

**WITH MORE, WE ARE BETTER: AN ANALYSIS OF METHODS IN
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH**

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Abstract

This paper sought to x-ray the methods available to a communication researcher both from the quantitative and qualitative perspective, and the predominant methods used by researchers and why? Using the generative theory of problem solving, the researchers were able to portray that problem solving in research should not only be limited to few scientific methods, rather there should be more liberal approach to select from myriad of research methods at the disposal of communication researcher. The researcher used library research, survey and in-depth interview methods to address the study. Findings revealed that there are many suitable research methods for communication researches, but researchers limit themselves to very few, thereby repeating methods and neglecting the majority of other methods. Further findings also revealed that most communication scholars, researchers and students have limited knowledge of different research methods that exist and suitable to the field of communication but are not regularly in use for communication studies. Most researcher seem to be conversant with survey method, content analysis, focus group discussion, Interview and observation, notwithstanding that there are more than thirty other research methods that are suitable for communication studies. The researchers, therefore, recommended that researchers should expose themselves and learn more methods existing and suitable in the field of communication and apply them in their studies.

Keywords: Methods, Research, Communication and Communication Research

Introduction

In the very instinct of man is the desire to always solve a problem. This is done to better the world view of people and society at large. Even when one problem seems to have been solved, human beings try to develop better ways of making the problem go away, this lead to more enquiries and the use of different approaches to unravel a given issue. MacLellan, Langley and Walker (2012) noted that the ability to solve complex problems is one of the hallmarks of human intelligence. Not only are humans capable of solving problems of overwhelming complexity, but they employ a great variety of strategies in doing so, because the cognitive systems community is interested in the development of flexible and general problem-solving systems.

In every society, communication is central and as such there chances of having problem with this communication process or the content. These problems need to be solved, hence the need for communication research. This research can be on the content, mode, structure, channel, the communicator and the effect of communication on the people. The various aspects of communication research call for different approaches in addressing them, especially as it is said that effective communication is the hallmark of societal development (Huston & Meirigam, 2018). Inquiries about communication are a natural human activity. In the day-to-day inquiries about communication, we often, make mistakes; science offers protection against such mistakes (Studocu, 2018). Whereas people often observe accurately, such errors can be avoided in scientific matters and research by making observations, a careful and deliberate effort to make sense out of reality.

Communication researchers can avoid over generalization through replication or repeating studies. Once a conclusion is been drawn, often times evidences which contradicts that conclusion are ignored. Researchers commit themselves in advance to set of observations made regardless of apparent patters. Communication researchers avoid such issues by careful and deliberate reasoning of observations. Communication looks for regularities in social life and is interested in human aggregates not individuals. Although, they observe people, they seek to study the underlying systems or patterns not individuals (Studocu, 2018).

Against these backdrop, this study sought to x-ray the methods available to a communication researcher both from the quantitative and qualitative perspective, and the predominant methods used by researchers and why?

Statement of Problem

There are two major approaches available to a communication researcher namely; quantitative and qualitative approaches. These two types of research designs have different methods that can be adopted to execute any research endeavour. The adoption of any of the designs is dependent on the aim the study sought to achieve. When measure of occurrence or quantity (how many) is the main purpose of the study, the researcher is expected to use any of the methods in quantitative design. On the other hand, when the rationale for the study is to provide depth of understanding or “the why” behind a given action or the motivation for such action, then qualitative design is called for (Kautily Society, 2018). However, most researchers, especially student researchers, do select designs for their studies without necessarily figuring out the rationale behind the selection of the design. This, in most cases, produces results that are not revealing much or answers that are already known.

With more insight into research development, researchers are beginning to use hybrid designs, which by default, are expected to be better than either quantitative or qualitative designs. These hybrids are mixed method research designs and triangulation designs. The application of these designs by scholars and researchers, in most cases, seems to be poorly handled.

It is therefore on these bases that this study sought to x-ray the methods available to a communication researcher both from the quantitative and qualitative perspective, and the predominant methods used by researchers and why?

