

The Significance of Advance Research Methods for Conducting Research in the Social Sciences : An Analysis

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Abstract

The social science research differs from research in the natural sciences as a result of its focus on people such individuals and groups and their behaviour within cultures and organizations that vary widely socially and historically. The quantitative and qualitative research methods are consider as the advance research methods in the social sciences disciplines research. The quantitative researchers are mostly concerned with measurement and sampling and often use deductive reasoning. In contrast, qualitative researchers tend to be more interested in content and use induction with more frequency. Many social sciences researchers use both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide fuller and more complete explanations in their respective researches.

Key words: Qualitative, Quantitative, Methodology, Advance, Research, Significance

Introduction

The research in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. One can also define research as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic. In fact, research is an art of scientific investigation. The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English lays down the meaning of research as "a careful investigation or inquiry specially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge". Redman and Mory defined research as a "systematized effort to gain new knowledge".(CR Kothari(2004),p.1). These are applicable to the social sciences disciplines research. The research in the social sciences draws on various long established traditions. Its origins might, for example, be said to lie with the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who developed ways of conceptualizing and categorizing knowledge, truth and human experience during the fourth century BC. Fundamentally, social sciences research is concerned with people and their life contexts, and with philosophical questions relating to the nature of knowledge and truth (epistemology), values (axiology) and being (ontology) which underpin human judgements and activities(Bridget Somekh article in an edited book(2005),p.1).

The empirical social sciences research that is research which involves the collection of data about people and their social contexts by a

range of methods draws heavily upon the traditions and practices of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and creative arts and so on.

The notion of the social scientist creating knowledge by bringing vision to the interpretation of facts was central to the work of Mills (1959) and more recently researchers such as Eisner (1991) have emphasized the importance of the social scientist as connoisseur (Bridget Somekh article in an edited book(2005),p.2).

Evolution of Research in the Social Sciences

As a recognized and codified practice, however, social science research has its origins in the emergence of the nation-state with its political demands for the classification and analysis of individuals and populations. Anthropology, for example, emerged in the service of colonialism. The very term social science indicates its emergence in relation to sometimes in opposition to natural science (Bridget Somekh article in an edited book(2005),p.2). The social sciences research differs from research in the natural sciences as a result of its focus on people such individuals and groups and their behaviour within cultures and organizations that vary widely socially and historically (Bridget Somekh article in an edited book(2005),p.3).

The early twentieth-century social scientists struggled to extricate themselves from the accusations made by logical positivism that research which lacked the solid foundation of measurement was no better than fancy and invention. They sought to develop methods which conformed to the methodology of the natural sciences, and researchers such as George Homans ('general theory') and Kurt Lewin ('force field theory') focused on seeking generalizable laws governing the behaviour of human groups. Today the historical shaping of social science research in a struggle to be 'other' than, but equivalent to natural science research lingers in the imagination of the public, politicians and policy-makers. There remains a political dimension to being a social science researcher, pursuing knowledge and understanding of individuals, social groups and organizations, in a world where status is not accorded equally to different research methodologies (Bridget Somekh article in an edited book(2005),p.2).

However, across the social sciences and humanities, there are differences in the development and popularity of particular methods, differences that are also evident cross-nationally. From the 1930s onwards survey research and statistical methods have assumed a dominant position, whereas qualitative methods have gained ground more recently. There has also been a recent resurgence of interest both in the social sciences and humanities in quantitative methods and in mathematical modes of inquiry, for example, fuzzy logic. Mixing different methods (e.g. Goldthorpe et al. 1968) and the innovative use of statistical analysis (e.g. Bourdieu 1984) are not, however, recent phenomena (Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen (edited) (2008), p. 1).

