

Explanatory Research Design - to be used for seminar papers / BA and MA theses

1) Introduction

- a. Research question (RQ) (= one sentence, ending with a ?)
 - i. y-centered research design: How can variation in a dependent variable (DV) be explained?
 - ii. Or x- centered research design: Which difference does variation in a specific independent variable (IV) make for the dependent variable?
- b. 2-3 sentences on the relevance of the research question (empirical, theoretical, etc.)
- c. Paragraph on how the paper/thesis is structured
- d. Paragraph on major finding of paper/thesis

2) Empirical Puzzle; empirical/theoretical relevance of research question

- a. y-centered research design: Definition of DV (parameter values, operationalization and measurement), detection of DV-variation (e.g. over time, over institutions, over actors, over policies etc.), presentation of DV pattern & discussion of counterintuitive elements//elements that require explanation
- b. Or x- centered research design: Definition of IV (parameter values, operationalization and measurement), detection of IV-variation (e.g. over time, over institutions, over actors, over policies etc.), , presentation of IV pattern and linkage to DV, discussion of counterintuitive elements//elements that require explanation

3) Theory

- a. Identification of relevant theories; very brief discussion of major findings/insights and gaps in literature and how own paper/thesis is contributing towards closing the gaps
- b. Selection of at least two theories and short (!) presentation (short, theory is not an end in itself but a means to develop hypotheses in order to answer the research question)
- c. Specification of hypotheses (at least two competing hypotheses need to be formulated)
 - i. Hypothesis: specification of causal relationship between IV and DV Deterministic (if IV change, then DV change) or probabilistic (the more IV, the less DV) formulation, including specification of causal mechanism and scope conditions
- d. Operationalization of IV ,causal mechanism, scope conditions

4) Method selection & Empirics – Plausibilization/test of hypotheses

- a. Methods: Discussion of selected method to empirically examine the hypotheses (qualitative or quantitative, if qualitative – discussion of case selection and choice of qualitative techniques applied, if quantitative – discussion of choice of quantitative techniques applied)
- b. Plausibilization/test of hypotheses (this is the major part of the paper/thesis and
- c. should be considerably longer than introduction, puzzle, and theory section)

5) Conclusions

- a. What was your RQ and what is the answer?
- b. Essential findings and take away message
- c. Generalizations and implications
- d. Outlook: limitations of your study & how to address them; future avenues for research

Essential: Comply with standards of scientific work (citations, sources, etc.).