



SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PARADIGMATIC POLARIZATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the philosophical traditions in social sciences, the dialectics of paradigms, theory, and its strong links with method and the associated data collection techniques. It X-rays the polar tension between structure and agency paradigms as an explanatory framework for social analysis in the context of nomothetic and idiographic approaches to social research, considering social processes and social changes. The paper concludes that in the 20th century, the emerged social processes have deconstructed structures, thus, providing a clue for locating actors within structures in the 21st century. Actors' interpretations, shared meanings, and lived experiences have tended to be significant in social analysis. By the same token, the structural methodology should be shored up to better provide answers to epistemological questions, given the undeniable structural context for micro-interactions and lived experiences, since structures are reified notions of representation, and this should be the intellectual pursuit of the 21st-century social scientists of the positive (structural) paradigm.

Keywords: Methods; Paradigm; Polarization; Social Research; Social Science

Introduction

As far back as the early 19th century, precisely 1822, Auguste Comte conceived a science of society that would study human behaviour by the same method of inquiry in the natural sciences both in its methods and functions. The new science of society, according to August Comte, would both explain the past development of humans and predict its future course. In effect, according to Harriet Martineau, 1896 (in Salawu and Mohammed, 2003:205-238), Auguste Comte wanted a naturalistic/positivistic science of society which would apply observation and experimentation methods to explain the patterns and regularities of events in the social world in which occurrences

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are rooted in the principle of causality of phenomena. However, Comte added a third method to his new science of society as historical comparison which found expression in his law of human progress and social order.

The seminal work by Auguste Comte, however, set the tone for Charles Darwin in 1858, when he published the Origin of Species which set forth the idea of evolution through the process of natural selection (Babbie, 2021: 44-45). In the mid to the 19th Century, social sciences' scientific status was seriously criticized and remained questionable for a long time. Karl Marx (1881-1883), and Emile Durkheim (1858-1916), however, reacted to the various remarks on social sciences. A 20th-century critic of social sciences was Alan Ryan, who averred that, "If we accept that there are social scientists, we can deny that what they practice is science or that the science they practice is the science of society (Ryan, 1970, p.4).

From the mid-19th Century according to Barnard, Burgess and Kirby (2004, p.7), writers began to claim the scientific status of their social theories. For example, Karl Marx in his theory of historical materialism, described the material transformation of economic conditions of production that can be determined with precision as in natural sciences, which he claimed to be scientific, as he could establish the law of historical development. By the turn of the 19th century, Emile Durkheim provided explanations for suicide through the collection of 'social facts and the identification of external variables to determine human behaviour, and more importantly, a paradigmatic approach of connecting theory and research, Merton 1968 (cf. Ritzer, 2011, p.92).

However, in the mid 20th century, social sciences also experienced internal crises with the emergence of anti-positivism which raised queries on the scientific status of social sciences. Though the scientific status was still argued for, and maintained, despite the criticism that





positivism was equated with quantitative research methods, such as experiment, survey, observer bias, and structural limitations inherent in the positivist method of social inquiry (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p.8). This in effect, Influenced Max Weber's radical departure from the search for general social laws as he contended that every society is relatively unique, hence, determinism as upheld by positivist (structuralist) social scientists has perceived humans as inactive or dormant. Rather, Max Weber posited that humans are rational and active and have a measure of control over their lives as they can create meanings from shared experiences (nominalist view). Besides, Max Weber was concerned with values in social research, as he argued that only then can facts (data) be collected and an objective conclusion can be reached (Barnard et al., 2004, p.8). Objectivity according to Max Weber is the collection of data without bias or prejudice, and objectivity in social sciences is only possible within the framework of values, as values are in certain aspects of the research process. As such, values are important as they help in relevant areas of social research, and he anticipated a paradigm change in all forms of science (Hughes, Kroehler and Zanden, 1999, p14; Barnard et al., 2004, p.12).