The growth of explicit interest in mixed-methods research designs dates from the late 1980s, resulting in a number of specialist texts but the practice has historically been intrinsic to many types of social science research. In qualitative research, many researchers have incorporated several quantitative approaches such as cross tabulation of their data ; and

some have adopted a multivariate approach. In 1987, Charles Ragin published his text on qualitative comparative methods, which lies in between qualitative and quantitative methods and draws upon logic rather than statistical probability. Historically there has been a plurality of practices of social research (Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen (edited) (2008), p. 2). The social research is a method used by the social scientists and researchers to learn about people and societies so that they can design products/services that cater to various needs of the people. Different socio-economic groups belonging to different parts of a county think differently (<https://www.questionpro.com/blog/social-research>).

What distinguishes the social sciences today is a positive orientation towards engaging in different types of research practice. The present-day scholars undertaking empirical research view methods as tools or optics to be applied to several different kinds of research questions that they and their funders seek to address in carrying out research. Coding observations and subjecting them to statistical processes is one way of creating and explaining patterns. The Case study and comparative approaches are others, the explication of the logic that brings together the clues about a case and has an explanatory purpose with reference to other cases. These two approaches can also be combined as in embedded case studies that employ both a case study design and a survey design (Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen (edited) (2008), p. 2).

Although qualitative and quantitative methods have evolved from very different scientific traditions as, among others, Charles Ragin (1994) points out, from the viewpoint of how empirical data are used to validate and defend an interpretation, they form a continuum. It can be argued that the two concepts, 'qualitative' and 'quantitative', are not so much terms for two alternative methods of social research as two social constructs that group together particular sets of practices. For instance, quantitative research draws on many kinds of statistical approaches and is not necessarily epistemologically positivistic in orientation. While the social survey is the current dominant, paradigmatic form, there is no uniform 'quantitative research' (Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen (edited) (2008), p. 2). Similarly there is no uniform 'qualitative research' either. Because much of the craft of empirical social research cannot be classified as either qualitative or quantitative, an increased permissiveness toward mixing methods and questioning of the binary system formed by the terms 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' are welcome trends (Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen (edited) (2008), p. 2).

In this new paradigmatic situation many contemporary scholars no longer regard it as reasonable to divide the field of methodology into opposing camps. On the one hand, researchers are willing to learn more about the possibilities of applying survey methods and statistics to their data analysis. On the other hand, what is known as 'qualitative research' has gone a long way since Malinowski's (1922) principles of ethnography or Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory. Different methods of analyzing talk, texts and social interaction have multiplied the 'optics' available to scholars who want to study social reality from different viewpoints (Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen (edited) (2008), p. 2).

Advanced Research Methods in the Social Sciences

Methodology, as it is understood simply refers to the ways the in which we acquire knowledge and comprises a multitude of specific methods and techniques. As such it is embedded in an epistemological tradition of critical rationalism(Karl Popper) and scientific realism. This has been summarized as the “two fold conviction that the world consists of causal mechanisms that exist independently of our study or even awareness of them and that the methods of science hold our best possibility our grasping their true character(Nathaniel Beck article in an edited book, p. 1557). Moreover, the term ‘methodology’ may be defined in at least three ways 1) a body of rules and postulates that are employed by researchers in a discipline of study, 2) a particular procedure or set of procedures, and 3) the analysis of the principles of procedures of inquiry that are followed by researchers in a discipline of study.

The methodology in the social sciences is usually characterized by the following such as 1) it defines the information to be analysed 2) it provides the procedural tools and procedures necessary to perform an analysis and 3) it sets forth the limits of the analysis. Methodology necessarily encompasses the three facets of exploration, description and explanation. Many of the social sciences sub fields(example, economics, psychology , sociology etc) have developed specific models for the collection and organization of knowledge(Ginny E. Garcia and Dudley L. Poston Jr. article in an edited book , p.107).

According to Herbert Blumer (1969), methodology refers to the ‘entire scientific quest’ that has to fit the ‘obdurate character of the social world under study’. Thus methodology is not some super-ordained set of logical procedures that can be applied haphazardly to any empirical problem. In short methodology constitutes a whole range of strategies and procedures that include such as developing a picture of an empirical world; asking questions about that world and turning these into researchable problems; finding the best means of doing so that involve choices about methods and the data to be sought, the development and use of concepts, and the interpretation of findings . The methods per se are therefore only one small part of the methodological endeavour(Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, Julia Brannen(edited)(2008),p.1). The following are the two(quantitative and qualitative) major important advanced research methods in the social sciences are analysed below.