Research Objectives

This study sought to:

- i) Identity the different research methodologies suitable in the field of communication.
- ii) Identify the research methodologies prominently used in communication research.
- iii) Determine the rationale behind the use of these prominent methodologies in communication research.

Research Questions

- i) What are the different research methodologies suitable in the field of communication?
- ii) What are the research methodologies prominently used in Communication Research?
- iii) What is the rationale behind the use of these prominent methodologies in Communication Research?

Review of Literatures

Concept of Research

Research is a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue Greswell (2018). Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2018)

defines research in mere detail as “studies ingoing or examination’, especially. Investigation or experimentation aimed at district and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in light of new facts or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws”.

Researches can be obtainable in different fields of study and spheres of life. Communication inclusively, communication research or research in field of communication can be defined as systematic effort to secure answers to question (Reinard 2011). Leedy (1997) defined research as the systematic process of collecting and analyzing information in order to increase our understanding of phenomenon with which are concerned or interested.

The relevance of communication researcher was made clearly by Worcester (1999, p.3) who write about public opinion research that “polls do not measure some abstract “truth”, but people’s perceptions”. Communication research is an extremely rich field of study that meant much more attention from communication researchers than currently received (Mahmoud, 2011). Communication research involves people as researchers, respondents and interested observes; people whose interactions are not always ethically neutral (Mahmond, 2011).

Quantitative Research Methodologies in the Field of Communication Research

Quantitative research involves “the collection of primary data from large numbers of individuals, frequently with the intention for projecting results to a wider population” (Brennett, 1996). It is normally conducted amongst a representation sample of a target population with the aim to generalize the research findings to the specific population (or universe). The emphasis is on numerical measurement (Smith, 1998; Bless & Hyson-Smith, 2000; Mart, 2001). The large sample is necessary to analyze the results according to categories within target population. Quantitative research can be conducted through various methods some of these methods include:

Survey Methods: It is the techniques that involve carefully sampling of population that provide quantitative descriptions of relationships among variables. This method uses questionnaire to achieve its purposes.

Descriptive or Observational Methods: Direct observation of behaviour by use of some measurement (the researcher doesn't manipulate or change any variables)

Content Analysis: Systematic, quantitative study of verbally communicated material by determining the frequency of specific ideas concepts or terms.

Opinion Surveys: Assessments of reports from individuals about topics of interest.

Experimental Methods: Method of studying the effect of variables in situations where all other influences are held constant variables are manipulated or introduced by experimenters to see what effect they may have.

Face-to-Face (Personal Interviews): Interviews of the interviewer with the respondent at the respondents place of residence, in the street, at shopping malls or at work.

Web/Online Survey: Interviews of eh interviewer through online survey.

Quasi-Experimental: designs of control but not all irrelevant factures. It has stronger external validity because of behaviour of is measured in real life selling.

Field Experiments: facilitates making causal inferences, have strong validity and often fairly inexpensive.

Others forms of quantitative research are-explanatory, expletory, census inferential, ad-hoc surveys, census, opinion polls, library research, theatre-style test, meta analysis, rhetorical, cross sectional, longitudinal research methods and so on.

Qualitative Research Methodologies in the Field of communication Research

In qualitative research, the researcher presents a non-quantitative type of analysis. It is the textual or discourse analysis of data. Some of the qualitative analysis include:

- **Phenomenology;** this form of Research attempts to understand how one or more individual experience a phenomenon.
- **Ethnography;** This form of research focuses on describing the culture of a group of people.
- **Case Study;** this type focus on providing a detailed account of one or more cases.
- **Grounded Theory;** This form of research is inductive in nature based or grounded in the observations of data from which it was developed.
- **Historical Research;** this form allows one to discuss past conditions and allows one to reflect and provide possible answers to current issues.
- **Focus Group Interviewing;** This involves a situation where researchers who use this meet with groups of people to understand their communication characteristics (Berg) with regards to a phenomena.
- **Action Research;** The intended outcomes is social change. It seeks to create positive social change through “a highly reflective, experimental and participatory mode of research in which all individuals involved are deliberate and contributed actions in the research enterprise (Berg,196: Wadsunt)
- **Unobtrusive;** Berg (2009) To some extent, all unobtrusive strategies amount to examining and accessing human traces.

