

The Theoretical, Field and Educational Problems of the Arab Researcher A Case Study of the Algerian Researcher in Information and Communication Sciences Specialty

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Received: 04/2024, Published: 05/2024

Abstract:

Social human research and studies are of particular importance as they are considered the only scientific and methodologically accepted way to achieve objective facts that can contribute to the progress and prosperity of society and find solutions to its issues. However, conducting these researches encounter a number of methodological, field, administrative, social and even human difficulties. Indeed, there is no methodological part of any fieldwork that has not mentioned the problems experienced by the researcher while doing his or her scientific fieldwork, but the types of challenges differ from one society to another.

This research paper seeks to know the researcher's legal status and track his or her relationship to field research by understanding the privacy of the community in terms of carrying out research and also determining the researcher's position in the digital world.

Keywords: Legal framework, researcher and society, research in the digital era.

Introduction:

Social human research and studies are of particular importance as they are considered the only scientific and methodologically accepted way to achieve objective facts that can contribute to the progress and prosperity of society and find solutions to its issues. However, conducting these researches encounter a number of methodological, field, administrative, social and even human difficulties. Indeed, there is no methodological part of any fieldwork that has not mentioned the problems experienced by the researcher while doing his or her scientific fieldwork. This matter has been rarely cited in the research of technologically advanced countries because it is inevitable that any field work requires effort and difficulties, but the types of challenges differ from one society to another.

The civilized society's mentality needs both working and cooperation in groups with collective awareness that aspires to find real, not illusory, solutions to any problem facing the community. This includes the methods and means adopted to solve these problems. For decades, history has proven that human development precedes machinery development which means that mentality is accepted before laws are issued for application. Thus, this research paper aims to shed light on the field problems faced by researchers in the Arab world in the fields of humanities and social sciences. It discusses the idea of societal collaboration in revealing human and social facts to obtain authentic data, and to understand the extent of societal cooperation across various environments in this process.

Studies associated with humanities and social sciences are not recent and they have not been limited to studying the relationship between Men and their society. In fact, they have extended to the individual's relationship with the means provided to facilitate their living conditions. In addition, they are not just confined to the relationship between human phenomena and social phenomena; they often depend on decoding the symbols specific to each society to understand the communication code within them. Consequently, deciphering the code helps identify the relationship between the individual and their surroundings, the thing that has led to all these techniques which access the lives of communities in different ways, and they have been adopted according to the social context.

Despite their richness in natural resources, Arab societies particularly suffer from economic problems. However, in reality, they experience a range of issues that cannot be confined to the economic scope alone. These issues extend to social, cultural, and political problems. Hence, the complexity of these societies makes the process of researching and studying them easier.

The consequences of these problems on both the individual and society require reconsidering the possibility of these societies accepting cooperation in scientific research to obtain valid and factual information that allows for finding

solutions to them.

This issue has made the research process's clarity and path rely on a set of concepts taken from other societies unrelated to ours. Many researchers adopt theories developed in a social context vastly different from our societies. The only common feature is the individual as a research subject. In any society, the research process and its credibility are fundamentally linked to several characteristics that the research community must possess. Among these features are the freedom of opinion and thought, and individual and societal freedoms. The traits of fear and apprehension about telling the truth, whether at the institutional or social level, should disappear. Nevertheless, this does not mean unrestricted freedom that infringes upon the nation's constants and social laws. Instead, it refers to the feeling of the right to express an opinion honestly and the entitlement to present social truth.

According to the number of research papers published by each country in 2014, Saudi Arabia ranks first among Arab countries with 17409 papers, followed by Egypt with 14800 papers, and then Tunisia with 6228 papers. In 2012, about 48826 papers were published by all Arab countries. However, the average number of research papers published in the Arab world is nearly 137 papers per million inhabitants.

Concerning Western countries, taking Spain as an example with a population of 46.704.314 residents, around 76699 research papers were published in 2012. This translates to an average of 1642 papers per million inhabitants. By contrast, all Arab countries with a population of 354.168.510 inhabitants published roughly 48826 papers, averaging 137 papers per million inhabitants. Accordingly, the rate of research papers published by Spain is 12 times more than that of the Arab world.¹

Since the late of eighth century, scientific researches have known a distinctive feature in conducting scientific research. They have been categorized into two major methods: empirical and critical, and one of these methods can depend on the other.

