



Preference, Appropriateness and Application of Research Methods in Nigerian Media and Communication Research Journals: A Content Analysis

Odo, Ogochukwu Nneoma*¹, & Nwokeocha, Ifeanyi Martins²

¹National Open University of Nigeria

²Heritage Polytechnic, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The Preference, Appropriateness and Application of Research Methods in The Nigerian Media and Communication Research Journals was studied using the Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC). The paper provided an insight on the nature of social science research with highlight on the major Communication Research Methods namely: Survey Research, Experimental Research, Content Analysis, Case study, Observational Research, etc. Social science researchers also employ quantitative and qualitative forms of analyses which were discussed in this paper. The Advantages and Disadvantages between the listed approaches were explained. The study aimed to ascertain the methods adopted in Media and Communication Journals in Nigeria while considering the online editions of The Nigerian Journal of Communications (TNJC) from 2014 to 2020. The study showed that the quantitative research method was preferred to be adopted in the Nigerian Media and Communication Journals. In conclusion, social science research remains a vital process to address societal challenges and to proffer solutions on social issues based on globally accepted scientific processes. The study recommends that Universities should steer students' attention to qualitative analysis as core analytical methods.*

Keywords: Research Methods, Journal, Communication, Preference, Appropriateness, Application and TNJC.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Wilson & Onwubere (2008, p.8) scientific research methods seek to emphasize quantification, logical exposition, controlled empirical testing, replicability of findings and inter-subjectivity. Redman and Morry as cited in *Slide player.com*, Research is a careful and systematic effort of gaining new knowledge. Clifford Woody stressed that Research comprises of defining and redefining problems formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions, collecting, organizing and evaluating data, making detections and conclusions. Research is systematic, controlled, valid, rigorous, exploration and description of what is not known and establishment of associations and Causation that permit the accurate prediction of outcomes under a given set conditions.

Wimmer & Dominick (2011, p.43) note, “regardless of how the word research is used it essentially means an attempt to discover something.” There are two main classes of research according to the use to which research is put to: basic and applied as attested to by Asika (2009:13), Adeleke (2010), Oluombo (2011, p.9) and Wimmer & Dominick (2011,14). However, Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.14) advocate a modification to the classes to be: academic and private sector research. They argue that scholars from colleges and universities conduct public sector research for government use, while

nongovernmental companies or their research consultants conduct private sector research, which is generally applied to decision making. Research may be defined as a systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles, or theories, resulting in prediction and possibly ultimate control of events (Best, 1978).

Ogbuoshi (2006:90) states that the nature of research work to be executed is the determining factor for the choice of the research method.

Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, popularly known as the founder of modern research surveys, made considerable contributions towards statistical survey analysis, panel methods, latent structure analysis and contextual analysis. In the early 1930s, Lazarsfeld introduced research through the use of surveys by conducting a study of Marienthal, a small industrial town near Vienna which suffered from a high unemployment rate. In 1933, he published a paper titled “Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community. The paper gives insight into Lazarsfeld’s ability to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. By careful assessment of social conditions, life histories, family budgets, spending habits and daily routines, Lazarsfeld transformed qualitative data into quantitative analysis, a breakthrough in the field of research survey methodology.

Lazarsfeld also made major contributions in the field of unemployment research surveys, public opinion surveys and market research, mass media and communications research surveys, along with political sociology and applied sociology. Lazarsfeld created new, sometimes controversial, directions in applied social research. Criticized by some sociologists for reducing all quantitative data into mere numbers and statistics, he was admired by others who thought his work offered new and challenging directions in the social sciences.

Research Methodology is a set of systematic technique used in research. This simply means a guide to research and how it is conducted. It describes and analyzes methods, throws more light on their limitations and resources, clarifies their pre-suppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at frontiers of knowledge. The work analyzed all the research Methodologies used in the online editions of The Nigerian Journal of Communications (TNJC) from 2014 to 2020. Why Communication Researchers prefer a method to the other, how appropriate the method is for a study and how it is applied in a research work.

