

The relevance of philosophy in media and communication research

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I. INTRODUCTION

To philosophize we must communicate philosophically. Communication has been an integral part of philosophy. Consequently, we cannot study philosophy without communication; yet, to understand communication we must subject it to philosophical inquiry. The relevance of philosophy in media and communication research cannot be overemphasized. The increasing interdisciplinary nature of scientific inquiry into human behavior has made natural sciences interested in methodologies of the social science. Research philosophy in its nature is to help the researcher evaluate the paradigms of research and the matters of epistemology and ontology. It is commendable that these parameters in social research and in extension communication research support the researcher to describe the research perceptions, elaborate its beliefs, clarify its assumptions and define what reality is. Social sciences has a rich history dating back to 1650, a revolutionary product within natural philosophy and an import from the moral philosophy of the time, it changed the common perception to defining what 'science' is (Kuper & Kuper, 1996). Social science as an academic discipline is concerned with the study of social space, social actors and the interaction between them. As an academic discipline that deals with social space, branches like geography, demography, anthropology and archaeology are examined, and when it deals with social actors, branches like economics, human geography, political science, sociology and psychology are also examined. However, how man describes and interprets certain phenomena within these branches is a function of communication. Therefore, as a social necessity, communication or media science becomes one of the most important branches of social science. This essay, explores a collective concern for philosophical methodologies in the social sciences, a concern to preserve needs for scientific sagacity and the objectives of self-determination in social inquiry, significance and social values, short of which the social research will remain deficient in the understanding of human phenomena.

II. EMPIRICISM AND SOCIAL RESEARCH-

Social scientist use an extensive range of methods to gather, study and evaluate important data in a given social phenomena. Traditional disciplines like mathematics and sociology have now accommodated modern disciplines that are concerned with the evaluation of structures and systematic disciplines like media sciences and political sciences where social research embodies philosophical examination of research methodologies. Social scientists review and criticize social phenomena based on epistemological and ontological assumptions (Uddin & Hamiduzzaman, 2009). These assumptions centred the philosophy of social science on the sharing of experience about the social world in which people's perspective differs from one another as a cross-disciplinary study, and this leads us to empiricism. In the philosophy of science, empiricism is a principle of knowledge, which underscores those facets of logical understanding that are meticulously associated to experience, particularly as shaped through thoughtful investigational provisions. In social research, it is pertinent that hypothesis and theories are tested against the pragmatic natural environment rather than on priori reasoning or perception. Hence, science is considered methodologically empirical in nature. To maintain the philosophical perspective of this essay, empiricism is traced back to Aristotle's philosophy of dictum. In Aristotle's dictum, intellect is naught when it is not experienced first by the senses. Although, philosophers like George Berkeley, David Hume and John Locke helped in the development of empiricism, they all argued in line with Aristotle on experience as the primary source of knowledge, an experience beyond ordinary senses but encompasses all forms of consciousness. Empiricism has become a core foundation of social research through observation and logic. Changing the purpose of social research to creation of theories, negating or corroborating theories through the definitive scientific methods of extrapolation, surveillance, data gathering and inquiry (Savage, 2007). In a narrow sense, social inquiry propagates the notion that there should be a line between ethics, values, theories and methodologies of social research. Although this line if any, allows a limited idea to freedom of inquiry, it is arguable if this distinction forms an important condition in understanding our social space and

the relationship within it as a fact we cannot escape. Indeed, such involvement may be a precondition of objectivity. The understanding of these discussions and the applicability of different approaches of social research, will improve research and more analytical and confident researchers will be the result (May, 2001).

III. METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH-

This essay will focus on the methods of media and communication research as a sub-discipline of social research but with emphasis on the three methodological paradigms in communication research.

There are three methodological paradigms in communication research namely-

1. The rhetorical methodologies
2. The quantitative methodologies, and
3. The qualitative Methodologies of research

Rhetorical methodology-

In media and communication research, the rhetorical methodology examines messages within the framework of political discourse, common culture and arts. Using the Aristotelian lens, the rhetorical methodology focuses on the relationship of the rhetorician and the audience through the triangulation of logos, ethos and pathos. Aristotle described the methodology of rhetoric or rhetorical inquiry using five standards and this are-

1. The standards of invention

The manner we express our ideas or the content of a communication that is in direct consonance with objectives of the rhetorician; in the Aristotelian school of thought the standards of invention in the methodology of rhetoric is implored.

2. The standards of arrangement

In the standard of arrangement, the ability of the rhetorician to organize his argument in a strong and convincing manner where the audience is mesmerized into the argument in fulfilment of the rhetorician's goal then the standard of arrangement will be examined.