The Empirical (Experimental) Approach

In the empirical approach, the researchers take the quantitative feature, even if they include interpretation, analysis, and parts of criticism. This approach developed in America and it covered statistics and its tools. Besides, it has been condensed into two steps within Lazarsfeld's model: content analysis (*) and audience studies. Nonetheless, these two methods originally appeared in response to a need. Content analysis emerged as a response to the American need after World War I to put an end to the impact of propaganda and counter-propaganda that had disrupted the political, media, and cultural atmosphere due to the aftermath of the war. As for audience studies, their reference point is the economic factor.²

The empirical studies are sometimes called the experimental studies. They are based on real-world experience, observation, and experimentation, and they aim to attain empirical theories.³

However, the social and historical challenges of our societies are highly different from their previous ones for several reasons. The intellectual need was not a priority; this accurately means that it was not taken into consideration because our societies were preoccupied with providing the necessities of life, especially after the independence when the colonizers left a ruined infrastructure in our countries. Consequently, this branch was in the hands of systems that were trying to maintain their existence.

The main focus of the empirical theory is on observable behaviour and not on the desired or expected one. The empirical theory incorporates observation, generalization, and interpretation of the actual behaviour.⁴ It is highly characterized by systematicity and the integration of theory and reality for the sake of providing descriptions, explanations, and predictions about the world surrounding us.

Empirical studies collect information, labelled "empirical data". After analysis, these data should allow the researcher to select one or more preliminary hypotheses and respond to them. The technique for gathering these data is not based on a theoretical approach or abstract thinking; it is a matter of testing hypotheses concretely.⁵ This is the hardest process for empirical studies that were conducted in our societies due to the limited statistical base and the difficulty of obtaining it if it is available. This is what most Arab researchers mentioned when discussing the limitations of their research.

The Critical Approach to Scientific Research

This type of research seeks to link the social or human phenomena to the political and economic context in which they take place by studying underlying structures (both indirect and non-conscious). These structures are not mere coincidences but they stem from the cognitive theorizing that emerged in Europe, giving rise to the Frankfurt School and its associated branches.⁶

Criticism is considered a practical and organized form of thinking that it works to get out the intellectual energies of the critic and discover new scopes for expressing the reality of society and life (Al-Qalini, 2014). According to conventional theory, criticism starts from preconceived ideas and concepts of the problem.

However, the new criticism, influenced by Habermas, questions of assumptions and axioms, break free from narrow frameworks and re-examines thinking, its methods, foundations, and concepts. Habermas considered criticism as "lifting the veils from what is concealed and obscured" He acknowledged the multiplicity of social, political, and human issues, which necessitates diverse approaches as well (Ibrahim & Nizar, 2014).⁷

The Laws Governing the Researcher's Work

Scientific research is based on four main elements: the researcher, the methodology, the participants, and the methodological materials. Therefore, this study will deal with each element individually in assessing the effectiveness of these elements in research related to Arab societies.

The university has a fundamental role in preparing and encouraging researchers to engage in research or vice versa. As a result, this institution needs to pay careful attention to the status of research and researchers, identifying the reasons that urge them to conduct research and achieve results that make them significant contributors to the overall advancement of the country. In fact, the university is a scientific entity interested in preparing scientific cadres and competent researchers to actively contribute to the development of society in all fields. The Algerian university has established scientific organizations in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. These affiliate organizations include many stakeholders and aim to facilitate the research process. Laboratories were founded according to a set of organized rules and conditions outlined in Decision No. 11/98 issued on August 22, 1998.^{8,9}

The legal frameworks that regulate university researchers emerged from 1968 until 2017. Since the independence, they have not been concerned with the laws regulating university operations. They just focused on organizing the teaching process within the university, ways of promotions, and determining ranks for degree holders. However, they did not discuss how the work of researchers is conducted despite the fact that the initial designation was "professor researcher." Most times, teachers who obtained scholarships were the only ones oriented to research. In light of this, the research process was not an integral part of higher education except within the framework of completing theses and research projects to obtain certificates and achieve rank advancement.

