

Understanding the nuances of Communication and Media Research in the present day context

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Abstract

Research is the creation of new knowledge or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way to develop new concepts, methodologies and understandings. Academic understanding about research embeds the aspect of ‘Critical’ and ‘Systematic’ in the pursuit of gathering comprehensive information. We may tend to limit the purpose of research to academic and scientific purposes. But research should be understood as human activity. The research process categorically involves Identifying the problem/situation that demands for research, Framing the research problem or hypothesis of the research, Collection and consolidation of relevant literature and other materials to substantiate the need for research, Appropriating suitable methodology for the research, Application of the methodology in the context to test the hypothesis, Analysing the findings about the application of the methodology in the hypothesis to understand the validity of the hypothesis, Evaluating appropriateness of the research for prospective research pursuits. Communication is an inevitable process that contributes significantly to the lives and living of human being.

Keywords:

Systematic, Critical, Hypothesis, Validity, Communication, Media Research

Introduction

Research simply refers to the objective of finding something or gathering some information. Scholars tend to define research in multifarious ways. Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick define research as an attempt to discover something. Etymological inquiry about the term refers to idea of cognitively or intellectually walking around or wandering to gather information, a sort of exploration to seek information about something. In the present day context, it is quite easy to refer research as the intellectual pursuit of searching any information comprehensively. Academic understanding about research embeds the aspect of ‘Critical’ and ‘Systematic’ in the pursuit of gathering comprehensive information. Critical refers to the idea of unbiased and neutral method of investigation whereas Systematic highlights the idea of planned and structured approach to be employed in the course of research.

An important aspect is the purpose or the motive of the research. The purpose of the research could be casual or serious. It is to be noted that invariably the objective of the pursuit of research leads to a finding. We may tend to limit the purpose of research to academic and scientific purposes. But research should be understood as human activity. Most of us employ research without admitting the notion that we are doing active research. Some of the research activity that we do every day are checking newspaper for news updates, updating and checking our bank statements to understand the financial transactions, shopping in a supermarket choosing between varieties of products and brands. We continue to research for our survival and comfort. But the crux of the concept of research as a systematic and critical enquiry to understand something should permeate into our being to make our living meaningful and significant.

Understanding the Process of Research

Research is a process that has a definite purpose and objective. Any research process begins with the resolute purpose of setting the domain to be explored or

investigated. The area could be anything that suits the interest and arouses the curiosity of the researcher. It is noted by scholars like Anders Hansen and David Machin, ideas of research stems from two points (a.) curiosity or inquisitiveness of the researcher about particular subject, object or event (b.) considerable expertise with theories, hypothetical models, and scholarly discussions.

In pursuing research, ascertaining and accessing the trajectory of the research is essential. The research process categorically involves

- 1) Identifying the problem/situation that demands for research
- 2) Framing the research problem or hypothesis of the research
- 3) Collection and consolidation of relevant literature and other materials to substantiate the need for research
- 4) Appropriating suitable methodology for the research
- 5) Application of the methodology in the context to test the hypothesis
- 6) Analysing the findings about the application of the methodology in the hypothesis to understand the validity of the hypothesis
- 7) Evaluating appropriateness of the research for prospective research pursuits.

Identifying the problem: The need for the Research

The problem for any research invariably depend on the individual experience or expertise in the domain. It should be understood that identifying the problem is the core of the research. Problem in the research dimension has to be understood as the something of ‘concern’ rather than something of complication. The objective of research has been discussed from the ancient time. People have been searching for meaning and reason of things that concerns them, their lives and their being. This is particularly explicated in the concept of ontological enquiry of things.

According to SAGE Online Dictionary of Social Research Methods (2006) defines ontology as

“...the concept concerned with the existence of, and relationship between, different aspects of society such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures... Ontological issues are concerned

with questions pertaining to the kinds of things that exist within society”

Scholars invariably define ontology as the search to find the reason or justification for things happening in and within an individual, society and community. In communication research, ontological enquiry is vital; the pursuit of understanding the Audience, Society and their culture, social structure, economic parameter are part of Ontological enquiry.