Quantitative research method

In the social sciences, quantitative research can be generally defined as any research that uses numbers as the basis for making inferences about the phenomenon under study. The hall marks of quantitative research are control over extraneous influences(often involving experimental manipulation) and more generally , statistical approaches to sampling, measurement, and data analysis(Jeffrey C. Valentine article in an edited book, p.112). The goals of research represent a convenient way to discuss different types of quantitative research. Researchers employ a descriptive research strategy when they are interested in a numerical description of an object, event, or situation(Jeffrey C. Valentine article in an edited book, p.112).

The branch of mathematics known as statistics is widely employed in quantitative research. Statistics is relevant to quantitative approaches to social science in three major ways such as first, researchers rarely work with entire populations (e.g., all elementary students in a country), as these are generally too large to study. Instead, researchers work with samples, and statistics provides a way of quantifying the expected range of differences between a randomly drawn sample and the population. This is best illustrated in political polling. A second major use of statistics in quantitative research is in group comparisons. A third major use of statistics in quantitative research involves statistical modelling of the interrelationships between variables (Jeffrey C. Valentine article in an edited book, p.113).

Quantitative research is often contrasted with qualitative research. The latter overlaps somewhat with descriptive approaches to quantitative research, but instead of resulting in numerical and statistical descriptions, qualitative research often is presented in narrative form. Historically, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research created a rift among social scientists. At the extremes, quantitative social scientists have argued that a question is not truly scientific unless it can be formulated in mathematical or statistical terms, while qualitative social scientists have argued that quantitative approaches are too crude and can therefore never result in valid knowledge. Most of the modern social scientists believed that qualitative and quantitative methods can complement one another. This recognition is reflected in the growing use of so-called "mixed method research," in which both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed in the same research study (Jeffrey C. Valentine article in an edited book, p.113).

The quantitative researchers are mostly concerned with measurement and sampling and often use deductive reasoning. In addition, it is important to identify facts and laws that can be used as predictive tools. Quantitative research provides data in numerical form and allows for the manipulation of the data using statistical procedures. That information can then be combined with the descriptive data provided through qualitative research to provide more meaningful results (Ginny E. Garcia and Dudley L. Poston Jr., article in an edited book, p.109).

The researchers using quantitative methods seek to transform the collected data numerically so the data can then be analyzed using statistical methods. Quantitative researchers most often use a positivist approach because accuracy is an important requirement. The data are first described using measures of central tendency such as the mean, median, and mode. In most cases, the quantitative researcher next moves to multivariate analyses that examine several variables simultaneously. Quantitative research begins with the formulation of a research question and then a hypothesis or hypotheses. The researcher then identifies and operationalizes the desired variables, creates a standardized data set, defines procedures with which to analyze the data, and finally undertakes analysis using the statistical methods (Ginny E. Garcia and Dudley L. Poston Jr., article in an edited book, p.109). The use of quantitative methods in political science generally means the application of a statistical model to political science data and a statistical model is simply a set of compatible probabilistic assumptions (Kevin A. Clarke article in an edited book, p.2176).

As far as application of quantitative methods in policy studies are concerned, the use of quantitative methods in policy analysis has its intellectual roots in Harold Lasswell (1951, 1970, 1971), who envisions an overarching policy science discipline based on social science knowledge and methods to analyze policy choices and decision making for the democratization of the society(Kaifeng Yang article in an edited book,p.349).