History of the Nigerian Journal of Communications (TNJC)

The Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC) is a scholarly, academic, professional and interdisciplinary journal of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), Nigeria Chapter. It is devoted to research and professional practices in all functional areas of communication. It is published in the tradition of the well-known international journal of the ACCE, the African Media Review, a quarterly journal of communication based at the headquarters of the pan-African organisation, ACCE, in Nairobi, Kenya, which has been in publication since 1986.

TNJC publishes a Volume a year, with two Issues in each Volume. The First Issue in each Volume focuses on relevant and contemporary issues in all areas of communication including Print Journalism, Broadcast Journalism, PRAD (Public Relations and Advertising) or the more encompassing concept, Marketing Communication, Business and Organisational Communication among others. The second Issue of each Volume focuses on the theme and papers presented at the Annual Conference of the ACCE. This issue is thus regarded as a Special Issue based on a specific theme discussed at the previous year's conference. In essence, only papers accepted and presented at the ACCE's Annual Conference have a chance of been published in the Special Issue of the Journal.

Well research articles from any part of the world are welcome in this peer-reviewed journal, including reviews of current books that are related to communication in Nigeria, Africa, and the world in general. The Journal welcomes advertisements which are, for now, publishable at negotiable but competitive rates. Interested advertisers and sponsors should contact

the Editor-in-Chief for details. All other correspondences should also be forwarded to the ACCE Nigerian Chapter Secretariat C/O Ekeanyanwu Nnamdi, National Coordinator/President, ACCE, at the Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, P.M.B 1017, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Objectives of Study

The study has the following objectives:

- To ascertain what research method is preferred to be used in the Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC).
- To investigate the appropriateness of the research method used in TNJC.
- To ascertain what way research methodology is applied in TNJC.

Research Questions

Research questions help to provide clue to the search for acts about the nature of relationship existing between variables. In x-raying impact of preference, appropriateness and application of research method in media and communication Research journal in Nigeria.

- What research method is preferred to be used in the Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC)?
- How appropriate is research method used in TNJC?
- What way is research methodology applied in TNJC?

Scope of Study

The scope of the study shall be centered to the Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC).

Significance of Study

- The study will add to existing literature in the area of Research Methodology in Media and Communications Research.
- The study will be beneficial to Students and Researchers in Communication Discipline.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Under the Literature Review, the study looked at various categories of research methods from the point of view of several scholars while considering the Nigerian Journal of Communications (TNJC).

The Different Methods in Communication Research

The major classification of research in Mass Communication are grouped under the Quantitative and Qualitative categories. This is because no matter how research is classified, it is basically identified by its method of data collection. In this regard we have quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Quantitative data gathering methods are Surveys and Experiments while Qualitative data gathering methods are Interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Observational Research, Ethnographic Research, Historical Research, Content Analysis and Case Study.

- **Survey Research:** The survey research method is perhaps the most popular technique of data collection among communication researchers. Surveys are now commonplace in all areas of life. Decision makers in businesses, consumer and activist groups and the media use survey results as part of their daily routine. The survey research technique has been aptly defined by Wiseman and Aron (1970:37) as “a method for collecting and analyzing social data via highly structured and often very detailed interview or questionnaire in order to obtain information from large numbers of respondents presumed to be representative of a specific population”. From the above definition, you can see that the survey research method focuses on people, the vital facts of people; their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations and behaviour. Survey is conducted to collect and analyze social, economic, psychological and other types of data; it is based on interviewing people (respondents) who must be representative enough of the research population being studied for it to be worthwhile.
- **Experimentation:** The word “experimentation” is derived from the Latin word *experiri* which means to try. However, Severin and Tankard (2010:37) define experimental research as “the classic method of dealing with the question of causality” i.e. the relationship between something that happened and the reason for it happening or cause and effect. It involves the control or manipulation of a variable (research element) by the experimenter and an observation or measurement of the result in an objective and systematic way. There are two basic techniques of obtaining data in experimental research – laboratory and field experimentation. Whether laboratory or field experimentation, the purpose is to obtain verifiable and reliable data.
- **Content Analysis:** This is a special data gathering technique available to communication researchers. It is used to collect data from already existing or secondary sources. So instead of interviewing people or asking them to respond to questionnaires as in survey research or observing behaviour as in human experiment, the researcher using content analysis examines the communications that have been produced (e.g. newspapers, magazines, books, journals etc.) at times and places of his or her own choosing.