3. The standards of style

Closely related to the standard of arrangement, the standards of style is particular to the careful selection of words and non-verbal cues implored by the rhetorician to influence a given audience towards a given aim or objective.

4. The standards of memory and

The rhetoric of memory is perhaps the simplest of all the standards, as it is more specific to the cognitive power to remember words or having a grasp of a given schemata. The ability to hold in memory various schema and to provoke a dissent or acceptance of any schema into the existing schemata is a function of the standards of memory.

5. The standards of delivery

The standards of delivery demonstrate the effect of communication on a given audience. It is measured by the tone of the communication, the medium of delivery, non-verbal cues and the choice of words of the rhetorician.

IV. THE QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY-

In modern quantitative social science research, methodology has been entrenched as the foundation of research, research inquiries are adjusted to align with the methodologies adopted. The dominant epistemologies of social science research are structural-systematic as posited by the Aristotelian school of thought and the associative-quantitative, which is based on the Cartesian-Humean school of thought. However, this essay will focus on the Aristotelian structural-systematic methodology as a form of quantitative social science research method. In the structural-systematic methodology, the researcher's objective is to comprehend the structure that forms the foundation of a given study. Despite this need, it is of no importance to adopt the Aristotelian quantitative methodology when observing phenomena like behaviour (Toomela, 2010). To understand the philosophy of quantitative research, the distinctive views of cause and causality, history of causality and theories of causation become relevant while underlying the nature of causes in philosophy such as causes of efficiency, material, formal, final and causes of example.

Aristotle

According to the Aristotelians, to comprehend a cause is to explain or to know 'why', therefore the inquiry into causes is beyond ordinary inquiry; it becomes a scientific inquiry. This among other approaches makes the social sciences a science discipline with scientific methodologies. Hence, the aim of this methodology

is to understand what the causes of the inquired phenomena are. The Aristotelians identified four types of causes-

- a. The philosophy of causality rooted in structural-systematic epistemology
- b. The philosophy to describe distinguishable elements in scientific inquiry
- c. The philosophy that identifies key affiliations and merits that illustrate the novel whole which emerges in the mixture of those elements and
- d. The dynamic methods of the occurrence of the whole (Toomela, 2010).

Richard Mckeon in 1941 edited the works of Aristotle and quoted the following statement by Aristotle on causes- ‘...all the causes now mentioned fall under four senses, some are cause as the substratum, others as the essence. The semen, the physician, the adviser, and in general the agent, are all sources of change or of rest. The remainder are causes as the end...’

While these methodologies share comparisons, their emphasis and definite procedures are relatively diverse and produce dissimilar results. No research procedure or practice is superior to another. Instead, methodologies to communication research modestly disclose different facets of human communication in action.

The Qualitative methodology-

Qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to comprehend the intricacies of human communication in its natural form. This intricate communication becomes comprehensible through research methodologies like ethnography, focus groups discussions, historiography, and case studies. This essay will explore four empirical and analytical approaches in qualitative research, while maintaining the philosophical lens (empiricism) adopted for this essay.

Empirical and methodical approaches in qualitative research-

- a. qualitative descriptive studies,
- b. grounded theory,
- c. case study, and
- d. ethnography

These methods rely on data to draw conclusions. The researcher has the liberty to examine the data either at close range by interacting with the subject in order to capture real experiences. This type of data collection and analysis is non-linear and not straightforward, but a process that pendulums back and forth (iterative). In qualitative research, data are collected and analyzed concurrently. However, data is gathered for analysis through systematic processes like in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions or participant observation (Mak, 2012).

Qualitative descriptive studies-

The qualitative descriptive studies is designed as a comprehensive summary in everyday terms, of definite events experienced by people or assemblies of people. Although some researchers argue that this category is nonexistent in social research, others on the other hand have embraced this category to a point of abuse, where studies are labelled as grounded theory, phenomenology or ethnography, even though these studies do not meet the requirements of such qualitative methodologies. Currently, many researchers are adopting the qualitative descriptive methodologies in carrying out social science research. Although, wrong labelling of qualitative descriptive studies as grounded theory, phenomenology, and ethnography is in the rise, it is worth mentioning that they are indeed qualitative descriptive studies in a way but not completely in the descriptive sphere because they also incline to expound phenomena. Therefore, a central qualitative descriptive design is a valuable method in and of itself. This type of research is viewed as a categorical alternative to social inquiry, it is less interpretative and it encourages the researcher to live close to the data during data gathering. The qualitative descriptive researcher is not interested in a conceptual or a high abstract of rendering analyzed data. These empiricist qualities make qualitative descriptive research unique compared to other types of qualitative research. Furthermore, qualitative descriptive studies among all approaches to research are the least theoretical; they are largely unadulterated leaving the experience in its true natural form. In contrast, qualitative descriptive inquiries are often modelled after the naturalistic inquiry. The nature and structure of a qualitative descriptive study is unique in its experience as it eliminates manipulation of variables and it does not draw conceptual framework from any existing theory or phenomena. The data collected is raw, the theoretical framework is generated during the data gathering and its phenomena revealed therein. Despite its similarities to grounded theory, a qualitative descriptive study is not a grounded theory, as it does not generate a new theory therefrom (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In the qualitative descriptive study, data is presented in open descriptive summary of the raw data and organized in a systematic and logical manner. The nature of data presentation brings us back to the standards of rhetoric highlighted earlier. This cross-methodological approach is best described by period of incidence; definite or opposite sequential order of experience or, describing an experience from the viewpoint