- **Indepth Interview:** Smith (1998) and Benett (1996) emphasizes that depth interviews requires the services of skilled interviewer in order to explicit proper and related information about the issue at hand.
- **Group Discussion:** This is type of research where a selected sample is been brought together to deliberate on a certain phenomena in a controlled environment.
- **Expost Facto Research:** This type of research investigate possible cause and effect relationships amongst variables.
- **Correlational Studies:** This type of research investigates the extent to which variation in one factor corresponds with variation in another factor based on correlational coefficient.
- **Expo Facto:** This form of research is conducted after an event must have taken place and data is already in existence . Asika (2002) “ Systematic and empirical study in which researchers doesn’t in any way control or manipulate variables in the course of the research”.
- **Ethno-Methodological:** This type of research focuses on how people make sense of the world and in common sense attitudes revealed in conversation and behavior Berg (2000).

Empirical Review

In a study entitled, “Research Methodology in Communication: Review and Commentary, Journal Annals of the International Communication Association Voll, revealed that there are good reasons to view research methods as the servant of theory and research design, measurement and analysis should be treated within the perspective of model or theory which makes its relevant according to several recent and continuing trends in theoretical approaches to communication are isolated and more obvious methodological implications of each explored.

In another study entitled “Guide to Communication Research Methodologies” by Malik (2017) which revealed that each methodology has its own merits and often work well on its own or together though it was noted that it is worthwhile to learn other various research methods which allows them to study their interests in greater depth and breath in order to allow them ability to assemble stronger research studies and answer their questions about communication as a concept and a field of knowledge more effectively.

In a study entitled, “Research Limitations and Necessity of Reporting them” by Price, James .H. & Mu-nana (2004) it was revealed that the limitations of a study are characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influenced interpretation of findings from researcher such as constraints on generalizability, applications to practice and utility of findings which results to ways which people chose design of study.

Also, in a study entitled, “Communication Research as a Social Science Discipline Status , Problems and Opportunities” by Khan (2018) which was built on the assumptions that Social Scientific Paradigm of Mass Communication research developed in the states has generated over the years. it analysed the field of communication and identifies some technical system problems providing a solution that apparatus for a natural level of institute of journalism and Mass Communication is proposed as one of the strategy of developing the Social Science field especially Mass Communication.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the generative theory of problem solving. MacLellan, Langley and Walker (2012) noted that the generative theory of problem solving also shares the same principles of the standard theory which states that problem solving involves carrying out search

through a problem space in an effort to transform an initial state into one that satisfies a goal description. However, the generative theory of problem solving adopts all the assumptions of standard theory, but it also moves beyond them to incorporate new postulates, which include:

1. The primary mental structure in problem solving is the problem, which includes a state description and a goal description.
2. Problems and their (attempted) solutions reside in a working memory that changes over the course of problem solving, whereas operators and strategic knowledge reside in a long-term memory that changes gradually if at all.
3. The problem-solving process operates in cycles that involve five stages: problem selection, termination checking, intention generation, failure checking, and intention application. Each stage involves changes to the problem structures in working memory.
4. Alternative problem-solving strategies result from variations on these five processing stages, with their settings being entirely independent of each other

Methodology

The researchers utilized the Survey and Library research methods. For the Library Research, the researchers studied 150 research works of students from the seven selected Universities in the South East which are University of Nigeria Nuskka (UNN), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Godfery Okoye University, Enugu, Nnamdi Azikwe University (UNIZIK), Anambra State University(ABUS), Imo State University Owerri (IMSU) and Ebonyi State University (EBUS) respectively. 50 published journals works in Nigeria in the field of communication was studied and analysed by the researchers during the course of the research.

