

In Search of Effective Research in Social Sciences: Discussing the Key Fundamentals

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Abstract:

The objectives and research methodologies of different "sciences" naturally differ from one another. Since each science generates a certain kind of knowledge, it is morally unjust to compare and devalue one science against another. The question is if this truth is reflected in academia's thinking and behavior, globally. Experiences suggest that, despite the enormous contribution of social sciences to human civilization, the knowledge engendered from natural sciences research is often given more respect than those from the social sciences. In the given reality, a social science researcher faces a struggle to remain motivated. The inherently intricate nature of social science research exacerbates the dilemma and frequently creates a scope that raises doubts about the validity of the study. Such a scenario calls for extraordinary planning from a social science researcher, which is anticipated to be done both before and throughout the research process.

Given this call, the present paper attempts to draw the key requisites, essential for effective research. The paper, while underlining the significance of social science research, focuses on some fundamental questions that collectively seek to explore what makes research more effective and how a researcher can attain it. This paper, instead of describing the elements of research in social sciences, draws the stages of research, required to be followed before and during the investigation. To present the discussion the paper uses exploratory and descriptive methods.

Keywords: Research, Social Sciences, fundamentals, research cycle, political studies

Background

Academic research is a serious, sensitive, and systematic process of thinking that occurs in the background 'need', required to be identified as knowledge (developing new knowledge or recognizing and addressing a problem). The perception and understanding of 'need' vary as a researcher's intellectual responses grow against the backdrop of cultural, social, economic, and political experiences, expectations, and disciplinary training. Among many other effects, the impact of disciplinary influences is important to recognize because it directs a researcher's attention to particular questions that try to explore what is known and if the known is adequate in and of itself¹. A researcher, while pointing to the insufficiency of the existing knowledge, is

¹ Disciplines define themselves by their epistemological foundations and hence what is essential to know is argued differently.

expected to think further about how to fill the identified gap and how to know what so far is not known. To meet what is expected there is a clear requirement of rigorous reading of relevant literature, which is even otherwise necessary to understand the variations of knowledge. While there is a general phenomenon of variation of knowledge within and between disciplines, differences are greatest within the social sciences. This is perhaps because, within the social science, the concerns for 'knowledge' are widely diverse and extensively humanitarian. In this discipline 'knowledge' that is important to be 'known', is investigated through human-centric approaches, which allows and urges a researcher to identify and focus on the issues attached to the human mind, needs, desires, sorrows, sufferings, and activities. Importantly, a researcher, while identifying and describing a concern, has to justify why the 'same' is important to be realized and solved as a part of knowledge.

Since here, the unit of investigation is human, and society itself, the nature of expectation from a social science researcher is different from natural sciences, to reach the required understandings, this pinpoints to certain per-understandings and mapping of the thinking process². A common challenge is, how to explore and understand this per-understanding and how to do the mapping. Understanding this very challenge before social science researchers, the following sections attempt to propose what is the possible best way to attain a researcher that can be accepted as effective by academia.

Why Research: Stating the Significance

Thrust to know the truth is associated with the idea of an ideal, which needs to be recognized as more than just an intellectual activity. The value of research rests in what it can offer to humans and the environment. Given that perfect existence has numerous needs, contemporary civilization has classified and categorized knowledge as a system of disciplines, the purpose is to find, investigate, and achieve the ideals, essential for human survival with dignity. Globally, the intellectual energies that perform and act within the purview of a discipline use different lenses to discern the necessity, meaning, and relevance of 'knowledge', hence the concerns of established disciplines vary in priority, character, and subject matter. For instance, for natural sciences meaning and relevance of knowledge emerge in the context of the natural world and hence its investigation moves around the issues related to the natural sciences. Whereas, according to social sciences, the meaning(s) and logic of knowledge is to learn about human societies and discover and comprehend their patterns, processes, and issues. The key focus here is on making a society 'just', hence any difficulties that impede the 'just and ideal' society need to be explored, and addressed. While claiming to be an anthropological asset, such research is

² The individual, group, or thing that is the focus of the investigation is referred to as the unit of analysis. The usual units of analysis include people, groups, organisations, nations, technologies, objects, and so on.

expected to demonstrate why the subject matter and units chosen are relevant, as well as what it may offer in the future and to whom. Certainly, the idea of 'contribution' is the central subject of any research. In social sciences, logic for research is indeed beyond a degree of doctorate, and hence social sciences as a science of human beings and societies, propose and urges to do research to –