Qualitative Research method

The 'Qualitative research' is a broad idea. The qualitative nature of research may be derived from the research issue, the methods used, the analysis strategies, and the scientific justification of the procedure used(J. W. Heyink and T.J. Tymstra(1993),p.292). The research is called qualitative if it is about determining "what things 'exist' rather than to determine how many such things there are". More literally, 'quality' refers to the nature of things, rather than to their quantity. Whereas quantitative research initially is product oriented, ("What is the impact/outcome of the programme?"), qualitative research is particularly suitable for analyzing processes ("Why does the programme work, or what is exactly the reason why it does not?"). The qualitative method aims pre eminently at clarification, interpretation and to a certain degree at explanation(J. W. Heyink and T.J. Tymstra(1993),p.293). It is not so much the nature of his/her research subject that distinguishes the qualitative researcher from the quantitative one, but the way he handles it. The subject of qualitative research is usually seen in its unicity and not as an exchangeable specimen of a category. In the terminology of Allport (1962) it can be stated, that in qualitative research the morphogenous approach is chosen rather than the dimensional approach in quantifying research(J. W. Heyink and T.J. Tymstra(1993),p.294).

Qualitative research includes a variety of approaches that attend to words, arguments, memes, ideographs, symbols, images, signs, significations, narratives, plots or other symbolic practices in an attempt to understand the phenomena better. Wherever it focuses its attention, qualitative research is interested in meanings, themes, relationships and patterns, not much in hypotheses, variables, measurements, probability sampling, statistical inferences or correlations. Cresswell says, " qualitative research is an enquiry process.... in which the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting". Moreover, he also credits Ragin with recognizing that, " qualitative research rely on a few cases and many variables". For that reason, it is sometimes characterized as a small n research(Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2900).

The qualitative researchers tend to be more interested in content and use induction with more frequency . In this case, the meanings associated with human behavior are taken into consideration. The qualitative methods examine social data without quantifying the data. The qualitative researchers often examine the links between theory and analysis and seek to discover general patterns among and between their variables. Some of the methods involved in qualitative research include grounded theory, semiotics, and conversation analysis. The qualitative researchers more frequently use an interpretive or critical approach and are interested in allowing the meaning of their work to develop as they conduct more research. They are further interested in using their research to explain and predict. Their

data usually take the form of words, rather than numbers, and such researchers most often reason via induction(Ginny E. Garcia and Dudley L. Poston Jr., article in an edited book, p.109).

The qualitative methodology is used by social scientists in the study of human behavior. This methodology may be used in addition to or in place of quantitative methods. The use of qualitative methods by social scientists allows the researcher to obtain a rich set of data that is not easily obtainable with the use of quantitative methods. The qualitative methods encompass a variety of methodologies, including observation, interviewing, document analysis and archival document analysis(Gabriela Guazzo article in an edited book, p.110).

The two key methods used in the social sciences are observation and interviewing. Observation involves the examination of research subjects in the natural social environment with particular attention paid to the subject's behavior and actions. In contrast, interviewing involves direct interaction between the investigator and the research subject. The investigator speaks directly with the subject asking questions related to a specific topical area. Interviews are generally recorded utilizing audiotapes, videotapes, or written notations. Interviewing may take the form of structured or semi structured interviews (Gabriela Guazzo article in edited book, p.110). The analysis of qualitative data includes a variety of methods such as including grounded theory, narrative analysis and computer-based approaches(Gabriela Guazzo article in edited book, p.111).

Over the past two decades, the use of qualitative research in the social sciences has increased significantly. The qualitative research involves research that uses observational, communicative, and documentary methods in natural settings in an effort to understand the social world. Some qualitative researchers have remained squarely in the scientific tradition of post-positivism, insisting on objectivity, rigorous research design, and examining causality. Others are more rooted within interpretive traditions, including symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, hermeneutics, postmodernism, feminism, critical theory, and cultural studies and in varying degrees reject post-positivist notions of scientific rigor(Alan R. Sadovnik, article in edited book, p.417).

The qualitative research is based on what sociologists term social constructionism and interpretivism. Unlike quantitative research, which is usually deductive (theory testing), qualitative research is usually inductive (theory construction). The social scientists do not simply discover or find knowledge; they are not detached from the world they are researching. Rather, they actively construct knowledge by inventing tools and instruments to collect and produce data. These tools and instruments are constantly renewed and revised. The social scientists formulate concepts to make interpretations of the data.

