UNIUYO JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES, UJCS

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Editor
UJCS

Printed By:
ELYSIAN AND PARTNERS LIMITED
26 Ukana Offot Street, Uyo - Nigeria

Publishers:
Department of Communication Arts
University of Uyo
Uyo
Akwa Ibom State
Nigeria

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TRENDS IN METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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and

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Abstract

This study appraised the methodological and theoretical approaches commonly employed in political communication studies. It adopted content analysis as a research method to examine 160 political communication-related articles in reputable peer-reviewed journals published between 2005 and 2015. It was found that, overall, political communication researchers seldom employed mixed methods (6.3%), while they seemed to prefer quantitative designs (75.0%) to qualitative approaches (18.8%). Specifically, researchers employed survey (43.3%) and content analysis (35.4%) more frequently than other methods. They used interviews (39.4%) and case studies (27.3%) more frequently than other qualitative methods. Also, the study reveals that in political communication studies, application of theories has gained prominence with the framing and the agenda-setting theories topping the list of commonly used theories. The trends here suggest frequent use of theories, but extreme paradigmatic preference among political communication scholars with few cases of quantitative qualitative complementarity. The study, therefore, concludes that copious use of theories to drive studies is a positive trend, but political communication researchers should be encouraged to be pragmatic and embrace mixed methods because a single methodological approach may not always be adequate in solving most research problems.

Introduction

Communication research, like other social science disciplines, employs a wide range of research methodologies that include quantitative and qualitative social scientific research approaches. Research in journalism and communication fall within the ambit of social sciences and humanities, and communication researchers are bound to employ research methodologies that can efficiently and effectively account for and measure the ability of human beings to think, to query and to react to societal happenings, issues and occurrences (Williams, 2004). Some communication researchers by their nature prefer to stick to one peculiar methodology even in a situation where employing another alternative or mixed methods would have been quite effective and valid. In certain instances, communication researchers combine both the qualitative and the quantitative methods in a study (Kaplan &Duchon, 1988). Naturally, the methods employed are expected to be premised on the appropriateness to the theme under focus and the nature of the problem being investigated (Guest, 2012; Kristine &Florczak, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2015). Methodologies play substantial roles in knowledge determination, generation and eventual application in different circumstances. On the range and variety of research methodologies used in a number of different media research contexts, Gunter (2000, p.2) suggests that:

> Different perspectives on the study of the media have emerged
> historically in response not only to the findings of empirical
> enquiries, which changed ideas about the way people respond

to the media, but more often and more significantly as a result
of paradigm shifts within social science research more
generally.

The foregoing position of Gunter is an indication that change in people's attitude to information consumption through the media has also compelled divergent vistas and paradigm shifts as well as deployment of novel methods of research in communication and media studies. One may infer that this is a positive change because a phenomenon of paradigmatic rigidity and incompatibility where a researcher has imbibed, and restricted himself to a specific research orientation irrespective of the peculiarity of the research focus could be methodologically counterproductive (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2005; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). This is also a justification for self-reflection by communication scholars.

Therefore, appraising trends in communication research by communication scholars is seen as 'self-reflection' by some researchers. For instance, to So (1988, p. 236), self-reflection is "a mark of maturity. It is expected that when a discipline reaches certain stage of development, its researchers would think of its history, evaluate its present status, and contemplate what the future will look like."

Self-reflection, therefore, is considered a process whereby communication scholars retrospectively evaluate and progressively project into the future in the field of communication/media studies. This effort at a critical examination of the trends in communication research is a reasonable exercise as it will allow researchers to dig more and find out more in the field of communication/media scholarship (Lazlo & Lazlo, 2002; Kim & Weaver, 2002; Shelley, 2015). This is the justification for this current study, which is somewhat a meta-analysis of the current trends in political communication studies in terms of methodological orientations and theoretical applications by scholars. In essence, this study will add to existing knowledge in these aspects of research designs and application of theories to drive political communication studies, and provide new direction for scholars as to the current trends in focus areas and their implications for research.