That said, in the late 20th century, prominent social scientists like Aron Cicourel(1981), Jeffery Alexandra(1982), Randal Collins (1981), Karin Knorr –Cetina (1981) Reed (1987) Anthony Giddens(1984), and Norbert Elias (1986), have argued that the agency- structure, the micro-macro, the voluntarist-determinist, individual-society polarity or whichever other dualisms taken into consideration are the most important theoretical, methodological and paradigmatic issues within the social sciences. Fundamentally, these issues concern researchers' view on the philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world; what can be known about the world? And how can it be known? From these questions, it is evident that social sciences are beset with ontological, epistemological and normative issues.





In an attempt to answer the questions, social sciences are confronted with diverse frameworks of explanations or paradigms. They include, for example, theories of evolutionism, functionalism, structuralism, symbolic interactionism, exchange theory, postmodernism, existentialism, dualism, holism, behaviourism, feminism, and conflict theory. Similarly, in terms of methodological approach, there are quantitative (nomothetic) and qualitative (idiographic) approaches. These theories and methods, however, can be subsumed under the rubric of positivist paradigm, social definition paradigm, critical paradigm, feminist paradigm and post-modern paradigm. These paradigms determine and distinguish the kind of research techniques and explanatory framework from one community of social scientists to another.

Consequently, the paradigm debate has led to disputes among social scientists as some proponents of a particular paradigm tend to view their approach as the only viable in social research and social progress (see, Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.234; Omadjohwoefe, 2009, p.36). Alain Touraine in a reaction to positivism puts it succinctly: "...But it can be to stress the need for a rethinking of the representation of the social facts which are the foundation of what we considered to be our specific domain of research and reflections..." (Touraine, 2003, p. 126). Though Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.17), have developed the agency-focused grounded qualitative research approach in reaction to the primacy of emphasis on the verification of theory (hypothesis testing) through a quantitative approach (positivism). For Aryal (2023, p.111), there is a need for a paradigm shift from positivism to an indigenous research paradigm in social sciences. While Layder (1998, p.5), argues for the use of adaptive theory as a means of integrating agency research with broader structural issues alongside extant theories, attempts, reactions and counter-reactions to the integration of micro-macro level of social analysis can be found in the works of Knorr Cetina (1981), Cicourel (1981),





Alexandra (1982), Collins (1991), Reed (1987), Ritzer (2011), and Giddens(1984) on agency-structure level, as well as (Elias,1986) on individual-society level.

It is against this background that this paper critically examines paradigm and its polarization, the attempts toward its integration, theory and method in the context of polarity: objectivity and subjectivity; reliability and validity; macro and micro; quantitative and qualitative data; individual and society; structure(social facts) and agency(social action) which are the thrust of this paper, to understand the implications for social research amidst emerging social processes and social changes. This paper is organized around the following: introduction; conceptual clarifications; philosophical assumptions and traditions in social sciences; nomothetic and idiographic dialectics; links between theory and method; towards the integration of paradigms; emerging social processes, social changes, social analysis, and conclusion.

Social Sciences: Emergence and Proliferation of Thought

According to the philosophers of social science, social sciences emerged as a rival discipline to natural science as it aimed to apply scientific methods to social phenomena. As such, the philosophers of the social sciences examine the foundations and claims of social sciences, as well as the plausibility or otherwise of those claims where necessary. Thus, the application of scientific methods to social phenomena has generated debates in the philosophy of the social sciences and has equally raised queries on its scientific status (Ogunyomi and Awe, 2022, p.37). Consequently, two opposing polar ends emerged, the naturalists (Positivists) who hold on to the scientific status of the social sciences and the applicability of scientific methods to social phenomena; and the anti-naturalists(anti-positivists) who hold opposing views on the scientific status of social sciences and the applicability of scientific methods to social phenomena (Ogunyomi and Awe, 2022, p.37). But Karl Pearson wrote in the early 20th century to diffuse the tension, “The unity of all science consists

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alone in its method, not in its material, the man who classifies facts of any kind whatever, who sees their mutual relation and describes their sequence is applying the scientific method and is a man of science (Pearson, 1911, p.10).

