleviating identity pressures created by work as well as domestic life and aid revitalization of men's identities as fathers and husbands. Circumscribed by egalitarian ideology and the family ideal, male spaces also foster paternal and fraternal bonds instrumental for creating masculinity at home.

Keywords

Mancaves, home, domesticity, masculinity, identity, gender, space

Journal of Consumer Culture
2016, Vol. 16(3) 654–676
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/146954014533712
jcc.sagepub.com
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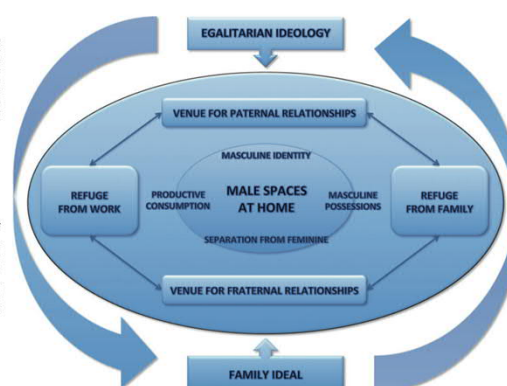


Figure 1. Extended model of domestic masculinity.

THESIS TIP:

Even if you don't use figures in the final paper, they can be helpful in the analysis stage!



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Discussion

- The author's summary of the journal article. The author will also explain the implications (practical and/or theoretical) and what further research could/should be done. →What do their findings actually mean, considering the existing body of literature?

DISCUSSION

We approached this ethnography as the solving of a mystery (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007). Consumers spend billions of dollars each year on pain relievers, yet at the same time extreme and painful experiences like Tough Mudder are becoming more popular by the day. In order to better understand this puzzling dilemma, we closely examined past scholarship on extraordinary experiences in consumer research (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Canniford and Shankar 2013; Celsi et al. 1993; Kozinets 2002; Tumbat and Belk 2011).

Marketed pain is a theoretical "breakdown" (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007, 1266), an anomaly that existing theories, models, and vocabularies cannot fully resolve. Indeed, past consumer research is limited in helping us understand how pain could add meaning to an extraordinary experience, or why consumers would pay to endure pain.

In contrast, our research opens up new avenues of thinking about extraordinary experiences, as a way for consumers to rediscover their forgotten bodies, and as temporary moments of escape from their self. These insights, we believe, highlight the centrality of the body in endowing extraordinary experiences with meaning.

Pain and the Rediscovery of the Body in Extraordinary Experiences

Pain produces a very specific kind of embodiment. The stinging discomfort of icy water and the rattling pain of electric shocks transform the body into the "thematic object of the subject's experience" (Zeiler 2010, 335). The body in pain no longer functions as "a *from* structure, the painful body becomes that *to* which he attends" (Leder

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Discussion, limitations, and future research

Short summary of research purpose and findings

Discuss your findings and link back to the relevant literature

Key: how do your findings a) complement, b) extend, or c) contradict those in prior studies → explain or speculate why!

Often good idea to split between Theoretical Implications and Managerial Implications

Limitations discuss specificity of context and population

Future research can address limitations or provide completely new directions!

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THESIS TIP:

Having a too-short or underdeveloped discussion section is a common thesis problem; possibly because of exhaustion with the process



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To sum it up

- By now you should be able to:

Craft a research question (context-theory match)

Gather data, at least through interviews

Analyze data in iterative fashion

Report your findings

The rest is about practice and experience!

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