

An Introduction to Social Science Research and its Philosophical Alignments

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Abstract: *Over the years there has been a gradual growth in social science research and this has jolted the academic world, postgraduate students are faced with the highly esteemed tasks to producing dissertations and thesis that meet the contemporary methodological requirements. The aim of this research paper is to shed more light on social science research methods and its philosophical alignments/approach and the obstacles that hinder its use, especially when it is about measuring societal values and interactions. To this end, a detailed explanation of the stages of research in the social sciences as well as the difficulties related to the nature of the sociological disciplinary field are put forward, in order to define the objective posture that the researcher must adopt.*

Keyword: *Methodology, Social Sciences, Values, Research Methods, Society, Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

The term "research" refers to a systematic/analytical inquiry or probe with the idea of studying an item or concept with the goal of uncovering its source or establishing its facts, and occasionally reaching fresh conclusions on the aforementioned subject matter. Research may be defined as a creative and methodical effort to enhance the reservoir of knowledge.

Finding reasons why research is vital may appear to be a no-brainer, yet it is something that many individuals avoid like the plague. However, for individuals who enjoy learning, whether they are members of a research institution or not, undertaking research is not only necessary, but also mandatory (Zarah, 2020). Furthermore, the following reasons below show why research is necessary and valuable:

- It's a tool for expanding one's knowledge and encouraging learning.
- It's a way to better comprehend issues and raise public awareness.
- It aids our commercial success.
- It enables us to debunk falsehoods and defend facts.
- It is a method for identifying, assessing, and seizing opportunities.
- It encourages the enjoyment of reading, writing, analysing, and sharing useful knowledge.
- It is both a source of sustenance and a form of mental activity.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), research and knowledge production are critical to education, development, and our shared future. As a worldwide network, UNESCO connects education research, policy, and practise. The UNESCO research and information centre investigates new opportunities and challenges in a rapidly changing global learning landscape (UNESCO, 2021).

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL SCIENCE

Daniel (2020) defined social sciences as a collection of academic disciplines devoted to studying society. This discipline of research investigates how people connect with one another, how they behave, how cultures form, and how they impact the world. The social sciences contribute to understanding how society works by investigating anything from the reasons of economic development and unemployment to what makes individuals happy. This information is crucial and may be used for a variety of purposes. It aids in the development of business strategy and government policies, among other things. The natural sciences, which include areas such as physics, biology, and chemistry, are distinct from social science as a field of study. Rather of researching the physical world, social science investigates the interactions between persons and societies, as well as the creation and operation of communities. These academic areas place a greater emphasis on interpretation and qualitative research methods.

Daniel (2020) went on to say that social science as an academic area of study arose from the era of enlightenment (or the age of reason), which flourished in Europe for most of the 18th century. Adam Smith, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume were among the major thinkers of the time who provided the groundwork for the study of social sciences in the Western World. Individuals began to take a more rigorous approach to quantifying their observations of society, and comparable parts of society, such as linguistics and psychology, became distinct disciplines of study throughout time.

According to ESRC (2021) assessment on how social science impacts lives, social scientists frequently influence our lives without our being aware of it. A study of crowd behaviour during football events, for example, found that avoiding heavy-handed methods by police can assist preserve crowd control in potentially confrontational situations. The conclusions of the research on how to create a less combative environment are being incorporated into police training across Europe. Other study findings have influenced policies aimed at lowering child poverty and altering the UK tax system in order to assist poorer families. Such study has been utilised by charities such as Save the Children to highlight the higher prices paid by the impoverished for basic necessities such as petrol and banking. Examples of how social science affects our lives include:

- The function of governments in a more market-oriented society, as defined by notable philosophers such as John Maynard Keynes and Karl Popper.
- The concept of the National Health Service was devised by an economist.
- The work of social scientists has affected the delivery of billions of pounds in governmental subsidies to the poor.
- If you're a parent, a councillor, an officer of the law, or a company executive, the findings of social science research continue to be important to you.

Scholars have been able to show over time that social science encompasses a wide range of fields, and that, as diverse as they may appear, they are in many ways intertwined. Economics, Management and Business Studies, Social Anthropology, Development Studies, and Environmental Planning, Demography and Social Statistics, Human Geography, Methods and Computing, Education and Linguistics, Law, Economic and Social History, Politics and International Relations, Psychology and Sociology, and Social Policy and Social Works are some of the major disciplines.