According to Publichealthcolumbia.edu Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e. text). Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts. As an example, researchers can evaluate language used within a news article to search for bias or partiality. Researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the

writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding the text.

Sources of data could be from interviews, open-ended questions, field research notes, conversations, or literally any occurrence of communicative language (such as books, essays, discussions, newspaper headlines, speeches, media, historical documents). A single study may analyze various forms of text in its analysis. To analyze the text using content analysis, the text must be coded, or broken down, into manageable code categories for analysis (i.e. “codes”). Once the text is coded into code categories, the codes can then be further categorized into “code categories” to summarize data even further. “A research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952).

Uses of Content Analysis

1. Identify the intentions, focus or communication trends of an individual, group or institution
2. Describe attitudinal and behavioral responses to communications
3. Determine psychological or emotional state of persons or groups
4. Reveal international differences in communication content
5. Reveal patterns in communication content
6. Pre-test and improve an intervention or survey prior to launch
7. Analyze focus group interviews and open-ended questions to complement quantitative data

Types of Content Analysis

There are two general types of content analysis: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis determines the existence and frequency of concepts in a text. Relational analysis develops the conceptual analysis further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text. Each type of analysis may lead to different results, conclusions, interpretations and meanings.

1. **Interviews:** There are some controversy about interview as a research method. Some researchers tend to view it as a subset of the survey research method while others see it as a distinct qualitative research method. Among the latter is Berger (2000), according to him, interviews are one of the most widely used as fundamental qualitative research techniques. Wimmer and Dominick (2000:122) distinguish interview as a qualitative research technique from interview used in survey research by describing it as “intensive or in-depth interview”. According to Berger (2000:111) the simplest way to describe the interview technique is to say that it is a conversation between a researcher (someone who wishes to gain information about a subject) and an informant (someone who presumably has

information of interest on the subject). The goal of interview as in other research techniques, is to obtain data or information. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011:139) intensive interviews are unique for the following reasons:

- i. They generally use smaller samples.
 - ii. They provide detailed background about the reasons respondents give specific answers.
 - iii. Elaborate data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations etc. are obtained.
 - iv. Intensive interviews allow for lengthy observation of respondents - nonverbal responses.
 - v. They are usually very long. Unlike personal interviews used in survey research that may last only a few minutes, an intensive interview may last several hours and may take more than one session.
2. **Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** This is an interview conducted with 6 – 12 people as a group simultaneously and a moderator who leads the discussion about a specific topic. Its identifying characteristic is that it is a controlled group discussion which can be used to gather preliminary data for a research project; to help develop questionnaire for a survey research, to understand the reason behind a phenomenon, to see how a group of people interpret a certain phenomenon or test preliminary ideas or plans. When properly conducted, it is a natural method for eliciting group opinion on specific issue in a social setting. It has an advantage over the individualistic respondent interviewing when genuine responses are expected. FGD serves as an influential forum whereby individuals within the group have their personal views moderated by the responses of other members of the group.
 3. **Observational Research:** Observation can fairly be referred to as the classic method of scientific inquiry. It involves not the ability only to perceive events as they occur but also to nose for fine details that others may take for granted. Observational research is based on things seen. According to Seltiz et al (1976) the basic principle of an observational technique is that it is an attempt to summarize, systematize and simplify the representation of an event rather than provide an event exact representation of it. There are two types of observational research-participant and nonparticipant observation.
 4. **Ethnographic Research:** Ethnographic Research and participant observation are similar in that the researcher in both cases is involved in the phenomenon being studied. However, ethnography in a general sense involves any study of a group of people for the purpose of describing their socio-cultural activities and patterns. As a qualitative research method, the

researcher spends long period of time living with and observing other cultures in their natural setting collecting extensive narrative (non-numeric) data. Ethnographic researchers use a variety of data collection techniques including interviewing, diary keeping, analysis of existing documents, photography, videotaping, etc.