Framing the research problem or hypothesis of the research

The hypothesis of the research is fundamentally an assumption which is considered as the core of the research process. The pursuit of any research centres about an assumption. Hypothesis has to be understood as an assumption or supposed statement about a problem. Prof William M. K. Trochim explicates about the concept of hypothesis as a statement of prediction about problem concerning the subject of subject. According to him, in inductive reasoning does include a concrete hypothesis rather exploratory research (which is part of inductive research) has tentative hypothesis. It should be noted many of the academic research pursuit are based on deductive reasoning which involves exploring into broader area and then narrowing on specific research problem. The Hypothesis are supposed statement that could probably guide to prospective solution for a problem. The purpose of any research necessarily is to understand the determination of the statement and prove the validity of the statement. Furthermore, Hypothesis points to the locus of the research process. The research process is necessarily systematic process of enquiry which aims to holistically understand about the Hypothesis.

Review of Literature

Literature are purposive documents which informs the readers and help them develop their understanding and knowledge on specific subject. Reviewing the literature is not merely reading and understanding the contents of the document. Reviewing involves a process of retrospection and reflection of the literature. Retrospection necessarily involves examining the validity claimed in the document and the scope of the document. Understanding the scope of the document provides a cue for the formulating the right trajectory for the research. Jill Jesson, Lydia Matheson and Fiona M Lacey descriptively explain the significance and the review

of literature for contextual research. Accordingly, they suggest that literature review has two dimension namely a. traditional literature review b. systematic literature review. The traditional literature review is not more than appraisal of the literature. The appraisal of the literature majorly is based on the narration and specifically looks on the style or the approach with respect to the narration. On the other hand systematic review of literature approaches the literature methodically from various vantage points. The systematic review of literature involves,

- a) Systematically and critically approaching the text
- b) Evolving a structured approach to the text
- c) Employing a rigorous validation of the information
- d) Meta-analysis of the text
- e) Synthesising needed data from the text

Literature review is necessary processes in the research which allows the researcher to build a valid argument for the research and helps the researcher justify his/her claim for the research. However, it should be understood that Review of Literature is not just the phase in the process of research rather the process of literature should be concurrent. The literature review should justify every phase and step of the research.

Appropriating suitable methodology for the research

Methodology can be understood a specific way of conducting research. Research or inquiry deals with the searching the system of knowledge. In way research calls for reviewing the knowledge; the reviewing of knowledge has to be done systematically. In this regard, methodology specifies the process of facilitating the inquiry or research. Research has historical dimension; the pursuit of updating knowledge by observing and analysing things started from the inception of humankind. Epistemological quest was one of the significant aspect in Greek tradition. Epistemology relates to the nature of Knowledge. According to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Epistemology is the understanding of knowledge with regards to the method, validity and its scope. Scholar opine Epistemology seeks to understand '*the very bases of Knowledge*'. In communication and Media Research, Epistemological Understanding is inevitable as it seeks to know the process of

communication; understanding can be derived in two modes. Scientific inquiry of the process or otherwise called as the quantitative enquiry is part of Epistemological understanding. Also, the employing Humanism or qualitative enquiry is another method of Epistemological pursuit. Pursuing research is not vocation but a commitment to the domain. The commitment of the individual to a specific subject of interest helps the researcher identify areas of concern or the problem of the research; furthermore, the ‘commitment’ builds the aspect of experience in the research. The experience of understanding the concern. The experiential enquiry of specified concern is defined as the empirical. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the meaning for the term Empirical is derived from the Greek Word, Empeiria meaning Experience. Aligning with crux and objective of the term, Empirical Method are employed for valid and verifiable claim or solution for any research problems. Scholars suggests, Empirical methods were equated with the use of quantitative methods and also with, primary data collection and analysis. Presently, some Scholars opine that the qualitative method and secondary analyses of data can be considered empirical.