A number of studies (e.g. Kamhawi & Weaver, 2003; Onekutu & Ojebode, 2007; Potter & Riddle, 2007; Ojebuyi & Ojebode, 2011; Ogundoyin & Soola, 2014) have examined trends in communication research and come up with findings that provide insights into emerging research cultures, and give directions for communication researchers as to what is the ideal research approach given certain research problems. For instance, Kim and Weaver (2002), in their study on thematic meta-analysis in communication research regarding the Internet, observed that non-quantitative research methods (72.9%) were frequently adopted than qualitative methods accounting for 26.7% in Internet-related studies. Trumbo (2004) analysed research methods adopted in mass communication research between 1990 and 2000 and discovered that out of 62 articles studied, 29(48%) were quantitative, 28(44%) were mixed and 5(8%) were qualitative. Also, Kamhawi and Weaver's (2003) findings their study of research trends in mass communication from 1980 to 1984 showed that towards the mid-eighties, there had been a progressive shift by researchers from quantitative designs to qualitative methods of research in mass communication studies.

Potter & Riddle (2007) explored the trends in methods adopted by scholars in communication research. They discovered that larger percentage of articles published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* from 1937–1956 employed more of quantitative methods than qualitative methods. Also, Potter and Riddle (2007) citing Kamhawi & Weaver in their examination of articles published from 1980–1999 in ten communication journals found

that 33,3% used survey , 30% content analysis while 13.3% used experiment. 4.7% employed historical method, 10.3% used quantitative, while 8.4% employed a combination of methods. In a study by Onekutu & Ojebode (2007), it was revealed that out of the six health communication-based journal articles published from 1987 – 1989, 4(66.7%) were content analysis, while in 1995, 1996 and 1997, 5 (71.4%) out of the 7 abstracts studied used content analysis. Accordingly, this study clearly presented a pattern showing that majority of the studies analysed were quantitative, while a paltry few were qualitative. Ojebuyi & Ojebode (2011) also examined media gate-keeping research methods and theories employed by researchers. They studied communication-based journal articles published between 2000 and 2008, and reported a progressive drift from quantitative designs (33.8%) towards qualitative orientations (57.0%). They also reported that majority of the communication studies examined were not theory-driven as only 44(34.4%) of the studies had theoretical foundations. Ogundoyin & Soola (2014), in a study that examined trends in methodology and theoretical approaches in interpersonal health communication research (1991-2010), found that while 51.4% of the studies examined employed qualitative methods, 18.1% used quantitative, and30.5% employed mixed methods. Curiously, most of the studies examined were not theory-driven.

As evident from the foregoing patterns, none of the studies reported here is related to political communication studies. The implication here is that despite several studies on trends in methods and theories used by communication scholars generally, there are yet no reports on the patterns of methodological and theoretical orientations among political communication scholars. This is the gap that the current study is intended to fill as it specifically aimed at establishing the current trends in methods and theories in communication studies. To achieve this objective, we examined a total of 160 political communication-related articles published in reputable peer-reviewed journals between 2005 and 2015. In essence, we answered the following specific questions: What is the trend in political communication research, regarding the choice of methods? To what degree are political communication studies theory-driven?

Giving attention to political communication studies as the case in our current study is imperative given the fact that, apart from changing orientation in methodological approaches, notable media effect theories such uses and gratifications, agenda setting as well as network analysis, have notably caught the attention of political communication scholars as well as political scientists, commentators and analysts. Existing empirical investigations into media's ability to influence and effect cognitive change in individuals (Littlejohn, 2002; Iyengar & Mutz, 1998; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1977) and engage interactive and personalised audiences (Jenkins, 2006; Bimber, 2003) have substantially enriched the research community and the larger society in exploring and understanding probable variables that affect and influence how and what people do with the media especially in the modern democracy.

Communication through the mass media in today's world has dominated economic, social, entertainment, cultural and political spheres. The mass media have evidently maintained certain underlying relationship with relevant significant forces in every system. They have been variously used and still being used as valuable agents of socialization in every sector of human activity (Watson, 2003). Communication as a field of study has provided a veritable avenue for scholars and researchers to explore and break new grounds, investigate subsisting phenomena, test and develop new hypotheses that would eventually enhance and expand the frontiers of knowledge for current practices and further research undertakings (Onekutu and Ojebode, 2007).

