

Nature of empirical analysis in social sciences

Isaac Reed and Jeffrey Alexander used the term “Methodenstreit”, basically a German term used to refer to an intellectual debate over research methodology or over methods. It can also be given meaning as to the way in which an academic inquiry is framed or pursued (Outhwaite&Bottomore, 1993). In a general context the writers studied the “nature of empirical analysis in social sciences”, i.e. their “social scientific calling” aim to explore the question that “what empirical is?” as they feel the difference of “art” on one hand to the “philosophy” on other hand. While speaking to the notion of “social scientific practice” and in particular context of “Anglophone sociology” they firmly accepted that the present age can witness the “return to empirical studies of social sciences” where there is a loose hand to “theoretical concerns” pertaining to studies of social sciences. However, they stand on to establish theoretical arguments. It was argued that it is significant to understand the “theoretical debates” to a study of social science, as they act as base which explains the “deeper understanding of the nature and purpose” to carry out an empirical study(Reed & Alexander, 2009).

Moreover, we can likely consider Sinha (2010) argument which states that it is important to understand that “methodology should follow the demand of the research questions” where by no means the researchers may undertake the practise of “manufacturing questions” that subsequently “fit the experimental methodology”(in, Bhawuk, 2010; also see, Kaplan 1964). In other words it can be said that the methodology can be shaped through a better understanding of area under inquiry and its subsequent focus. Assuming certain guiding principles like above, this research sought to tackle the area under study i.e. changing patterns of news production, on more theoretical framework rather than carrying out empirical findings. However, it is tried to develop base or grounds or foundation through deep theoretical understanding of the concept and then further to develop an empirical framework, under which this concept can be implemented on later developments to the study.

To addition, this work tries its best to avoid being excessively instructive or moralising as the belief is to form understanding or learning and to purely avoid any teaching. What is tried is to cover the regions (as said, organisation, technology, innovation) under the area of study (i.e. changing patterns of news production) in a complete fashion of exploring, understanding and learning. Additionally it is tried to be flexible and or diverse as certain traits in doing qualitative research.

The approach of this research is to carry out an ‘epistemological study’ by adopting ‘grounded theory approach’ as one of the method to carry out epistemic studies (See, Carter & Little, 2007). At first it is very important to understand the term ‘epistemology’, in other words, what is epistemology? In an appealing understanding of epistemology, Dharm P. S. Bhawuk (2010) in his work, explained ‘epistemology in terms of theory of knowledge’ possessing variables/elements such as “nature” of knowledge (crucial qualities or characteristics by which one recognise something, can be descriptive

knowledge or productive knowledge), “origin” (from where the knowledge originated or come to existence, source of knowledge, lineage), “scope” (can be explained as ‘limitations’ pertaining to knowledge), “variety” (i.e. what ‘variety’ of knowledge exists?). Moreover, it is significant to understand the relationship of knowledge to ‘truth, belief and justification’. It can be explained as examining the knowledge on the grounds of ‘truth’, more important on that is how we define ‘truth’ and what ‘truth’ actually mean to knowledge. Furthermore, the relationship of ‘truth’ to ‘belief’ in knowledge, in other words examining how knowledge can be a true belief. Additionally, the notion of ‘justification’ which explains in simple words to justify positions/stands i.e. the positions of “why” and “how” we know something or about the knowledge and in context of ‘truth’ it can be explained as what evidence/facts we have to justify that what knowledge known to us is true or not (also see, Ayer, 1956; Audi, 1998; BonJour, 2002). Here one thing is to be made clear that epistemology is not a method. However, epistemology can be held accounted for modifying the research methodology and to justify the knowledge which is produced under the area of study. In brief understanding, epistemology can be seen as to play a role in “justification of knowledge” (See, Carter & Little, 2007)

Researchers often relate epistemology with ontology as foundational elements of qualitative research (like, Bhawuk, 2010; Reed & Alexander, 2009; Cody, 2005). Ontology is defined as “study of being” (Bhawuk, 2010). According to Blackburn, 1993 & Burner, 1990 ontology put up questions that are related to “nature of reality” or answers questions as Quine, 1948 explains “what is existence” (see in, Bhawuk, 2010), questions related to “nature of reality” in broad perspectives seek inquiry to “physical reality” such as analysing essential documents and “social reality” such as examining an institution to subject concern (in, Carter & Little, 2007). However, from the above understanding it came to the view of this research that such inquiries like ‘ontology’ require critical ‘philosophical’ understanding or handling which at this level of research is not possible. The research hereby accepts the above said as a ‘limitation’ to this work. Moreover, at any point it is not denied, that overall, such examination plays a vital role in the better understanding of a qualitative research, or can be helpful to the construction of ‘theories of knowledge’ in carrying out a social inquiry of a subject (one can see, Mauthner&Doucet, 2003; Schwandt, 2000; Carter & Little, 2007).

Now the question arises that how the enquiry will sustain, as said above this research work has opted “Grounded Theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) approach, also known as “method of constant comparison” (see, Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 548) as one of the known qualitative research methods used to carry out data analysis.

At first it is important to have basic understanding of grounded theory as a method. Different versions/models of grounded theory appears in the context, popular among them are generally classified as ‘Glaserian (Glaser, 1978; 1992) and Straussian (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998) versions/models of grounded theory (see, Walker & Myrick, 2006; Stern, 1994). However different they may be, the commonality among them is still persistent of the original notion, meaning or definition of grounded theory i.e. “the discovery of theory form data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.