In this point, to finalise a Method to understand and address the Research problem or concern, the research should chart methodology which is appropriate considering these factors,

- i. Locus and Milieu of the Research Problem or Concern
- ii. Challenges in approaching the Research Problems
- iii. Samples for the Research
- iv. Limitations of Time and Resources to pursue the Research exercises
- v. Scope and Prospect of the Research

Research Methodology is a schematic trajectory of conducting the research to prove the hypothesis. Formulating the right Methodology will give the researcher the confidence and expertise to pursue the research.

Application of the methodology in the context to test the hypothesis

In approaching the research concern, applying suitable methodology is vital in the process. The aspects of Quality and quantity are very significant in any research

taking into consideration the purpose and objective of research (Daniel, 2016). It elucidates further by stating that in the quantitative research, the participants do not actively contribute to the research. It is observed that the researcher is at the “driver’s seat” (Daniel, 2016 cites Bryman, 2001, p286). The linear and non-flexibility character of a quantitative approach makes the researcher follow set trajectory; the researcher initiates the point of research, fixes the research problem, decides the approach to the research problem, collects and collated the data and then summarises the result. On the other hand, Qualitative research has no stringent and set procedure; the methods depend on the researchers’ interpretation and ingenuity. It is observed that it will be not possible to conduct the same research and get the same result at any other time and place. Invariably, qualitative research cannot be replicated as quantitative research method (Daniel, 2016 cites Bryman, 2008, p391).

Data Collection using application of appropriate methodology is crucial in research. As mentioned in the section, the nature of data varies depending on the type of approach that the research employs to collect the data. Another significant aspect is data collection is the nature of the research problem; the nature of the research problem. Some of the significant aspects to be considered in the data collection phase are,

1. Scope of the Research Problem
2. Milieu of the Sample and the reach
3. Type of Data sought from the samples
4. Method of Collection of Data

Analysing the findings about the application of the methodology in the hypothesis to understand the validity of the hypothesis

The collected data in the research process is analysed to prove the validity of the hypothesis. This step is usually termed as the Data Analysis and findings. Analysing the data depends on the type of Research Method employed to collect the data. Scholars tend to define Data Analysis as the process of breaking large amount of data, consolidate the data in into usable results. Data can be analysed and approached according the purpose of the research and the objective of the research problem in lieu with the hypothesis of the research. According to Merriam, there are different approaches in the data analysis like ethnography analysis, narrative

analysis, phenomenological analysis and constant comparative analysis. In the same line, there are different methods in analysing data namely, Hermeneutic Analysis, Narrative Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Ground Theory Analysis, Content Analysis and Cross Cultural Analysis. An elaborate and specific analysis of data should provide the researcher the summation of the findings about validity of the hypothesis.

In communication and media research, statistical method is employed to analyse the data obtained from the research. Statistical method facilitates scientific enquiry of the results and its presentation. Moreover, statistical method helps systematically quantify and qualify the results for effective understanding and further analysis. It is to be noted that in the present day context, mixed approach are predominantly employed for the studies which makes the study more reliable and valid.

Evaluating appropriateness of the research for prospective research pursuits.

As mentioned in the introduction, research is a process of exploring something information or developing an ideas that can be applied in human life and living. Research finding should analyse and evaluate its suitability to be developed into innovative concept, a recommendation or an idea for further study and research. Understanding the suitability of the research to be transformed into concept for human life and living is primary mandate for research pursuits. In communication and media research, the results should be specific that understanding about media or messages can be derived, media effects can be monitored, new communication strategies can be devised and possibility is endless.

Communication is an inevitable process that contributes significantly to the lives and living of human being. The elements pertaining to survival and existential are significantly conditioned by communication and its media. Communication research should actively contribute to the understanding of the emerging media **ant** is effects in its totality.

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