- Identify what is ideal and attain an ideal society
- Explore and pursue the truth(s) of society (societies) (study individuals, groups, and communities)
- Understand the nature of human societies and the reasons and impact of the sufferings of living beings (including the environment) (study individuals, groups, and communities)
- Knowing that is important to be known (to be more precise about understanding the nature, causes, and impact of the sufferings which in research is usually pointed as the problem)
- Get involved in the process of theorization or testing what is been theorized³
- Explore the difference in perspectives and perceptions (role of background and pre-conditions attached to the same) and understand the reason (s) behind it.
- Understand the shifts in trends and add to the discourse (need for primary data)
- Disprove the popular lies with scientific investigation and present the truth, think, and go beyond the existing notion(s).
- Test the legitimacy of knowledge claims, and justify the findings scientifically
- Create a new system of knowledge that addresses the real needs and priorities of individuals, groups, or communities.
- Explore and sustain the utility of available resources for all.

In social sciences, knowledge is insufficient unless it proposes something useful to humanity. Since societies are diverse it is critical to find a common value that can be commonly determined as a contribution. A careful understanding of the key preconditions of research, however, helps to minimize the complexity of the research process.

A commitment for effective research: Understanding some preconditions

Unlike natural science research, in social science research logic to do research holds obvious diversities, mainly because as part of research, each society has a different priority to be examined. Consequently, for a researcher before choosing a research area and topic, it is opined to pre-examine if the priority needed to be chosen for the research is real and addresses the needs of society. To justify the topic and concern, one has to demonstrate why scientific research is

³ The process of theorization may involve inductive and deductive reasoning. Deduction is the process of making judgements about a behaviour or occurrence based on preliminary premises and theoretical or logical justifications. On the other hand, induction is the process of making judgements based on evidence or observations.

required on this specific issue and why not on any other. In this sense, some pre-preparations are essential, for instance-

Key Virtues to be developed

- ✓ Originality in thinking and observation
- ✓ A rational reader (focusing on key concerns, as everything cannot be taken as a research concern)
- ✓ Determination to know what is required to be known (a commitment to self)
- ✓ Effective Hard work (not smart work)
- ✓ Effectively honest (towards the truths and realities)
- ✓ Enhance the foundation of criticism
- ✓ Habit of listening /discussion (does not mean debating)
- ✓ Welcoming critical comments and observations
- ✓ Courage to accept that you can be wrong

Researching before Research

Each research, to be acknowledged as effective, demands pre-research. This perhaps may appear as surprising but the reality is that before deciding the method of research and choosing between quantitative and qualitative methods a researcher has to -

- ✓ Make a list of the needs and priorities of a society (ies). If the concern or research question is derived from the background of political studies, explore what is political in it.
- ✓ Test the validity of concerns, and discuss the identified concerns with professors and peers.
- ✓ Start reading relevant literature, in a broader sense.
- ✓ Identify the area of research and frame a statement or inquiry, related to the same.
- ✓ Identify the unit (s) or theories of inquiry (it is different from the topic) and explore and examine the operational definition of the identified units or theories.
- ✓ Review relevant literature (limited) on the same.
- ✓ Synthesize the concepts established in the framework of the specified notion, idea, or theory (at least attempt).
- ✓ Discover the gaps and focus on the required to address them.

- ✓ Explore the missing values that are otherwise important for humans and humanity.
- ✓ Consider how to best justify your research area and topic selection.
- ✓ Identify the features of various approaches and methods and choose a method fitting best to address the identified concerns (requires critical engagement with methodology)

Pre-realization of the challenges

During the study process, researchers may encounter frequent challenges such as

- ✓ Identifying the correct priority need or problem and concern without personal biases.
- ✓ Justifying the problem as a problem.
- ✓ Identifying what is political without being political (if the inquiry is concerned with political studies).
- ✓ Finding literature that is relevant and defines the problem without biases.
- ✓ Methodological confusion, which method and approach can address the identified concern best?
- ✓ Own attitude and approach towards things and developments, happening around.
- ✓ Understanding with the guide or mentor.
- ✓ Responses and challenges from the society/ customs/ traditions that are often passive towards nontraditional research.
- ✓ Economic constraints (absence or insufficient financial support from the institute or family).
- ✓ Uncontrollable interferences come from within the society or even outside.
- ✓ Ambition about the research project ultimately disturbs the time mismanagement.
- ✓ Choosing between Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary, and Transdisciplinary research⁴