5. **Historical Research:** Historical research or historiography has been aptly described by Kerlinger (1973:701) as “the critical investigation of events, developments, and experiences of the past, the careful weighing of evidence of the validity of sources of information on the past, and the interpretation of the weighed evidence”. The historical investigator, like other investigators, collects data, evaluates the data for validity and interprets the data. The historical method differs from other scholarly activity only in its rather elusive subject matter – the past, which it attempts to place in proper perspective. This type of research is also limited by its seemingly elusive subject matter which poses difficulties in interpretation. Fred Omu's (1978) famous book, *Press and Politics in Nigeria (1880 – 1937)* is a classic example of historical research in communication studies. According to Phifer cited in Berger (2000:133) there are seven types of historical studies. They are as follows: Biographical studies, focusing on the lives of important persons. Movement or idea studies, tracing the development of political, social, or economic ideas and movement. Regional studies, focusing on particular cities, states, nations and regions. Institutional studies, concentrating on specific organizations. Case histories, focusing on social settings or a single event, Selected studies, identifying and paying close attention to a special element in some complex process. Editorial studies, dealing with the translating or processing of documents.
6. **Case Study:** Case study has been defined by Wimmer and Dominick (2000,p.134) as the qualitative research technique that uses as many data sources as possible to systematically investigate individuals, groups, organizations or events. Case studies are conducted when a researcher needs to understand or explain a phenomenon. Unlike a survey that examines one or a few characteristics of many subjects or units, a case study is used to examine many characteristics of a single subject (e.g. a communicator, newsroom, newspaper, tv station, etc). The case study usually tries to learn all about the area the investigator is interested in for the specific case over a period of time. Case study is frequently used in medicine, clinical psychology history, management science among other disciplines. The great

psychologist, Sigmund Freud, is said to have written case studies of his patients. The major drawback of case studies is that they usually cannot be generalized to other similar situations. Most often the results are based on a single example

METHODOLOGY

Given the nature of this study, it is only appropriate that **content analysis** was adopted as the **research design** to specifically investigate the Nigerian Journal of Communication (TNJC) under review. According to Walizer and Weiner (1978) in Wimmer and Dominick (2011:156), content analysis is any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of documented information. Kelinger (2000) cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2011:156) supports the use of content analysis for this kind of study when he argued that the design allows for studying and analyzing communication content in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. It was in that order that the researchers developed the coding guide for measuring the variables.

Population of Study

The population for this study which comprised of all research works published online in the Nigerian Journal of Communications from 2014 to 2020. A total of 123 research works were sampled for the study. The Journal was selected because of its National outlook, it's

a Communication journal which is relevant to the study at hand and it has existed for a period of time.

Study Instrument

With respect to the research design adopted in this study, the most appropriate instrument for the collection of data is the coding system. Therefore, the manifest content of the selected journal was coded using coding sheet carefully constructed for this research. One major advantage of coding over all other means of data collection is its ability to translate field data into an easily understandable value or symbols representing specific attributes or given variables and indication (Uwakwe, 2005). The above instrument was used in the cause of generating data for this research.

Census Study

The researcher analyzes all the articles in the Nigerian Journal of Communication online database.

FINDINGS

Unit of Analysis

The Unit of Analysis comprised all research methods used in the Nigerian Journal of Communications between 2014 to 2020. Using simple descriptive statistics, the manifest data examined What research method is preferred to be used in Media and Communication Research Journal in Nigeria? How appropriate it is and the method of its application?

Table 1. What research method is preferred to be used in Media and Communication Research Journal in Nigeria?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Survey	53	43.1
Content Analysis	23	18.7
No Method	16	13.0
Mixed Method	14	11.4
Interview	6	4.9
Qualitative Method	4	3.3
Framing Method	3	2.4
Focus Group Discussion	2	1.6
Textual Method	1	0.8
Quasi- Experimental	1	0.8
Total	123	100

The Table above shows that out of the 123 research works under review, nine research methods were analyzed from the research works. It shows that out

of the 123 works analyzed, 53 (43.1%) researchers preferred to use the Survey Research Method.