For the Survey research method, the tool of questionnaires was used to gather relevant data which are vital to the study. The questionnaires were distributed to a population of 1,250 Mass Communication students from six (6) Universities respectively which are University of Nigeria Nuskka (UNN), Godfery Okoye University, Enugu, Nnamdi Azikwe University (UNIZIK), Anambra State University (ABUS), Imo State University Owerri (IMSU) and Ebonyi State University (EBUS). For the Mass Communication scholars/lecturers interviewed in the course of the study were University of Nigeria Nuskka (UNN) (20), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) (15), Godfery Okoye University, Enugu (8), Nnamdi Azikwe University (UNIZIK) (20), Anambra State University (ABUS) (12), Imo State University Owerri (IMSU) (15) and Ebonyi State University (EBUS) (12) respectively.

Using the Taro Yamaen Formula

$$N/1 + n (e)^2$$

Where:

n = Desired Sample Size

N= Population Size

e= Level of Significance

1= Constant Value

Population Mass Communication students were 1250

$$1295/1 + 1295 (0.05)^2$$

$$1295/1 + 1295 (0.0025)$$

$$1295/1 + 3.2375$$

$$1295/ 4.2375$$

$$=305.6 \text{ that is } 306$$

Therefore, the sample size for this study is 376 that is 306 students and 97 lecturers. The researchers distributed a total of 376 questionnaires, out of which 300 were returned and out the 300 questionnaires, 250 was filled correctly and valid for the research work. For the Library Research Method, the researchers utilized 150 past research works from these schools equally selecting 25 past researches each from the six (6) different schools which formed the population of the study. The researchers also had an interview section with lecturers of Mass Communication in these selected universities, the number of lecturers interviewed in the course of the research were 20 lecturers.

Data Analysis

What are the different research methodologies suitable in the field of communication?

The researchers studied 150 research works of students in the South East and 50 published works on journals in Nigeria in the field of communication from past researchers. In the seven selected Universities, 20 lecturers were interviewed by the researchers. Some of these research methods are listed below by researchers.

Qualitative research methods	Quantitative research methods
Expo-factor	Survey
Participant observation	Telephone survey
In-depth interview	Face-to-face questioning
Focus group	Web surveys
Ethnography	Experimental/naturalistic
Grounded theory	Explanatory
Phenomenology	Descriptive observation
Quota system	Content analysis
Group discussion	Opinion surveys
Basic fundamental	Simulation
Applied research	Panel studied
Action Research	Frend studies
Social impact assessment	Cohort analysis
Evaluation	Ad-hoe surveys
Summative evaluation	Library research
Formative evaluation	Quasi
Correlation	Theater-style text
One time research	Meta analysis
Case study	Rhetorical
Diagnostic research	Goss sectional
Historical research	Longitudinal
Overt research	
Historiography	
Unobtrusive research	
Participant observation	
Mixed method	
Triangulation	

A lot of respondents both scholars and students alike in the study had a limited knowledge of different research methods suitable in the field of communication which are suitable for research.

A large chunk of the respondents knew a few qualitative research methods with expo factor and interview at the top of the researchers knowledge and in quantitative survey and content analysis took lead amongst a large list of methods showing that the communication researchers, scholars and even students are still miles away from grasping the full potential of different research methods existing in the field of communication research.

Question 2: What are the research methodologies prominently used in Communication Research?