Until 1985, there was no evaluation of teachers' works from a scientific perspective, according to Article 14¹⁰, which established a national university committee responsible for assessing their works scientifically and determining their academic promotion criteria, up to the eighties. "Having a closer look at the Algerian university development since independence and the trajectory of academics in social sciences, it is evident that the social structure, cultural situation of society, and political system were not priorities for forming independent intellectuals capable of formulating psychological and social perceptions and approaches within independent social fields (religious, political, cultural, etc.), as Bourdieu pointed out in his book about intellectuals. Instead, the public effort was mainly directed towards forming academically educated conformists. Their role was confined to later stages in the history of independent Algeria, as is currently the case, in the processes of justifying and covering up social imbalances, contradictions, and political deviations. This produced a closed ideological discourse rather than directing the role towards a rational and balanced understanding and interpretation of society, mechanisms of social interaction, and establishing for conditions of social and political transformation".¹¹

Scientific research is associated with promotions instead of with the research itself. As we are not specialists in legislative sciences, we are not criticizing this aspect. We are just focusing on the research perspective related to the social and human phenomenon generated by these legislations and their way of application. This has made researchers chase after a hierarchy of arrangements that are far from the essence of scientific research, based on a foundation that reflects neither the form nor the content.

The Researcher and the Research Population

Every scientific research depends on the necessity of selecting a population for study which helps us to achieve scientifically reliable results. The method of selection is based on two main approaches that are determined by methodologists as probabilistic and non-probabilistic. These approaches have been defined according to different factors related to the evolution of methodologies and their tools over time. However, these are also linked to the breakthrough of societies and their changes, especially in Western countries, which have witnessed advancements in research materials and techniques in line with the development of mass societies (particularly known in Communication and Media Sciences). However, these methodological approaches often face challenges in their application in our societies. This is due to a lot of reasons related to the specificity of these societies, primarily awareness and means of control in addition to the difference of political systems and the relationship of these societies with research.

Basically, the relationship is historical because our societies have witnessed the effects of colonization. The matter that has made them late compared to their colonizers whose main reason for the colonization was to subordinate us in all fields. To different degrees, our societies lost their scientists and became subordinate to Western scientific systems. The absence of a communicative approach in studying Algerian society has revealed numerous epistemological issues in the scientific field. Some of these issues relate to the lack of theoretical heritage in this field, while others are associated with the difficulty of studying the Algerian individual and obtaining information that unveils their true perspective. It is because this individual is bound by what social institutions impose on them, and modern life changes in the light of the massive technological spread" (Azzi Abdelrahman).¹²

Robert Park defines the local community as a social unit where its members share a set of common interests, governed by public values and a sense of belonging to such an extent that enables them to take part in the basic conditions of shared life.¹³

However, society has been exposed to many changes that have threatened its stability and led to the disintegration of its units. These changes have obliged individuals in these societies to resist these transformations. Therefore, it has become a matter of change and acceptance of new values that are brought by technology, the ease of its adoption, and the challenge of studying these transitional societies. On this ground, Zuhair Ahddadn said: "The attempt to transition from a stage of consumption to a stage of discovery, especially with what we have received from the West, and adapting it to our specific cultural context, is not a critique of Western discoveries to reject them. Rather, it is about critiquing, analyzing, and placing them within the framework of the values that our societies live by."¹⁴

He also viewed that today we use the media in a traditional manner inherited from the outdated colonial situation. We still use them within the same framework, without recognizing and realizing that these means are just techniques used to solve problems that are not necessarily our own.¹⁵ As for the feature that distinguishes societies, there is too much debate about it. Azzi Abdelrahman thought that excessive definitional identification refers to the preconceived ideas that we know about some universities or groups such as professional, cultural, ethnic, or any other characteristics that describe societal differences. Very often, these descriptions are not a reflection of reality but rather a simplification of it, and in some cases, they distort it.¹⁶

As you believe that by using some methodological materials such as questionnaires, you obtain information. However, these materials often cannot accurately describe reality because what society thinks is significantly different from what the researcher is investigating. In fact, unofficial situations can provide us with more accurate and closer information about social and human reality. Many contemporary sociologists and communication anthropology theorists argue that quantitative statistical tools are too far from the reality of society and the actual experiences of its members. In this vein, Cyril stated that: "The measurement tools are not suitable because they impose unreal measures outside the lived world, as described by sociologists, and their concepts based on this description."¹⁷