Political participation, which can be taken as a subset of political communication, is an aspect of investigation in applied behavioural science research. It examines the observable influences of human communication that enhance research and public debate about issues, ideas, developments in public communication and assist in the dissemination of knowledge. In the field of political communication, communication is perceived as a social process that provides a platform and promotes political participation including civic engagement of every citizen (Al-Kandari, & Hasan, 2012; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012;nBosch, 2013). With the declining citizens' interest and participation as well as trust in democratic politics, politicians and representative institutions (Dahlgren, 2009; Gibson, Lusoli & Ward, 2008), government, political parties, communication, social and political researchers and scientists seemed to have focused increasing attention on the potential of online communication to address the negative perception and revitalize participatory democracy. Specifically, the emergence of interactive social media has made it to be increasingly enlisted in political communication especially to facilitate political participation and civic engagement. All these emerging trends have made political communication studies more robust, and rather complex, than they used to be some years ago before the digital revolution. Therefore, our current study would provide new insights into the trends in methodological approaches and theoretical applications in contemporary political communication studies.

Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods: The Nexus and Imperatives

As Bryman (2008) explains, quantitative and qualitative approached are the two traditional theoretical perspectives usually employed to explain research orientations. These perspectives are epistemologically described as positivism and interpretivism, while they are ontologically tagged objectivism and constructivism respectively. The third, and new, approach is pragmatism. In quantitative approach (i.e. positivism or objectivism), the social reality exists as facts that are independent from social interaction or perception, and which the researcher is expected to observe, and measure precisely through standardised research instruments and procedure that are scientifically replicable. In addition, the researcher should control intervening variables, and objectively present generalizable results through statistical inferences (Guo, 2015; Brunsdon, 2016).

On the other hand, in qualitative research, the social phenomena do not exist independent of the world, rather the researcher is seen as an active subject of the world he is trying to observe and interpret. Therefore, the researcher must interpret the social reality from the perspective of the people being studied bearing in mind that those people are capable of their own reflections on the social world. In essence, qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and attempt to interpret such phenomena from the perspective of the meanings people adduce to the social reality. The basic assumption of qualitative researchers (interpretivists) is that we cannot identify the meaning of social phenomena, such as events and actions or individuals' attitudes, from outside the context where they occur. The researcher must be involved in the interpretation. This calls for approaches such face-to-face interaction and bottom-up engagement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; May, 2002; Silverman, 2005; Bryman 2008; Flick, 2009; Kisely & Kendall, 2011; Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). The distinct characteristics of the two research orientations would suggest that they cannot, and should not be combined, or that a qualitative researcher belongs to a world different from that of quantitative researchers.

However, the reality of our changing world has shown that in most circumstances, only one research approach may not be sufficient to explain a given social phenomenon,

and no research method is the best; the nature of the social reality being observed determines whether the researcher would use one research method or combine research designs. This is called pragmatism, a research orientation that works on some basic assumptions that the appropriateness of a research method is determined by the nature of a research problem and the research questions, and what has been done before (whether or not it worked with certain method). It also encourages combined approaches, mixed methods, and integration (Bryman, 2008; Feilzer, 2010; Guest, 2012; Kristine & Florczak, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2015). As a matter of fact, it is a new approach that tends to end the paradigmatic friction, in such a way that there is an escape from the traditional worldviews and method chauvinism.

There is a growing consensus over the virtues of research strategies that integrate both qualitative and quantitative tools of research. The deployment of qualitative and quantitative methods—also called mixed methods approach—in studying one phenomenon is increasingly receiving significant attention among scholars and researchers. Some researchers have taken the approach as a third research method in addition to quantitative and qualitative methods. They have devised different names such as multi-methods (Brannen, 1992), mixed methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), mixed methods (Creswell, 2003) or multi- strategy (Bryman, 2004). Mixed methods approach is called triangulation. Perhaps, triangulation appears to be more precise as it aims at revealing complementary, convergence as well as dissidence among the findings and generation of theories. Theoretical triangulation is the use of multiple theories in the same study for the purpose of supporting or refuting findings as different theories often assist researchers to look at the problem at hand using multiple lenses (Denzin, in Thurmond, 2001). Related and/or competing theories can be used in formulating hypothesis for the purpose of providing broader and deeper understanding of the research problem under investigation.