of more than one participant. The consequence is a qualitative descriptive summary of the selected and systematically organized experiences in the most relevant manner. Therefore, when an open description of a phenomenon is required, a qualitative descriptive study is the best approach. This type of research has helped social researchers to answer the questions who, where, when, what and how of human experiences. There is no shame however, if a researcher names this type of research as a qualitative descriptive study instead of the erroneously naming them as phenomenology, ethnography or grounded theory.

V. GROUNDED THEORY-

Grounded theory is a social science methodology often referred to as the grounded theory methodology (GTM). It has gained popularity within the social sciences based on its symbolic interaction with a focus (subject of study), study processes, interaction between the researcher and the focus and the actions drawn from the study (McCreaddie & Payne, 2010). However, GTM is not a theory but a method of social research, defined in particular terms as a 'strategy' with the aim of generating a theory from the study; this is perhaps the main dissimilarity between the qualitative descriptive methodology and the grounded theory. As a study that generates its theory from the data, it implies that the theory is grounded, or the theory is developed inductively from the data. Strauss and Corbin developed GTM to help in the collection and analysis of data and the eventual emergence of a theory from the same body of data. According to McCreaddie and Payne (2010), GTM begins and ends with data and in-between are the abstractions and understanding of the data. This approach enables grounded theorists to collect and analyze data, offer insight to the data, enhance the understanding of the phenomenon and provide a coherent meaning which will guide the study to necessary or appropriate action.

Furthermore, GTM as an inductive research methodology seeks to ascertain the binding and general principle of the study constructed by generalizations, establishment of relationships and the generation of new theories altogether. GTM recognizes that the inductive process may still have some pre-existing theories or philosophies when analyzing a data; yet, it is not interested in disproving existing conceptualities or theories but to outline the assumptions, stabilize the study and amplify the significance of the data collected. The research philosophy of GTM is to explore the potential antecedents and factors about which little has been known and explored, the empiricist nature of this method creates a level of independence to ground theorists, as they are not bound by pre-existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Thus, it is a naturalistic paradigm with the assumption that reality is manifold in natural and true experience, which is inter-related and links the researcher with the focus (Khan, 2014). Despite the rich literature in GTM, there has been another case for intellectual discussion, which leads us to another philosophy of GTM known as the GPT (grounded practical theory). GPT creates a new methodology using the analysis of discussion, which will guide the assessment of normative theories. The theory argues in favor of communication research, which is dominated by theories of what is, and the normative theories dealing with what ought to be. Scholars of the GPT argue that disregard of normative theories will limit the practicability of communication as a social science discipline (Craig & Tracy, 1995). To elaborate this discussion further we will examine GPT as a meta-theoretical methodology based concept of communication as a practical discipline. The objective of defining communication as a practical discipline is to guide communication scientist in the development of normative theories geared towards communication practice. If this argument must remain lucid, the development of GPT as a grounded methodological means to theorize communication practices will thereafter involve-

1. rebuilding communicative practices,
2. re-describing those practices in less context-specific terms, and
3. Identifying implied principles that guide communication practice.

Generally, this method of social science research has become a relevant point of reference in communication research by the systematic categorization of the various levels inherent in a GPT study. The method begins with a problem level as the grounded independent variable of the study. The problems are then reconstructed logically and matched with techniques deployed to solve the problem; leading the study to the next level called the technical level. This level is crucial in building the theory. Finally, these principles and standards are seminal to communication practice helping it to manage its problems and techniques thereby constituting the philosophical level (Craig & Tracy, 1995).

The epistemology of case studies-

Empiricism has become one of the epistemological methodologies in social research. It is defined as a research methodology grounded on an observation-based model for determining the truth or validity of knowledge claims in which raw data is assigned an important role. As a social science research method, it substantiates the abundance of realities that needs to be observed. This methodology produces realistic and valid views inclined towards the adoption of numerical and observable data called raw data whose objective is to contest or validate current realities.