Paradigm

Paradigm in social sciences means a set of assumptions about the social world and about what constitutes proper techniques and topics of enquiry. It means a view of how science should be done. It is a broad term encompassing elements of epistemology, theory, philosophy and methods. Paradigm has been the subject of vigorous debates as in the phrase ‘paradigm wars’, which have been used to describe arguments in literature between quantitative and qualitative researchers (Omadjohwoefe, 2009, p.40). Paradigm as a concept gained popular usage in sociology and contemporary social sciences largely as a result of Thomas Kuhn’s work: *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* 1962; the key concept in Kuhn’s work was paradigm even though, he was vague on what he meant by a paradigm (Babbie, 2021, p. 29). Though, Kuhn has developed one of the most provocative conceptions of science to emerge as an alternative of positivist tradition, just like the challenge mounted against Newtonian physics by Albert Einstein in the early part of the twentieth century (Wilmot, 1985, p.13; Barnard, et. al., 2004, p.10; Marsh et. al., 2002, p.24).

According to Aryal (2023, p. 112), the common goal shared by all social sciences such as the quest to understand and provide explanations for the complex human behaviour and social system can be referred to as a paradigm. For Ritzer (1975, p.7), the paradigm is a fundamental image of the subject within a science. Paradigm serves to define what should be studied, what questions should be asked, how they should be asked and what rules should be followed in interpreting the answers obtained. Again, for Ritzer, paradigm subsumes, it defines and interrelates theories, methods/instruments that exist within it. This definition, therefore, presupposes that theories,

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methods/techniques are only part of a paradigm in social research (Ritzer (2008: A-11). By extension, the paradigm is the broadest unit of consensus within social sciences and serves to differentiate one scientific community or sub-community from another (Barnard, et. al., 2004:9).

Social Research

According to Ghosh (1982, p.187), social research encompasses scientific investigations conducted in the field of social sciences and the behavioural sciences. It is a broad category within which there are many sub-classes. Social research is the systematic method of discovering new facts or verifying old facts, their sequences, interrelationships, causal explanations and natural laws that govern them, Young 1949 (in Ghosh 1982, p.187). Social research studies human behaviour and social problems. It involves the application and scientific method for understanding, studying and analyzing social life in order to modify, correct or verify existing knowledge. Social research tries to find causal connections between various human activities and the natural laws governing them using logical and systematic methods. The main purpose of social research is to discover those laws which can be the proper guidelines for studying human conduct and behaviour (Hughes, Kroehler and Zanden, 1999, pp.18-19).

Ghosh (1982, p.187), identifies the following objectives as cardinal to social research:

- Social research aims at understanding human behaviour and its interaction with social institutions.
- Social research aims at acquiring new knowledge to gain insight into existing problems.
- Social research aims at improving the tool of analysis, or to test these against complex human behaviour and institutions





- Social research aims to find causal connections between various human activities and the natural laws governing them using logical and systematic methods.

Philosophical Traditions and Assumptions in Social Sciences

Social sciences are influenced by the idea of science as the name indicates, particularly, the empiricists' tradition that plays a crucial role in the development of social science. The empiricists believe that knowledge starts from sense perceptions and through direct experience. Hence, a generalization could be developed about the relationship between physical phenomena (Wilmot, 1985, p.8; Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.19). In the same vein, Hollis and Smith (1990, p.3), note that empirical science aims to develop causal statements which specify that under a given set of conditions, there will be regular and predictable outcomes. From an ontological assumption, therefore, the empiricists believe that there is a real and concrete world 'out there' which is external to agents. The focus of the empiricists is to identify the causes of social behaviour and provide explanations thereof through rigorous 'scientific' methods (Burrell and Morgan, 1979,p.1). In terms of methodology, the empiricist tradition is greatly influenced by logical positivism which posits a very straightforward characterization of the form of scientific investigation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.6; Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.20). According to Barnard, Burgess and Kirby (2004, p.3), positivism has been first, used by Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Positivism holds that all knowledge can be based on science and scientific thoughts and that all behaviours, whether of objects or people, are subject to general or universal laws. Hollis and Smith (1990: 50), put it thus:

...a science detects the regularities in nature, proposes a generalization, deduces what it implies, for the next case and observes whether the prediction succeeds. If it does, no consequent action is needed, if it does not, then either discard the generalization or amend it and test the fresh prediction...