One of the most significant methodological challenges in evaluating scientific work is validity. Dooley considered: "There are two types of validity. The internal validity means the logical relationship within the different components of measurement."¹⁸ It is one of the elements identified by semantics in the process of using linguistic signs. "The external validity relates to the extent to which the results of a specific study are related to the variables and measurement criteria in the real-world community."¹⁹

Concerning reliability, Baddeley and Lewis suggested that researchers who use the same techniques on the same subjects should attain the same results if their methodological materials are reliable.²⁰

The Researcher and the Digital World

It is a common truth that human relationships primarily revolve around evolution. If this evolution is not accompanied by an understanding of its mechanisms of interaction with human consciousness and intellect, it may not align with the human perspective to understand oneself, one's reality, society, and the world to which he belongs. Based on this perspective, the researcher needs to realize that research knowledge is generally different from the old. This indicates that the topics and their mastery need to align with the social and technological situation of research, changing along with it the researcher's view of humans as individual and group phenomena that function within the new communicative space.

The researcher identifies the pillars of the digital model as an unnatural innovation, based on information and the creation of intelligence. His or her ideaturns around challenging humans and leading them. Therefore, the nature of the digital world is crucial in determining the relationship between the researcher and the

population under investigation in a new digital space. Additionally, all societal change and the active elements in the digital system govern the parts of social and human research that produce concepts and ideas. Through a conceptual system, the researcher examines the meaning of the virtual world, establishes a unique relationship that leads to a world where its real and realistic features are obscured, and ventures into what is often referred to as an illusory world. He attempts to uncover many behavioural relationships through communication. The focus is on the most prominent relationship in the digital communication system, which is the human. Humans share the digital space, considering that their digital behaviour is acquired through collective practice.

Despite the technological advancements that facilitate the research process, such as information gathering and wide-scale distribution of questionnaires, it often lacks the spirit of research. This is due to the nature of society, as researchers in our societies may suffer from the neglect of individuals towards existing scientific work on the internet pages, especially when they are asked to fill out forms. I have personally experienced this issue. Researchers may need to repeatedly request (form filling) multiple times, even for groups affiliated with academic spaces.

“Defining science and scientific researchers may appear easy at first glance, but it is much more challenging than it seems. Over the past few decades, science has evolved with the emergence of new technologies and various methods for their development, in addition to the new social needs. The role of researchers has also changed where the need for purposeful interaction between science and society has become more concrete than ever before.”

“This need has become so clear to governments all over the world that they need to rethink the way guidelines are developed to more clearly promote science policies and ethics globally while shaping how science is practised, organized, and enhanced. For example, member states of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have requested the institution to adjust the definition of a researcher.”²¹

As science and technology generate data faster and more than ever before, it has become difficult to keep up with and manage this information. Therefore, it is crucial to find ways to automate the discovery and interpretation of the information we need only that information.

Conclusion

In this research, we attempted to draw attention to the process of researcher preparation. It is a complex process influenced by many factors, and it involves complicated psychological, legal, and social dynamics that make the claim of its interpretation so challenging. Based on what has been already mentioned, we tried to shed light on the various paths that the methodological processes go through, and these form the scientific basis of research. For many, there is no vast difference between the methodological concepts that highlight social and human truths. According to them, we face the same dilemma.

We also tried to discuss the social structures that define the relationship between the population and the researcher. Indeed, these structures are determined by a set of theories and schools specialized in studying the individual and their communicative behaviours. They influence the process by which methodological tools contribute to the validity and reliability of the obtained results of research in our societies and discuss official situations where the university has become a stage for them.

In addition, we attempted to connect those conceptual and structural pathways with the methodological frameworks used in our research to identify the long-term impact that shapes the researcher's cognitive and knowledge frameworks. These frameworks facilitate the discovery of real facts translated by individuals into behaviours they adopt and feature in the academic space.

Our findings showed that research provides an opportunity to understand the roles played by different participants in the research process. At this stage, it can be said that the first thing a researcher considers is the boundaries of his work. Unlike what many researchers believe, our boundaries urge us to explore new issues and boundaries of research that are almost endless.

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