XX). The grounded theory is also seen as formulating a “reciprocal relationship” among the process of collecting data, doing data analysis and the process of theory building. It is said that the grounded theory is “derived inductively”, in other words can be explained as a ‘reasoning process’ in which at first data is gathered, then examined/analysed, to build theory, as it originates from the data itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The belief in grounded theory is that it will develop ‘value to the context’ of the phenomenon under study (Egan, 2002). This research work has no interest in digging the difference among the said versions/models of grounded theory and neither to take any particular position pertaining to differences in versions/models during the course of the research work. Moreover, it is tried to follow the basis guiding principles for conducting a grounded theory inquiry as discussed among researchers (like, Egan, 2002; Patton, 2002; Dey, 1999; Denzin, 1994; Robrecht, 1995) originally laid by Barony Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their book “The Discovery of Grounded Theory” in year 1967. Additionally, this research work in its due course may consider the common positions of the said two advance versions/models, rather than to investigate the research area on particular differences.

Glaser & Strauss (1967) in their work have raised significant critical issues such as the notion of “preconceived theoretical framework” (p. 45) and “theoretical sensitivity” (p. 46) which must be carefully understood in context of grounded theory approach before starting analysis process. In context of “preconceived theoretical framework” it is argued that in forming the decisions related to grounded theory research, ‘must not be’ guided by presumed theoretical ideas, structure or opinions beforehand or ‘while proceeding to and during the course of building theory’ (Egan, 2002) pertaining to the concept/phenomenon under study of the research work. However, a general understanding of the concept can be considered to initiate the process of research. In context of “theoretical sensitivity” or “relevance of categories as they emerged from data comparison”, can be explained as a process in which the researcher at first tries to capture the sense or essence as reflected in the form of facts or information available in the data collected pertaining to the particular area of study. Then the ideas/ opinions are framed in a sense to develop a concept from the collected data and then to analyse the relationships which have emerged between the developed concepts, originally originated from the collected data itself, pertaining to a particular area of study (Egan, 2002). Additionally, Dey (1999) argued that “theoretical sensitivity” may engage in the process of ‘repetition in the collection of data and the analysis of data’. Moreover it is argued that there ‘must not be’ a set or defined focus in advance to any particular “theoretical perspective” as speaking in context of the developed concepts from the collected data pertaining to a particular area of study (see, Egan, 2002). T. Marshall Egan, in his work, make mention of grounded theory research as “commonly accepted to be holistic, naturalistic and inductive” (2002, p. 279).

This research work tries to be flexible and dialectic to carry out the process of grounded theory research. Basically the area under inquiry has been explored in a way to establish and sustain focus to the phenomenon under investigation. As said, it is not possible to cover each and every distinction pertaining to the area, as we are limited to

time, size and level of the study. However, in general it is tried to develop an understanding of the concepts pertaining to the inquiry. Moreover, it is tried to carefully handle the issues of 'maintaining theoretical sensitivity' or to avoid preconceptions of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, it is tried to establish a continuous relationship between different stages of the research process for e.g. maintaining continuous connection between data collection, data coding, data comparing, and categorisation of data as constituents of data analysis process. The "theoretical sampling" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45) of data was carried out flexibly as to handle any instant adjustment to the sample. Initially a general understanding of the area under inquiry was developed i.e. it is necessary to understand at first that what is already done and what is said to be done so as to know what we are doing and what we want to do.

The research work is carried out on secondary data.

Potential sources for data collection were established. With an aim to set focus and to manage limits of time and size, this research work mainly look at academic research papers, scholarly journal articles and textbook confined to the area under inquiry. However multiple sources were consulted to collect the relevant data keeping in view that it will help to create variety and to establish conceptual framework such as Athens (publishers like Sage, Emerald etc) google scholar, research programmes (like, Goldsmiths media research programme), Journalism Reviews, Conference papers etc. Moreover there was no pre planned decisions on the ways in which the sampling of data will be carried out in a hope that the decisions will be informed theoretically when we move along with the examination of collected data. Here it is likely to mention that, as we collect data we also start to code, compare, and categorise the data for analysis. In other words, the data is examined into parts, then analysed for difference and similarity with other data and finally placed in a category. It was practised to organise categories in a way that each of them represent having a particular type of data in it and accordingly the data representing identical category is placed in that category (also see, Walker & Myrick, 2006). This helps us to understand the actual argument developed by each category. Moreover, it also inform us about the decisions which can be taken to move on further with the sample.

It was said that the process of data analysis of sample continues till the researcher reaches to the level of "theoretical saturation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However it was also argued that the saturation level comes by itself in the researchers as they keep moving on with the course of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this context, this research work has limitations, as we were constrained by the time, size and level of research work. It was decided to carry out the process of analysis within a time frame. However, it was tried to collect as much as data to sample for carrying out analysis within that set time frame. Moreover, in true knowledge, it is likely to mention that the mood shifts were actually sensed at different time periods in the course of data analysis. The sense that collection of data will be guided theoretically was actually witnessed during the process of data analysis. Additionally, as we go more deeply into the data it helps us to give meaning to the concepts which were discussed.

There are some other limitations to this research work as well. The work do not have any empirical evidence of its own to analyse/evaluate and have to be dependent on the evidences laid in the work of academics or scholars in their studies. Moreover, in the long run the work can be improved on different sites i.e. as discussed earlier this work lack in the perspective of ontology; this work is time bound so it lacks on the notion of reaching a level of “theoretical saturation” during the process of data analysis which can be improved by making the process free from time constraints, where researcher naturally in its due course reach the level of saturation. This research work have used basic coding procedure of qualitative research, this can be improved and developed in more explanatory way in the long run as it is treated to be “fundamental analytical process used by the researcher” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:12). Moreover, software’s like, NVivo can be used to give more accuracy to the process of coding and categorisation of data in data analysis.