Processing toward effective research

For social science researchers, the entire society is a laboratory, and hence changes that are slow or even rapid are essential to be observed and investigated scientifically. Here, scientifically is not synonymous with positivism or is not a rejection of the knowledge attained by adopting a non-positivist approach. Instead, this entails that since the change in a unit of a society instigates changes in the entire society, only systematic thinking can help in understanding the reason

⁴ Multidisciplinary research draws on several disciplines in parallel but they remain separate from each other. Interdisciplinary research synthesizes approaches from different disciplines into a new and coherent whole. Transdisciplinary research integrates and transcends disciplinary boundaries, bridging humanities and sciences.

behind and consequences of the same. Importantly, in social science research, the idea and practice of thinking for knowledge are attached to a problem (s), faced by common. Hence, the process here begins with a question that asks how to identify and argue a 'problem as a problem'. To address the question, scientific strategies advanced in social science research propose to follow certain steps such as

Step 1. Think (except reading relevant literature, start looking around what is most disturbing in the existing society (societies))

Step 2. Is there any constraint that is causing the problem? What has caused it to become a social, political, or economic issue? Is the identified and argued concern general and valid?

Step 3. What is the nature of the problem and why?

Step 4. Whether this problem is identified, by academia, if so, then how has it been defined, argued, and addressed?

Step 5. If not then what next (original), what can be done theoretically how theoretic promises can be implemented, and what are the hindrances in the way?

It is important to realize and adopt the steps mentioned above mainly because this enables a researcher to attain the required justifications and aids in addressing how one may claim to know what is vital to know for an ideal society. The thinking process is not an attempt to answer all of the issues that will arise during the research process; rather, it is a process that will reveal that there are some requirements and problems that must be addressed as a priority. The described process can be understood as follows-



Figure: 1: Cycle of the research process

Figure 1 depicts research as a rational thinking process; it is important to note that a researcher is not only expected to think rigorously, but, s/he should also find valuable findings that are relevant to either understand the problem or address the problem. Thinking methodically is vital here; in fact, what to think and how to think are the two primary considerations. Only regular readings and an appropriate interpretation of each reading can contribute to attaining the right

concern⁵. The 10 stages highlighted in the above figure, propose the required pattern of thinking, each stage has its specific requirements, for instance-

Stage 1 Reading what is available and observing the surroundings

Reading and observation, which are the early stages of any inquiry, serve to shape the thought process. In the researcher's conceiving, this generates concerns such as what value is, if values exist in multiples, whether value is essential and achievable, and how to obtain it.

As readings and observations guide the thought process, they must be read and observed objectively. Only this can help you grasp what the true problem is. An activity like such serves purposes, assessing the present state of knowledge in the field of investigation, identifying the major authors, papers, theories, and findings in that area; and recognizing knowledge gaps in that research area.

Stage 2 Understanding the problems: reasons and Nature

Since society is the unit of examination in social science research (which encompasses humans and the environment), a researcher reading and observing may come across many problems that are inextricably related. Before deciding on an issue to be analyzed and addressed, a researcher must consider the causes and nature of these many difficulties. S/he should think generally about why these numerous problems have developed and what the underlying cause is.

Stage 3 Filtering: focusing on one problem and forming research questions developed in the background of the identified problem

Stage 3 is critical for social science research since any problem identified throughout the reading and observation phase might be deemed appealing and serious enough to solve. The filtering process poses a query to a researcher: which of several relevant problems is the most essential and requires urgent investigation? This enables a researcher to offer research questions and concerns, which is otherwise the most crucial aspect of the overall investigation method. It is important to note that only effective research questions can address topics such as what, why, how, and when and can appeal to a larger demographic.

Stage 4 Clarifying the limitation of the study

While focused on a problem, a researcher should be aware of what he or she will and will not do. To avoid the issue of authenticity, the 'what not' should be justified persuasively. A reader of the research, while reading the discussions and findings, must grasp what this research is meant to achieve and propose, as well as what cannot be anticipated of it.

⁵ It is essential to note here that choice of right concern is subjective. Something which is a right concern for someone, can be of non-relevant for someone else, here the role of justification is very important.