Methodological triangulation is the use of more than one method in studying the same phenomenon under investigation which may occur at the level of research design or data collection (Mitchel, 1986; Bums & Grove, 1993). This type has been widely used in social sciences and has also been adopted in media and communication studies. Some authors have referred to it as indicating paradigmatic connection (Greene & Caracelli in Thurmond, 2001; Bryman, 2008). There have been divergent views about the uses of triangulation in researches. Some have argued that triangulation is just for increasing the understanding of the phenomenon under study. Others have actually argued that triangulation is used to increase the study accuracy as one of the validity measures (Smith & Kleine, 1986, Golafshani, 2003). Creswell & Miller (2000) delineate triangulation as a validity procedure where researchers look for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. The importance of triangulation is further buttressed in Maxwell and Loomis's (2003:3) words that:

> The complementary use of qualitative and quantitative methods provides a greater triangulation - the confirmation of findings by different methods – of findings, which improves the overall validity of results ... and makes the study of greater use to the constituencies to which it was intended to be addressed.

This does not suggest that triangulation will necessarily make any faulty research design better. It stands to reason that multiple sources and approaches can never make a defective research produce findings whose validity can stand the test of time. Wimmer

and Dominick (2011, p. 118) citing Miles and Huberman also lend their voice to the prevalence of triangulation as a method to fully understand a phenomenon that:

> It is getting harder to find any methodologists solidly encamped in one epistemology or the other. More and more "quantitative" methodologists…are using naturalistic and phenomenological approaches to complement tests, surveys, and structured interviews. On the other side, an increasing number of ethnographers and qualitative researchers are using pre-designed conceptual frameworks and pre-structured instrumentation….Most people now see the world with more ecumenical eyes.

The foregoing position of Wimmer and Dominick further gives credibility to the perspective of pragmatists that there is no one-size-fits-all research approach. The social reality being investigated and the nature of research questions largely define the appropriate research methods to be adopted. (Feilzer, 2010; Guest, 2012; Kristine & Florczak, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2015) Generally, the use of multiple methods in a study is gradually gaining prominence among various communication researchers across the globe, hence its popularity and acceptability.

Method and Materials

This study employed content analysis. It focused on published studies on political communication. This method allowed some quantitative findings on a particular phenomenon to be transfigured into quantifiable units that enabled the researchers to make generalisation. This study basically centered on research trends in terms of methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks employed in recent political communication studies. The focus of this study was spurred by the propositions of some communication scholars that a good majority of communication researchers are fond of traditionally and stoutly adopting peculiar research method in their studies while neglecting others.

Sample and Analysis

The data used were generated both electronically and manually. Journals such as *Journal of Communication*, *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *Communication Research*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Global Media Journal*, *New Media & Society*, *Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Political Communication*, *Journal of Communication & Language Arts*, *Journal of Arts and Education*, and *Media International Australia* were consulted. Only related articles and abstracts were purposively selected and content-analysed. A total of 160 articles were analysed in this study. Articles were examined based on the following criteria – journal types, emphasis on research methods, full texts and abstracts.

Unit of Analysis and Content Categorization

Every publication examined in this study was used as a unit of analysis. In some case, where we could not access full articles, we relied on the abstract to serve as the unit of analysis. The categories that were used for coding included:
(1) **Methodological Approaches**: Methodology is the study of methods and the underpinning philosophical assumptions of the research process (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). In this study, the research used two major categories of qualitative and quantitative designs to determine which research design(s) a study adopted. Any

study that combined both quantitative and qualitative designs was put in the "mixed method" category.

(2) **Research Methods**: These are sub-categories created under the major methodological approaches--quantitative and qualitative designs.. Under quantitative method, survey; content analysis; experiment; longitudinal and multi-quantitative approaches were created, while under qualitative approach, the sub-categories that were examined are in-depth interview; discourse (textual) analysis; observation; Focus Group Discussion (FGD); case studies and multi-qualitative methods.

(3) **Theoretical Application**: This was employed to establish the communication theories and models that the researchers/authors deployed in generating their hypotheses, frame their research questions or support their findings in the articles and abstracts examined for this review.

To analyse the data, we coded every selected publication for, (1) research methods, (2) specific methodological approaches, and (3) theories/models employed in the study. In the analysis, frequency count and percentages were used.

Results

Generally, only 10 out of 160 articles studied employed mixed methods while 12 articles had multiple theoretical frameworks. Details of the findings are presented in Tables, 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Table 1: Research Designs Adopted by Political Communication Researchers

Research Design	Frequency	Percentage
Quantitative	120	75.0
Qualitative	30	18.8
Mixed	10	6.3
Total	**160**	**100**

Table 1 reveals that political communication researchers employ quantitative research designs (75.0%, n=120) more regularly than qualitative research designs (18.75%, n=30). However, mixed methods approach was employed in only 6.3% of all the studies analysed.