Research Topics	Students/ Scholars
Assessing Mass Media Influence in Promoting industry and Commerce through recessing Nigeria Economy (Survey Study)	Mbogu Chika
Influence of Political Advertising on voters behavior: A study of 2015 gubernatorial election (Survey Study)	Ezeamalu Cynthia
Influence of Formal Journalism Education on journalists professional practice in Enugu State (Survey Study)	Uche Chinonye
Perception of Social Media in Nigerian Undergraduate: A study of GOU (Survey Study)	Igwemma Pamela
Analysis of the Influence of TV Commercials on parents choice of schools for their children (Survey Study)	Ogbuanu Ebuka
Influence of Nolly wood movies on the social behaviour of students in public secondary schools in Enugu North (Survey Study)	Eneh Chinasa
Analysis of N. paper coverage of noise pollution in Nigeria (JAN 1 TO JUNE 30 2017) (Content Analysis)	Oke Dominion
Influence of Radio Biafra's secession campaign's on residents of Enugu State (Survey Study)	Ozodinobi Adanna
Influence of Violent TV cartoon Programs on children in Enugu Metropolis (Survey Study)	Ekwe Uchenna
Assessment of readers perception of the use of photographs in Nigerian Newspapers (Survey Study)	Odionyenfe Ezinne
Students Perception of the Corporate image of GOU (Survey Study)	Eke Lawrencia
Influence of Action movies on the social behavioral pattern of undergraduates in Enugu State. (A study of the movie Fast and Furious) (Survey Study)	Obi Ebele
Social media coverage of Reality Shows: A content Analysis of Big Brother Naija Show Facebook, Twitter and Instagram Fan Page (Content Analysis)	Amadi Chukwudera Deborah
Influence of the Broadcast Media on the learning quotient of Students residents in Owerri Municipal (Survey Study)	Anele Miracle
Radio Broadcasting programs and rural development in Nigeria: A study of residents in Agwu LGA Enugu (Survey Study)	Anosike Faith
Gender Equality and political participation: An assessment of African independent Television influence on women political participation in Enugu State (Survey Study)	Mbah Jacob
An Assessment of facebook and Radio Advertisement on the purchasing habits of GOU Students. (Survey Study)	Chukwu Mmesoma
News preferences in Enugu State: Analysis of Broadcast media and social media news consumption	Item Mercy
Influence of Advertising on Business organization: A case study of Diamond Bank (Survey Study)	Duru Joy Ifunanya
Public Perception of the influence of social media in the fight against corruption in Nigeria (Survey Study)	Duru Daniel
Effects of Gratification on the performance of Journalists in Owerri Metropolis (Survey Study)	Etumnu Emeka Williams

From the table above, past researches which are often tailored along a few research methods while respondents acknowledge the existence of other research methods in the field, a few like content analysis, survey, indepth interview, focus group and participant observation was the predominate methods used by students and scholars alike in the field. This shows that though many communication researchers are aware of the existence of different research methods but they are limited by different factors though some beyond their control.

Question 3) What is the rationale behind the use of these prominent methodologies in Communication Research?

Variables	Frequency
Challenge of breadth and focus	6 (2.4)
Multiple methods	7 (2.8)
Scholarly rigorous challenges	12 (4.8)
Personal challenge	18 (7.2)
Structure of field challenge	7 (2.8)
Ethical challenge	10 (4)
Availability of reliable statistics	18 (7.2)
Cultural and custom related issues	20 (8)
Identification and management of interviews	12 (4.8)
Public education	15 (6)
Knowledge of research methods	15 (6)
Research methods structures	25 (10)
Financial contributions	22 (8.8)
Past researches in the field	20 (8)
Accessibility of information	21 (8.4)
Time factor	22 (8.8)
Total	250 (100)

From the table, the rationale behind the use of these prominent methodologies in Communication Research in the field of communication can be linked to the different challenges existing in the field of communication that often limit the researchers to a few methods such as challenge of breath and focus, personal challenge and measurement of cross-cultural environment taking top with others challenges explored by researchers amongst respondents which often times hinder researchers from exploring other methods of communication research.

Discussion Findings

Research Methods Suitable in the Field of Communication

It can be said that many research methods exist in the field of communication with a broad categories often known as Qualitative and Quantitative research methodologies. From analysis of data collected by the researchers, it is fitting to say scholars and students alike have limited knowledge of different research methods suitable in the field of communication. A large chunk of the respondents knew a few qualitative research methods with expo factor and interview at the top of the researchers knowledge and in quantitative survey and content analysis took lead amongst a large list of methods showing that the communication researchers, scholars and even students are still miles away from grasping the full potential of different research methods existing in the field of communication research., it can be said that other methods if applied can provide a more reliable, accurate and valid analysis with a fresh point of view as seen in a study entitled “Guide to Communication Research Methodologies” by Malik (2017) which revealed that each methodology has its own merits and often work well on its own or together though it was noted that it is worthwhile to learn other various research methods which allows them to study their interests in greater depth and breath inorder to allow them ability to assemble stronger

research studies and answer their questions about communication as a concept and a field of knowledge more effectively.