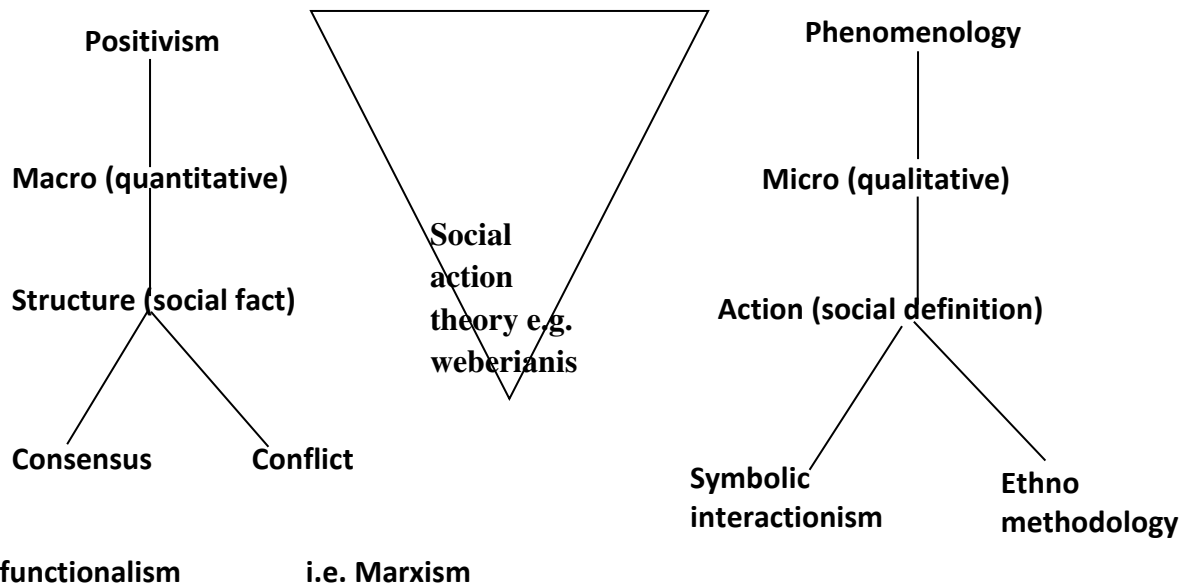
The emphasis here is upon explanations and rigorous scientific methods that will allow social scientists to develop similar laws similar in status to scientific laws that will hold across time and space. In contrast, however, there is an alternative hermeneutic or interpretive tradition (phenomenology). The term phenomenology is most closely associated with Edmund Husserl 1859-1938 and Alfred Schultz 1899-1959 (Barnard et. al., 2004, p.14). The interpretivists deny that social behaviour, like the movement of atoms and molecules, is determined by external forces which are beyond human control. All that can realistically achieved is an understanding rather than explanations of how people, individually and collectively interpret, understand and place meanings on social reality (Bernard et. al., 2004, p.13; Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.20).

As such, in the phenomenologist or interpretive tradition, it is not possible to establish a relationship between phenomena under a given set of conditions that holds across time and space because positivism fails to take into consideration complex underlying behaviour that may account for the surface behaviour of phenomena (Maliki, 2004, p.24). The interpretivists see the social world as essentially relativistic and can only be understood from the point of view of the individual in action. The interpretivists are also ideographic in their methodology as against the nomothetic position of positivism. The interpretivists believe that understanding the social world comes from obtaining firsthand knowledge of the subject under investigation. The interpretivists focus on particulars and unique events and are most likely to use qualitative methods (Omadjohwoefe, 2009, p.39).