NATURE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

In terms of assumptions about the nature of social science, Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) highlighted that an essential theoretical factor influencing the modern social science research process is the question of which of the several research paradigms supports one's research strategy. However, determining one's research paradigmatic perspective is predicated on several critical philosophical questions that face every researcher. They emphasised that the assumptions of ontology, epistemology, human nature, and technique all have an impact on a researcher's paradigmatic attitude.

Ontology

An ontology is the study of items and their relationships. It specifies criteria for differentiating several categories of things (concrete and abstract, existing and non-existent, actual and ideal, independent and dependent) and their relationships (relations, dependencies and predication) (Corazzon, 2020).

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, according to a peer-reviewed academic resource by (Truncellito, 2020). Epistemologists are concerned with a variety of jobs that may be divided into the following two groups:

- We must define the nature of knowledge; in other words, what does it mean to state that someone knows or does not know something? This is a question of comprehending what knowledge is and how to tell the difference between circumstances where someone knows something and cases where someone does not know something. While there is some universal consensus on some parts of this matter, we will show that it is far more complex than one might expect.
- We must ascertain the scope of human knowledge; that is, how much do we, or can we know? How can we obtain knowledge by using our reason, our senses, the testimony of others, and other resources? Is there a limit to what we can learn? Are certain things, for example, unknowable? Is it conceivable that we don't know as much as we believe we do? Should we be concerned with scepticism, the belief that we don't or can't know anything?

Human Nature

There are assumptions about the interaction between humans and their surroundings. One school of thought maintains that people respond to conditions in their external environment in a mechanical or even deterministic manner, and that humans are conditioned by their external surroundings. This viewpoint contrasts with one in which 'free will' takes centre stage, and man is considered as the controller and manipulator of his surroundings. We see a huge philosophical discussion between supporters of 'determinism' on the one hand and supporters of 'voluntarism' on the other in these two extreme perspectives of the interaction between humans and their environment (Ahiauzu & Asawo, 2016).

Methodology

To be clear, the terms 'methodology' and 'research techniques' do not denote the same thing under this subheading. According to Goundar (2012), one of the key distinctions is that research techniques are the procedures used to do research on a subject or issue. Study methodology, on the other hand, describes how you can proceed with your research. Experiments, tests, and surveys, among other things, are used in research methodologies. Research methodology; on the other hand, include studying the many procedures that may be utilised in the conduct of research as well as tests, experiments, surveys, and critical studies. This is the distinction between the two terms, research techniques and research methodology. It is also worth noting that research methodology prepares the way for correct research procedures to be carried out. Any scientific or non-scientific investigation begins with research technique and ends with research methods.

There are those who argue that social science research is a direct copy of scientific study in ontology and epidemiology. According to Gill and Johnson (1991), the aforementioned reasons are the cause of limited success in management science research, and this is related to the application of scientific methods to real-world problems, particularly social difficulties. As a result, Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) asserted that, although some are drawn to science and its ultimate rationality, others depart significantly and argue for normative social concerns in social research.

PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

There are three primary philosophical traditions in social science research, and these three philosophical traditions are known as:

- Positivism
- Idealism
- Realism

Let's take a closer look at each one of them.

Positivism

Positivism, as defined by (Turner, 2001), is the scientific study of the social world. Its purpose is to develop abstract and universal principles governing the workings of the social realm. A law is a statement concerning the interactions of forces in the cosmos. Laws have to be tested against obtained facts in a methodical manner according to positivism. Auguste Comte, who regarded Newton's law of gravity as the model, supported positivism to legitimise the nascent science of sociology. This advocacy was carried out by Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim in the form of data-driven laws. Positivism, on the other hand, has never gone uncontested, especially in sociology and anthropology, and as a result, it has been the subject of heated epistemological discussion. The Vienna Circle, a group of intellectuals in Vienna who discussed the nature of mind and logic on one side, and their relationships to empirical evidence on the other, defined the argument throughout most of the first half of the twentieth century. This discussion rages on in many forms at the start of the twenty-first century.