Contributing to Knowledge and Understanding

It is contributing to our Knowledge and understanding. This is because, although qualitative research has historically included work that was based on a positivist perspective, today it is more common for approaches qualitative research to be based on either an interpretive or critical theory perspective. These three perspectives involve different ontologies and epistemologies. Ontologies are about reality, the nature of things of what exists.

Epistemologies are about our knowledge of those things, how we can know and what the limits of our potential knowledge may be (Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2900). As it can be based on very different paradigms, qualitative research can include many different ways of gathering, organizing and reporting its observations and interviews. Qualitative research has been carried out in ways that are not very different from quantitative research, but one thing that tends to set it apart from most quantitative research is its active recognition that it involves interpretations of those observations and interviews and what they represent about the phenomena being observed. It is empirical, but not empiricist. As Denzin and Lincoln have described it, "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2901).

The qualitative researchers are engaged with others, they work within natural settings with those they are observing and interviewing. They attempt to discern what their observations and interviews mean, most often in terms that those being engaged would find consistent with their sense of things. One of the most common ways that qualitative research expresses its recognition of the importance of context is through thick description, which attempts to involve the reader in the feel of the case being described. Another aspect of qualitative research that enhances Public Administration's knowledge/understanding is through its approach to causation. It can present causation as a complex of emergent, unfolding and dynamically interconnected actions, as having iterative, interactive and multi-directional effects (Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2901). The qualitative research approaches also provide a way for the field of Public Administration to incorporate an understanding of tacit knowledge in its body of knowledge. The title of Mc Nabb's book which is in its third edition explicitly includes quantitative and qualitative approaches. In its chapter on research design, it argues that good research often requires using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2901).

Types of qualitative methods

There are quite a variety of qualitative research methods or approaches. The following are some of the examples analysed below.

The Interview

Beyond any shadow of doubt, the method most used and best documented in qualitative research is the interview. Moreover, the interview as a method used under the qualitative research. Interviews may show marked differences in the degree to which they are structured. This degree of structure may be taken as a continuum. On the other hand we see the interview in which a strict structure can be identified. Here not only the topics to be discussed have been worded and laid down, but also the concrete questions themselves. The sequence in which these will be dealt with has been fixed. The respondent is presented with a limited number of response alternatives, from which he/she makes a selection. Thus the interview has been standardized as much as possible. The interviewer may be seen as the yard stick. Moreover he/she is anonymous, 'exchangeable'; his/her personal influence on the course of the conversation is restricted to a minimum. The researcher has made

his/her theoretical concepts operational prior to the interview. Thus the respondent's response serves the researcher's system of concepts, or his theory. This way of interviewing links up with the positivistic research ideas and is strongly quantification oriented (J. W. Heyink and T.J. Tymstra(1993),p.294).

On the other side of the continuum there is the minimally pre structured interview. Topics to be discussed have only roughly been described. Closed questions are avoided as much as possible. The sequence of the questions and the degree to which topics are to be discussed are not fixed. The interview is not standardized; there is ample scope for improvisation. The interviewer has an active and personal influence on the course of the conversation. The objective is to map out (changes in) the respondent's subjective perception of the environment, and that in his/her own terminology. Thus, not the researcher's concepts, but those of the person examined are focused on. In this respect the terms 'open interview' or 'in-depth interview' are also used (J. W. Heyink and T.J. Tymstra(1993),p.295).

Much has been written on the merits of the qualitative interview (see, for example, Denzin, 1970; Silverman, 1985). A brief summary of these merits are such as 1) The respondent himself has the opportunity to raise issues he/she deems essential (for the research), 2) Misunderstandings about questions asked and answers given can be clarified there and then, 3) The flexibility of the interview situation offers the possibility to test out fresh hypotheses straightaway, 4) The interview is a 'wide-band method', because many themes can be checked for relevance at short notice and 5) The interview is considered pre-eminently appropriate for research into feelings, attitudes, intentions and motivations of behaviour (J. W. Heyink and T.J. Tymstra(1993),p.295). However, more deliberate in design than journalistic interviews, qualitative interviews may still be fairly described as "conversation with a purpose". Most generally that purpose is to learn about a research topic from someone else because their point of view is valued. A couple of examples of Public Administration research that utilized qualitative interviewing are Lyles and Mitroff and Lens (Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2902).