Research methodologies prominently used in Communication Research

The researchers in the study titled “With more, We are better”, sought to analyze different research methods existing in the field of communication. From the analysis of data collected by the researchers, it can be said that many in the field of communication : past researches are often tailored along a few research methods while respondents acknowledge the existence of other research methods in the field, a few like content analysis, survey, indepth interview, focus group and participant observation was the predominate methods used by students and scholars alike in the field. This shows that though many communication researchers are aware of the existence of different research methods but they are limited by different factors though some beyond their control to mention but a few notwithstanding that there are more than thirty other research methods which if applied can better address the research issues in question. In a study entitled, “Research Limitations and Necessity of Reporting them” by Price, James .H. & Mu-nana (2004) it was revealed that the limitations of a study are characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influenced interpretation of findings from researcher such as constraints on generalizability, applications to practice and utility of findings which results to ways which people chose design of study.

The rationale behind the use of these prominent methodologies in Communication Research

Also, from the study, it revealed that the rationale behind the use of these prominent methodologies in Communication Research in the field of communication can be linked to the

different challenges existing in the field of communication that often limit the researchers to a few methods such as challenge of breath and focus, personal challenge and measurement of cross-cultural environment taking top with others challenges explored by researchers amongst respondents which often times hinder researchers from exploring other methods of communication research. This can be seen in a study entitled, “Communication Research as a Social Science Discipline Status , Problems and Opportunities” by Khan (2018) which was built on the assumptions that Social Scientific Paradigm of Mass Communication research developed in the taets has generated over the years. it analysed the field of communication and identifies some technical system problems providing a solution that apparatus for a natural level of institute of journalism and Mass Communication is proposed as one of the strategy of developing the Social Science field especially Mass Communication.

It can therefore be said though the field of communication continues to wax strong on a daily bases, much more can be done by scholars, researchers and even students to ensure a more vast knowledge of the communication by applying various research methods which over the years have remained dormant.

Conclusion

This study provides a starting point for differentiating between different research methodologies existing in the field of communication will categorizing these methods into two broad continua which are qualitative and quantitative research approaches. A full appreciation of these methods and their difference requires a complex presentation than that presented in simplified discussion based on the fact that implementing these research methods requires specialized training.

The intent of this article is not to ostracize researchers for obvious concentration in a few limited research methods but widen the scope of researchers by presenting different research methods which are no existence in the knowledge of these researchers due to various extraneous challenges which are either within researcher's controls or not. The use of these research methods should be tailored by questions with asking not by concern of the methods involved. Inquiries into social phenomena is a tasking inquiry and both current and future social researchers should be familiar with different approaches in conducting research to understand and achieve greater knowledge of complex issues in communication and to store for anything less would be counterproductive because "with more, we are better".

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by researchers based on the findings of the study. Based on the findings and observations in the study that explored different research methods existing in the field of communication, it can be said that:

- A wider knowledge and understanding of the different research methodologies suitable in the field of communication should be explored and used by researchers apart from the obvious dominant ones that can rightfully be said to be over used by researchers in the field of communication. Alternative approaches can be explored by researchers to still arrive at objective and analytic findings in the field.
- Today, that researchers have a wide knowledge of research methods existing in the field of communication is an understatement of the century. Research methodologies prominently used in Communication Research are often meet with different challenges exist that stands as stumbling blocks both man-made and nature orchestrated but

researchers can seek for loopholes in these challenges and explore these researcher methods in an ethical and morally justifiable approach to gather and analyze data with regards to a research work.

- With more research methods, we are better in solving research problems in the field of communication as a whole. Communication scholars and students alike should work within the cover of the ethical guidelines of communication to explore these communication research methods while achieving the purpose of the said research. From all these research methods suitable for communication research only a few are used by researchers, therefore, its imperative that urgent actions been taken to remedy such daily occurrence that downplays the importance of methodologies in communication research

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