Table 2: How appropriate is the Research method used in Media and Communication Research Journal in Nigeria?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Quantitative	53	43.1
Qualitative	40	32.5
Triangulation (Mixed)	14	11.4
No Method	16	13.0
Total	123	100

Drawing a conclusion from the above table, we can answer Research Question 2, How appropriate is the Research Method used in Media and Communication

Research Journal in Nigeria? While analyzing the 123 Research works in Nigerian Journal of Communications, it was observed that most works analyzed used an

appropriate method which was a function of what nature the research was, if it is descriptive in nature or the kind that needed numerical data to be gathered and analyzed, the approaches they employed in their works suited the aim and purpose of the work. Only 16(13%) works out

of the total of 123 works analyzed had no methods indicated in their works. This is to say that 107(87%) works out of the total of 123 works analyzed used an appropriate research method for their works.

Table 3. What way is Research Methodology applied in Media and Communication Research Journal in Nigeria?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Quantitative	53	43.1
Qualitative	40	32.5
Triangulation (Mixed)	14	11.4
No Method	16	13.0
Total	123	100

The table above shows that the most common research methodology employed in the Nigerian Journal of Communication was the Quantitative Method 53 (43.1%), that the application of Quantitative Research method in the Nigerian Journal of Communication was through the Survey approach 53(43.1%) which can be seen in table 1. Data were collated with the use of Questionnaires.

DISCUSSION

The work considered a total of 123 online research works published on the Nigerian Journal of Communications (TNJC) under several volumes and years comprising of these lists, Vol.11, No.1, Oct.2014, Vol.12, No.1, Oct.2015, Vol.13, No.1, Jun.2016, Vol.14, No.1, Oct.2017, Vol.15, No.1, Jun.2018, Vol.15, No.2, Nov.2018, Vol.16, No.1, June 2019, Vol.16, No.2, Nov. 2019, Vol.17, No.1, June 2020, Vol.17, No.2, Nov. 2020.

The first research question states that “What research method is preferred to be used in Media and Communication Research Journal in Nigeria”, the work under study reveals that Communication Scholars prefer to use the Quantitative Research Method(Survey) 53 (43.1%) out of several other methods listed.

The second research question “How appropriate is the Research method used in Media and Communication Research journal in Nigeria”. The work being studied shows that how appropriate a research method is, depends on the problem being investigated. So the work reveals that most communication scholars employed the Quantitative Method 53 (43.1%) to investigate the research problems, only 16(13%) Scholars who did not define the method employed by their studies. We can say that “the research method used in Media and Communication Research Journal is appropriate”.

Looking at the third research question, it states that “What way the research methodology applied in Media and Communications Research Journal in Nigeria”. Most communication researchers used the Survey approach 53 (43.15) and they collated their data through a structured questionnaire.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that quantitative method is the most adopted method by communication researchers whose works were studied in TNJC and that qualitative methods are not employed alone for analysis by researchers. Media and Communication researchers also see the Quantitative approach as the appropriate method which is applied as a Survey method while using the questionnaire as a tool for data collation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested as a way forward in the debate that led to this investigation:

- Universities should steer students' attention to qualitative analysis as core analytical methods. The importance of qualitative techniques should be stressed as much as quantitative techniques. This implies that depth Preference of Research Areas and Methods among Communication Researchers is Quantitative Research Method.
- In the light of the above, research teaching should be sub-divided into more courses, such as quantitative research, qualitative research, data analysis etc
- While teaching research methods, qualitative analysis should be stressed as being of equal magnitude with quantitative methods. This is to avoid the situation in which one method is seen as better, more impressive or more precise than the other.
- This study also found it difficult to understand why 16 works reviewed had no Methodology stated. How did the Researchers arrive at their conclusion? Methodology is a key area in any research work, so lecturers in schools and scholars should always emphasize the importance of a Research Methodology in any academic research work.

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