Case study research method-

The case study method is a resourceful alternative to traditional methodologies in descriptive studies (qualitative descriptive, quantitative descriptive and descriptive correlational designs), it underlines the researchers viewpoint as the central thesis of the research. It embodies both theoretical and practical implications. Other implications, no less significant, takes account of the influence of the method itself, either in the description of a phenomenon in motion or at rest. In conclusion, the convenience of a case study is that it emboldens social scientists to consider supplementary steps to improve educational curriculum that emphasizes communication and relationships between human beings (Zucker, 2009).

Ethnography-

This essay will conclude its discussions on the various methodologies of social research by looking into the method of ethnography. Ethnography belongs to one of the methodologies of social science research that has an empiricist undertone by relying heavily on personal experience of the researcher, which may sometimes involve direct participation. Ethnography also brings to mind the cross-disciplinary nature of the social sciences, as detailed ethnographic studies will often involve ethnographers from various disciplines. In detailed studies, ethnographers will sometimes focus on intensive language, culture education and a mixture of history, observations and in-depth interviews. In a typical ethnographic research the ethnographer uses three types of method to gather raw data. These methods of data collection will include-

- a. Interviews
- b. Observations and
- c. Document analysis

These methodologies in data collection consequently have three types of data/ results-

- a. Quotations
- b. descriptions, and
- c. Excerpts of documents, culminating into a single product: narrative description.

The narrative description is the end product of an ethnographic study taken, measured and analyzed from first experience (empiricism) and will sometimes include charts, diagrams and additional artifacts combined to tell a story (Genzuk, 2003). Ethnographic methods can spring up new concepts or standards, with new variables, for further empirical testing in the field or as raw data for a quantitative social science research. Although it is used in communication research, ethnography is firmly rooted in sociology and anthropology. Today the scope of ethnographic research has been broadened to include such communities as organizations and communities of interests, which is a complete departure from ethnographic studies in geographic communities. While predominantly matched to exploratory research, ethnography lures both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, while moving from problems of the inquiry, perspectives of the ethnographer, and theories that suffice and shift at the same time (Agar, 1996). As a research methodology, ethnographic inquiry delves into categories of human experience up close and personal. It improves and broadens top-down opinions and deepens the social inquiry process, it examines bottom-up perceptions, which helps to generate new methodical insights by appealing to communicating, team exploration of often-subtle arenas of human difference and similarities.

In communication studies, scholars use ethnographic research techniques to evaluate communicative behaviors and phenomena. Ethnographic work in communication studies seeks to clarify 'how' ordinary human practices construct the ordinary actions used by ordinary people in the accomplishments of their identities. This method leads the ethnographer to answer the question 'why' and 'how come' which are fundamental questions in human communication (Rubin, Rubin, & Piele, 2005).

VI. CONCLUSION-

The communication research process is best understood in the systematic execution of three sequential elements. This will involve the use of a definite framework (theory, ontology), classifying the research questions (epistemology) and shaping the best approach to answer the questions (methodology). It maintains that ontology, epistemology and methodology are independent determinants in the research matrix; it also maintains that the tripartite relationship may seem complex with one element affecting the outcome of the other. These elements are actually related to each other and can provide an immeasurable guide to social scientists while they carry out their research. This sequence constitutes the research philosophy. Research philosophy in its nature is to help the researcher evaluate the paradigms of research and the matters of epistemology and ontology. It is worthy to note that these parameters in social research helps us to describe our perceptions, elaborate our beliefs, clarify our assumptions and define what is truth. In media and communication research, an epistemological approach will deal with our choice of empirical validity in our analysis seen as a substantive

and not a methodological issue. These choices do not however guarantee a common position in an ontological inquiry but rather as a field with many variables, it probes our concepts while determining the position of these variations within the concepts. It elucidates the ontological elements as well as the methodological linkages. The ontological assumption in communication research helps us to probe the ways in which events, practices and abilities are accessible and demonstrated in language, the discursive, which could be called etymological inquiry, as it focuses on how knowledge and truth are constructed or changed through time. The methodological assumptions reside the researcher's ability to adopt suitable methodologies where the research is an end value of the researcher. The researcher executes these procedures, which help in the collection and analysis of raw data. The data is then interpreted and condensed into a brief or summary, where unambiguous relationships are established between the research objectives and the summary of the findings. Media and communication studies dictates unequivocal articulation of the research process through thorough understanding of the phenomenon, recognizing, and preserving the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the phenomenon. This unequivocal articulation will permeate the research process and improve its quality, making it easy to interpret the phenomenon in context.

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