The fundamental characteristics of research that is normally situated within the Positivist paradigm as listed by (Neurath, 1973 & Fadhel, 2002) are as follows:

- Belief in the universality of theory and the ability to generalise across contexts.
- Assumption that context is irrelevant.
- The belief that investigation leads to the discovery of truth or knowledge.
- The notion that cause and effect can be separated and analysed.
- The belief that the outcomes of an investigation can be measured.
- The belief in the scientific research method.
- Employs empirical or analytical approaches.
- Goal of finding out facts.
- Believes in the ability to observe knowledge.
- The ultimate goal of the researcher is to develop a complete universal theory that takes into consideration human and societal behaviour.
- Scientific method application.

Idealism

This is a philosophical viewpoint that holds that the mind shapes the world in some way.

There are various types of idealism. Idealism, on the other hand, suggests the predominance of ideas. These might be spiritual or heavenly concepts, or they could be ideas that make up human awareness. Idealism as a philosophical perspective should be distinguished from the adjective idealistic, which has several overlapping polemical connotations. It was created in Germany

throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries. It is commonly regarded as one of two philosophical paths pursued in an attempt to reconcile Cartesian rationalist dualism. The alternative path is materialism, which is frequently contrasted with idealism. Descartes' rigorous separation of thought and matter created unsolvable philosophical issues. While materialists abandoned separation in favour of material reality, idealists eliminated substance from the metaphysical system in their pursuit of a satisfying theory. Throughout the history of idealist philosophy, there has been a movement in the basic understanding of idealism from one in which an object drew its attributes from consciousness to one in which awareness imaginatively conferred some properties on an object (beginning in the late 18th century) (Lee, 2020).

According to an analytical assessment conducted by the University of Cambridge in 2012, as a forerunner to news on the 'Impact of Idealism' project: German Idealism revolutionised the globe and affected politics, science, art, and a variety of other areas. German Idealism emerged in the late 18th century, during the turmoil of the French Revolution. Its first important character was Immanuel Kant, whose concept of "transcendental idealism" centred around the idea that the mind was central to how we view the world, and that perception filtered the reality. Kant contended that we can only comprehend or make judgments about the world around us (or anything else) by experiencing it via our senses and then applying a conceptual framework to those experiences. This was a novel theory of the mind that pointed out the limitations of human cognition by stating that what we see is an universe of appearances processed by our minds and that understanding it independently of ourselves is impossible.

Realism

The current social sciences are theoretically fragmented. A bewildering assortment of techniques vie for attention, each making larger and sometimes more radical claims about the nature of human existence and the best way to study it (Kathryn, et al., 2006). The origins of this fragmentation may be traced back to the 1960s, when a deeply held discontent with mainstream social theory led to a quest for alternatives to the positivism that had come to dominate, notably in the United States, following the conclusion of World War II (Wolin, 1972).

Phillips (1987) defines philosophical realism in general as "the belief that phenomena exist irrespective of being observed, or regardless of our conceptions about them." According to Schwandt (1997), "scientific realism is the belief that theories refer to genuine elements of the universe." 'Reality' refers to whatever it is in the universe (forces, structures, etc.) that generates the experiences we observe with our senses."

There are unsolved philosophical questions regarding realism, and realist philosophers differ on many of these matters; one proponent of realist ideas said that "scientific realism is a majority viewpoint whose proponents are so split as to look a minority." (Leplin, 1984). However, equally significant challenges face opposing viewpoints, and the idea that there is a real world with which we interact and to which other conceptions relate has shown to be a tenacious and powerful one, attracting more philosophical attention following the fall of positivism (Maxwell, 2012).

In two ways, realism is essential. First, it strives for a more just and free society than the one we currently occupy, and to that aim, it attempts to establish an explanatory criticism of essential features of contemporary life. Second, it separates itself from empiricism's or positivism's naive realism. Indeed, the possibility of an explanatory critique of human activities emerges in the distinction between naive and critical realism, and the potential for emancipatory action led in part by explanatory criticism may be realised (Collier, 1994).

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS

Indeed, the social sciences use data collecting (in various forms) as a fundamental strategy in their study process. The goal is to make an objective reading of the facts, to comprehend them (man studying human behaviour) and, above all, to explain them (thus the concept of "explanatory technique"), and to arrive at conclusions that would improve man's experience (Durkheim, 1968).