Focus Groups

A kind of qualitative interviewing research approach that involves interviewing more than one person at a time, focus groups are a valuable way of adding group interactions to be dynamics involved in interviewing (Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2904). The focus groups originated in sociology in the 1920s, but were primarily used by market researchers for several decades, before regaining popularity in the social sciences in the 1990s, as well as becoming widely used as a marketing and political tool for gathering 'opinions'. They are increasingly being used as a research tool throughout the social sciences, as well as in a wide range of other academic fields. For examples such as health studies, education, political science and geography (Janet Smithson article in an edited book, p.357). Since the mid-1990s, there has been growing recognition of and interest in the potential for carrying out secondary analysis of qualitative data (Janet Heaton(2008),p.33).

Narrative Inquiry

In this interviews are designed to elicit stories from the interviewees. What distinguishes narrative inquiry is the focus on narrative and stories as they are told. Examples of Public Administration research that utilized narrative inquiry include Maynard-Moody and Musheno and Feldman et al(Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2903).

Ethnography

Probably, the most definitive aspect of ethnography is its focus on the culture of the group of people being studied. Whether that group is a primitive tribe or a contemporary organization. According to Cresswell, “An ethnography is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system”. The basic purpose is most often to learn about the culture from people within it. Public Administration researchers are most likely to utilize an ethnographic approach to study an organizational culture, the relationship between an organization and the people it serves or impacts and /or the culture of a community being served or impacted. Example of Public Administration discipline research that utilized an ethnographic approach include Kaufman and Lipskey(Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2903).

Case Studies

According to Yin, “ a case study is an empirical research approach using multiple sources of evidence and investigating a contemporary phenomenon in a way that captures the dynamics of its natural world context”. A case study is likely to include multiple qualitative (and perhaps quantitative) research approaches such as interviews, observations, document examination etc(Larry S. (Luton article in an edited book, p.2903). Examples of classic Public Administration discipline case studies include Allison and Selznick(Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2904).

Content Analysis

If the analysis done is simply based on counting the number of times that terms(or their cognates) appear in a document, such an approach would constitute a quantitative analysis of qualitative data. On the other hand, there are approaches to content analysis that focus on the meaning of the contents in ways that openly depend on interpretation. Examples of work in the field of Public Administration that were influenced by Foucault are Miller’s Governing Narratives, Wagennar’s Meaning in Action and Fischer and Gottweis’s The Argumentative Turn Revisited(Larry S. Luton article in an edited book, p.2904).

However, apart from the above methods, Qualitative Comparative Analysis(QCA) is also there. It was first introduced to the social sciences by Charles Ragin to identify complex patterns of causation by processing social science data with Boolean algorithms. By conducting a formalized comparison, QCA introduces the logic of qualitative research to the study of a larger number cases than are usually examined with qualitative methods. The Qualitative Comparative Analysis usually is employed with a middle sized number of cases(10-30)(Lasse Cronqvist article in an edited book, 2173).

However, many social science researchers use both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide fuller and more complete explanations. Indeed, since the 1980s, there has been a

convergence of the two approaches, and many analyses use both methods(Ginny E. Garcia Dudley L. Poston Jr., article in edited book, p.109).

Conclusion

Both the qualitative and quantitative methods are the presently advanced research methods in the social sciences. The quantitative researchers are mostly concerned with measurement and sampling and often use deductive reasoning. The qualitative methodology is used by social scientists in the study of human behaviour. The qualitative researchers tend to be more interested in content and use induction with more frequency . These two qualitative and quantitative methods are significantly contributing to the social sciences disciplines research for the benefit of humanity.

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