Stage 5 Identification and justification of the purpose

In the research process, stage 5 supports stages 3 and 4, implying that the researcher, once persuaded of the discovered need, problem, or worry, should present appropriate arguments and propose why this problem or concern was chosen for inquiry and what the aim is. For a researcher, it is morally critical to explain how the option chosen for research would introduce and promote the ideal or just.

Stage 6 Decide the units or theories for investigations

The stated objective and reason in social science research must also designate units of inquiry and justify which theories will be explored and evaluated for the same. This step emphasizes that if justice is chosen as a topic for inquiry, the idea of justice will be investigated in the context of injustice against whom whether it is a specific group, class, community, region, or what, also among many theories, which one or three theories are going to be texted.

Stage 7 Explore the method and decide on the methodology and research design

The concern or question that has to be addressed or identified determines whether to use a mixed method, qualitative, or quantitative approach⁶. This is possibly the second most difficult choice to make, after deciding which unit to examine and which problem to look at. However, having a thorough grasp of the three approaches can aid in decision-making, therefore it is frequently advised to ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of each. Just as quantitative research can answer problems that qualitative research cannot, qualitative research can contribute to knowledge of issues in ways that quantitative research cannot. The subtle differences between the two may be summed up as follows: qualitative researchers can offer particular settings that help establish a more nuanced grasp of abstract ideas, something that quantitative methods sometimes miss. Additionally, qualitative methods can offer reasoning that is not as generalizable as quantitative methods do. A researcher uses reasoning and observations in a qualitative approach; in a quantitative method, however, the researcher must interpret and report the findings of the data.

Another crucial component of social science research is research design, which aids in a researcher's ability to stay committed to their research goals. Making judgments on the general goals and methodology of the study, as well as whether to do primary or secondary research, are all part of creating a research design. Here again, the investigation's goal will determine the study design, which may be generally divided into positivist and interpretative categories. Interpretive

⁶ Some scholars points that the research appears to be qualitative based on the questions' use of terms like "explore," "understand," and "generate." On the other hand, the terms like "correlate," "relate," or "compare" imply that the investigation is quantitative in nature. However, this paper would like to underline that so cannot be the case always. It is not the terms that bifurcate the two methods, rather, it is a particular methodology and set of tools that establishes them apart in the field of research.

designs are intended for theory construction, whereas positivist designs are intended for testing theories.

Stage 8 Investigation: Description and Analysis

The two main parts of the research are description and analysis. In social science research, the description serves as a statement about how something looks. It seeks to inform the audience on the characteristics of people, places, incidents, events, etc. Conversely, analysis places greater emphasis on what and why questions, and in responding, it offers and explains the rationale. This offers interpretations that suggest a thorough grasp of the topic and call for more research, in the future.

Stage 9 Findings, and Conclusions

As the term "research findings" refers to the outcomes of a study or inquiry, it provides answers to the questions that have been targeted as the goal or purpose of the research. It suggests that based on examination and deduction, what a researcher has discovered. Given that the research's goal will be presented in the results, it will highlight what was found throughout the analysis process. Since this is the final product of the investigation, it shows the true connection or relationship between various variables and goes into great detail to explain arguments, facts, observations, and experimental results. A researcher should employ language that is compelling and easy to grasp to ensure the objectivity and acceptance of the results. To properly communicate the findings, a researcher should utilize headers, text, charts, graphs, tables, and figures effectively. Most importantly, a researcher, while making findings and conclusions should see that the arguments are logically correct, sound consistent, and commonly understandable.

Stage 10 Proposing for future researchers (Problem still the same or a new problem is identified)

This stage of the research makes recommendations for further investigations and, in the process, raises new and unresolved questions as well as suggests new areas for potential future research. Here, a researcher must be sincere enough to identify what is significant and deserves further investigation that the researcher was unable to locate. It should offer up fresh possibilities for future research; its compelling arguments and proposals may enrich the conversation and aid in comprehending the pressing problems facing a particular community.

The concluding remarks

While concentrating on the fundamentals of social science research, this paper has highlighted the importance of thinking and mapping. To understand the significance of social science research beyond intellectual pleasure the paper has underlined mainly three things- first, there is endless scope in social science research, because the challenges before human societies are numerous. Second, research is a thinking process and before starting with it, it is essential to

understand the preconditions and prerequisites. And lastly, to attain the aims, a researcher, while taking research as a thinking process should follow certain stages, each of which is important and unavoidable. The paper continued that research procedures may be made simpler and more efficient by approaching the creation of a research proposal as a "thinking process".

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