For the purpose of this research, the steps stipulated by (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2011) will be highlighted below.

- The observation of social facts will be the first stage in a social research project, followed by the formulation of a hypothesis that will be supported by certain research questions.
- The second phase is subject matter investigation, which entails gathering data on a certain topic because all research activity is part of a continuum. The social scientist is not expected to generate new ideas; rather, he is expected to locate himself and engage with prior or current schools of thought (Lahmami, 2020). This can be accomplished by selective reading and writing of materials (such as books, journals, or any type of digital record), as well as exploratory interviews conducted by researchers, witnesses, or members of the general public. After the researcher has listened to and analysed the numerous exploratory interviews, it will be used as much as possible to assist form the foundation of the research. According to Unrug (1975), content analysis will recommend an appropriate operational strategy for dissecting the interviews and arranging the work findings. Taking notes on one's own observations of a phenomenon under investigation might be a useful supplement in this second phase.

Finally, towards the end of this second stage, the social scientist may be required to re-examine his original question, reframe it, or reword it in light of the lessons learnt from previous studies.

- The third phase involves the researcher expanding on his research problems. The difficulty is not how successful a research question is in relation to the technique to take in analysing a specific social reality. To do this, the researcher will need to draw on the theoretical arsenal covered in class or, if required, study theoretical literature. It will be up to him to mobilise the theory in order to call a phenomena into question in its context. It is not a matter of presenting the social reality, but of linking it to other phenomena in order to make it understandable, thus the concept of "schemas of intelligibility" (Berthelot, 1990).
- Following an exploratory activity, the researcher is directed to trace the key characteristics of his model of analysis using a system of ideas and 'hypotheses' after having gained knowledge of the perspectives of analysis open to him and after having expanded his issue (Lahmami, 2020).
- The fifth step of social science research technique is scientific "observation," which is a pretty difficult process, as Gaston Bachelard (a well-known French philosopher) pointed out when he declared that scientific reality is not fair. "Found" is not the same as "conquered and built." It is the same in the social sciences; the researcher is urged to "treat the social facts as objects," not to assess or interpret with the criteria of the social group of membership, as (Durkheim, 1968) urges. The observation might be direct, made by the researcher himself, or indirect, made through a questionnaire or an interview, i.e. by utilising an observation instrument. The most crucial stage is to pre-test the instrument of observation before making it public, since the goal is to collect clear and exact data that meets all of the research device's objectives (Lahmami, 2020).
- The sixth step of the social science research methodology is "information analysis". It includes three major operations. It is, in short, to analyse the data collected and then compare them with the results predicted by hypothesis. The next step is to analyse the relations between the different variables selected. The criterion for maintaining a variable is its degree of correspondence under the main hypothesis. The last operation of this sixth step is the choice of the proper method of analysis; this can be a quantitative analysis involving the use of a summative poll from votes/questionnaires or a qualitative analysis based on the power of interpretation from a point of view such as in an interview with a politician or a scientist. It will be a matter of comprehending his speech and then developing a strategy based on the numerous points he has advanced (Lahmami, 2020).
- The seventh and final step is the conclusion. This is the most important step and usually the most consulted for potential readers. The social scientist designs his conclusion by adopting a tripartite plan. He first recalls the main lines of his approach: his initial question, his analysis model, his research hypotheses, his field of observation, his methods of analysis and his comparison of the variables with his interpretation. Secondly, he summarizes the contribution of his research in relation to the object of analysis. His work can support the conclusions of previous research, rectify them or even challenge them. This is to highlight "the most" brought by the researcher on the object of analysis and the degree of operationaliation of his work. In the final part of his conclusion, the researcher presents the perspectives offered by his research at a practical level (Lahmami, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study is to give an introduction to social science research technique, which is gaining traction in the academic world. To do this, in order to do this a detailed report on the essential stages of social science research has been discussed: from the beginning to the end, via exploration of its challenges, creation of the analysis model, observation and analysis of information. The potential appeal of the psycho-sociological approach to social action, a topic of contemporary study that is also experiencing considerable interest, is discussed in this paper. However, there are still issues connected to the nature of the sociological discipline field: social reality differs from physical reality, which is governed by a set of fixed laws, with the social being indomitable and depending on a number of variables.

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