Table 2: Specific Research Methods Adopted by Political Communication Researchers

QUANTITATIVE			QUALITATIVE		
Methodological Approaches	Frequency	Percent	Methodological Approaches	Frequency	Percent
Survey	55	43.3	Interviews	13	39.4
Content Analysis	45	35.4	Case Studies	09	27.3
Experiment	15	11.8	FGD	05	15.2
Quasi-experiment	03	2.4	Observation	01	3.0
Longitudinal	02	1.6	Textual Analysis	02	6.1
Multi-Quantitative	07	5.5	Multi-Qualitative	03	9.1
Total	**127**	**100**	**Total**	**33**	**100**
	79.4%			**20.6%**	

Table 2 indicates under the category of qualitative design, survey method is the most frequently employed research method (43.3%, n=55). This is closely followed by content analysis (35.4%), n=45), experiment (11.8%, n=15), multi-Quantitative methods (5.5%, n=7), Quasi-experiment (2.4%, n=3) and Longitudinal method (1.6%, n=2). In-depth interview (39.4%, n=13) remains the most often used, while observation (3%, n=1) is the least used as research approaches in qualitative methods. Case studies (27.3%, n=9) are the second most employed method, followed by focus group discussion (15.2%, n=5) and textual analysis (6.1%, n=2).The implication of the findings is that in political communication research, survey (43.3%, n=55) is the most frequently adopted quantitative method, while in-depth interview (39.4%, n=13) is the most often used qualitative approach. In all, while quantitative approaches accounted for 79.4% (n=127), qualitative approaches accounted for only 20.6% (n=33).

Table 3: Stratification of Political Communication Studies by Communication Theories/Models Employed by Researchers

Quantitative			Qualitative			Mixed			Cumulative	
Theory Applied	Freq.	%	Theory Applied	Freq	%	Theory Applied	Freq	%	Freq.	%
Yes	66	55	Yes	06	20	Yes	2	20	74	46.2
No	54	45	No	24	80	No	8	80	86	53.8
Total	120	100	Total	30	100	Total	10	100	160	100

Table 3 shows that 55 % (n=66) out of the 120 studies that employed quantitative methods applied communication theories/models, while 45 % (n=54) studies did not apply any communication theory or model. Conversely, only 20 % (n=6) out of 30 studies that adopted qualitative methods applied communication theories as against 80 % (n=24) qualitative studies that did not apply any communication theory. Out of 10 studies that employed mixed methods, only 20 % (n=2) was theory driven, while 80% (n=8) was not premised on any theoretical foundation.

Table 4: Classification of Theories and Models Adopted in Political Communication Studies

Theory/Models	Frequency	Percentage
Framing Theory	19	26.4
Agenda Setting Theory	17	23.6
Social Identity Theory	5	6.9
Uses and Gratifications Theory	2	2.8
Theory of Selective Exposure	3	4.2
Theory of Self Motivated Reasoning	1	1.4
Theory of Self Categorization	1	1.4
Theory of Reasoned Action	1	1.4
Theory of Depersonalization Effects	1	1.4
Network Heterogeneity Theory	1	1.4
Resource Theory	1	1.4
Theory of Expectancy Violations	1	1.4
Social Cognitive Theory	1	1.4
Grounded Theory	1	1.4
Theory of Cognitive Dissonance	1	1.4
Theory of Identity &News value	1	1.4
Information Flow Theory	1	1.4
Social Network Analysis Theory	3	4.2

Theory of Indexing	1	1.4
Gate keeping Theory	1	1.4
The Knowledge Model	1	1.4
The Stereotype Model	1	1.4
The Differential Gains Model	1	1.4
Communication Mediation Model	1	1.4
Heuristic Systematic Model	1	1.4
Structural Equation Model	3	4.2
Two-Step Mediation model	1	1.4
Total	**72**	**100**

As shown in Table 4, it is evident that among the communication theories that were employed by the theory-driven studies, Framing (26.4%, n=19) clearly was most frequently applied communication theory, closely followed by agenda setting theory and social identity theory which accounted for 23.6% (n=17) and 6.9% (n=5) respectively. Theories of selective exposure, social network analysis and structural equation model each accounted for 4.2 % (n=3). All other theories and models accounted for 1.4 %(n=1) each.

