

Chapter 14

Thinking Outside the Boxes: Communication, Mixed Method, and Convergence

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to conduct a critical discussion within a political economy framework on the use of mixed method, which is an increasing tendency in communication research, and its philosophical foundations in post-positivism. In the study, the mixed method called as “third methodological movement of the 21st century,” the limitations of the attempts to combine qualitative and quantitative methods in the positivist and postpositivist paradigm are revealed. The study discusses how the convergence of quantitative and qualitative methods in critical economy politics can be possible and what opportunities it offers in an effort to make a holistic explanation of social reality.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the mixed method as an increasingly used method in communication studies. In this study, the mixed method is examined within the framework of the methodological difficulties and tensions of critical communication studies and it is investigated whether it provides the opportunity to make a holistic explanation by combining the knowledge of the macro and the knowledge of the micro. For this purpose, firstly what is mixed method, paradigmatic problems will be explained and the dominant pragmatist approach will be criticized. Hereby, it is suggested that the mixed method should be handled in a critical realistic approach within a critical economic political framework and used with a dialectical understanding. Thus, an attempt is made to overcome the paradigm problems of the mixed method and to provide a methodological approach to critical communication studies.

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BACKGROUND

As in all social science disciplines, the mixed method, which is defined as the third methodological method emerged in the 21st century and claimed to be “a revolution in the scientific research area” or “a research paradigm whose time has come,” is increasingly being discussed in the field of communication and the number of mixed method studies is increasing rapidly (Creswell et al., 2015; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Creswell (2013: p. 207) claims that this research design will dominate the field in the future.

Mixed method research is growing rapidly in the field of communication and there are important reasons of this growth. Communication is a field that is growing in importance in the way of clarifying social phenomena and relations, and seeing the possibilities of change in it. Because at the present stage of capitalist development, technological developments are transforming the field of communication very fast and radically, and social relations are being mediated by all means of communication including traditional mass media and new media.

In today’s world, where social life is becoming more and more complicated and explaining the historical and social relations behind what appears in these social relations is getting more difficult, the importance of scientific activity to understand and explain social phenomena is also increasing. In fact, as one of the important elements of social relations, communication processes cannot be ignored in any research that claims to make a holistic explanation of social reality. The importance of scientific knowledge about communication processes lies here. The effort to understand society calls us to have scientific knowledge in this field. However, despite the rapid increase in the amount of academic knowledge published and become socialized in the field of communication, it is still debatable whether it is a remedy for the problem or not.

Science is the activity of explaining the facts. And the scientific method covering the ways of explaining the universe / facts is a fact-oriented and de facto process on the one hand and a descriptive and mental one on the other (Özlem, 2012, p. 28). However, different approaches towards science derive from two different tendencies that have tensely co-existed throughout the history of science, positioned against each other, and influenced and transformed each other. These two are the nomothetic perspective, which is derived mainly from great propositions and accepts the knowledge being generalized with the possibilities out of the limitations of everyday life, universal laws and deductive explanations, and the ideographic perspective which directs its attention to its own specific aspects, claiming that nomothetic perspective, which has been developed against it, is insensitive to local and event-based meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, pp. 99-104). In short, it is the tension between materialism and idealism.

These different philosophical attitudes are also the source of tensions in the social sciences, namely structure-agent, subject-object, macro-micro dualities, and methodological contradictions. Therefore, researcher’s attitude towards scientific knowledge and methodology is shaped by his/her own philosophical assumptions. Depending on the philosophical assumptions of the researcher, the differentiation of the research object and the level of knowledge to be achieved, different designs and different methods are proposed for the production of scientific knowledge. As the interests of research diversify, methods diversify as well (Bottomore, 1977, p. 24).

Certainly, there isn’t any social phenomenon which is unidimensional. Especially, the fact that the research objects of the interdisciplinary fields such as the field of communication are part of complex social processes, makes research practice even more difficult; and research focusing on only one dimension of communication activity remains weak and incapable both in providing a holistic view of the

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