Discussion

We found that, out of 160 studies examined, 75% (n=120) used quantitative designs, 18.75% (n=30) employed qualitative design, and the remaining 6.25% (n=10) combined both quantitative and qualitative methods – otherwise known as mixed methods (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) or triangulation, Wimmer and Dominick (2011). Given the number of studies that adopted quantitative research designs, it was apparent that survey (43.3%) was the most frequently used research method, while in-depth interview (39.4%) was the most frequently employed method in qualitative research design. By and large, 79.4% of the 160 studies examined in this study employed quantitative methodological approaches. This may be in line with the submissions of Wimmer & Dominick (2011) that quantitative design is still very popular and adopted mostly in published articles by communication researchers. It is equally noteworthy that political communication researchers have begun to cultivate the use of triangulation (mixed methods and theories) in their studies. Comparatively, we found that more quantitative studies are theory-driven (55%) than qualitative studies (20%). Findings in this study show that the most adopted theories in political communication research were Framing (26.4%), Agenda Setting (23.6%), Social Identity (6.9%), Selective Exposure (4.2%), Social Network Analysis (4.2%) as well as Structural Equation Model (4.2%) in the order of frequency. Although, 80% (n=24) of the qualitative studies were not theory-driven, this negates the submission of Olorunnisola (2007) that most Nigerian post-graduate students and a good number of their counterparts in the US failed to premise their theses and dissertations on any communication theories with a seemingly increase in the adoption or testing of a specific communication theory in recent studies. This may not be unconnected with the fact that most of the studies examined were published works from 2005-2015 (mostly 2013-2015). It is, therefore, interesting that 46.2% out of 160 studies examined had theoretical frameworks. This trend clearly depicts some level of improvement as earlier studies had shown that most communication studies were not theory-driven (Olorunnisola, 2007; Ojebuyi & Ojebode, 2011; Ogundoyin & Soola, 2014). The foregoing findings indicate that in political communication studies, researchers have improved in their efforts to premise their studies on theoretical frameworks. The distinction between theory-driven studies and those that are non-theory driven studies appeared to be narrow, especially in quantitative studies.

However, one worrisome dimension in the trends, as the current study reveals, is that in spite of the fact that most of the political communication studies examined employed quantitative and qualitative designs, it is apparent that most political communication researchers exhibited some culture of paradigmatic chauvinism. Apart from the fact that researchers employed more quantitative research designs (75.0%) than they employed qualitative designs (18.8%) for their studies, only about 6% of the studies employed mixed methods approach. This pattern shows that political communication researchers have sentiments for quantitative designs, and they hardly combine methods. As a matter of fact, from the perspective of pragmatism (Feilzer, 2010; Guest, 2012; Kristine & Florczak, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2015), the methods do not guide the study, rather, it is the nature of the study that determines the appropriate research methods that a researcher would adopt—either to use a single research method or to combine methods. Scholars who have advocated the use of, and have also employed mixed methods (e.g. Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2001; Bryman, 2008; Heyvaert, Hannes, Maes & Onghena, 2013; McKim, 2015; Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2016) believe that with the growing complexities of the modern world, it is becoming progressively unpopular that researchers stick to only one research orientation in their attempt to observe and interpret social phenomena, even when it is ontologically and epistemologically clear that only one research method cannot effectively drive the study.

Conclusion

The study sought to establish the current trends in applications of research methods and theories in political communication studies. To achieve this objective, the researchers manually and electronically selected political communication-based studies published in reputable journals between 2005 and 2015. It was found that although there is a progressive application of theories to drive most political communication studies, there are still signs of bias for quantitative research designs by scholars as most of the studies analysed used more quantitative designs such as survey, content analysis, experimental and quasi-experimental methods. Case studies, Focused Group Discussions, observations and textual analysis (being sub-sets of qualitative designs) were less frequently used. Also, only a few of the examined studies employed mixed methods despite the growing call for combination of research methods to observe and interpret social realty in the modern world. This trend where political communication scholars are paradigmatically rigid is discouraging. There is the need for paradigm shift with a more liberal approach to scientific research. If the nature of a social phenomenon being observed requires more than one methodological approach, political communication scholars should consider a mixed method research.

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