See figure 1



Source: Barnard et al., 2004:13

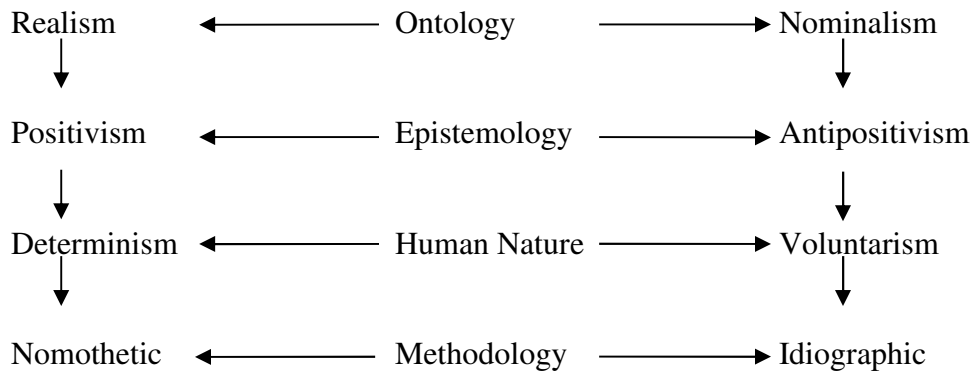
In the same vein, however, and within the framework of the ontological and epistemological questions, the methodological assumptions concern themselves with appropriate ways to conduct social research. Burrell and Morgan (1979, p.6), posit that the realists' (positivists) nomothetic approach is characterized by a systemic protocol and techniques; hypothesis testing in line with the principle of scientific rigour; the construction of scientific tests and the use of quantitative techniques for data analysis. Whereas the nominalists' (anti-positivists) idiographic approach is characterized by the total immersion of the researcher in the subject under investigation, and the researcher tries to understand its unfolding nature and characteristics during the process of investigation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.6). Abdulrahman (2013, p. 6), summarizes the philosophical assumptions in social sciences within the purview of ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodological approaches to social research with the model below:

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Figure 2



Abdulrahman (2013, p.6)

As noted by Abdulrahman (2013, p.6), the two interrelated sets or blocks of philosophical assumptions have continued to dominate the social sciences and find expression in the various disciplines of the social sciences, which according to Babbie (2021, p.19), have always influenced the why and how questions in social research in the form of dialectics.

Nomothetic and Idiographic Dialectics

The polarity between the two methodological approaches is rooted in the debate between concepts of structure and agency. To the structural factors, social science should be the study of the effects of the structure on social life in the macro or large-scale view of the social world (Barnard, et. al., 2004, p.13). Barnard and his associates posit that patterns created by structures, such as religion, the family, organizations or for Marxists, capitalists' relations of production are the starting point in explaining anything in society. Barnard, Burgess, and Kirby (2004, p.14), argue that social analysis begins at a structural level; thus, an increase in unemployment can lead to an increase in

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crime rates, or that social disintegration is the cause of suicide. As such, social facts are definite realities. In contrast, social scientists taking the micro or small-scale view of the social world, doubt the validity of this position. Barnard and his associates capture it thus:

...The idea of social structure is an abstract one, assuming a world 'out there' for us to investigate. The truth is that we are already in the world, with each of us having very different assumptions of what it looks like. The search for structural clues to social causes and effects should be abandoned in favour of piercing the way of individuals and groups make sense of the world they live in. This involves the analysis of social action, not the intangible structures they are thought to inhabit. Social facts do not exist but are created and constructed in the process of social interaction... (Barnard et. al., 2004, p.14)

Similarly, Marsh and Furlong (2002, p.24), argue that social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they shape. Marriage according to Marsh and Furlong (2004, p.24), is a social institution or structure, but it is also a lived experience particularly, although not exclusively for those who are married. Hence, lived experiences affect the agent's understanding of the institutions and also help to change them.

Again, Marsh and Furlong (2002, p.24); and Wilmot (1985, p.181), argue that social structures unlike natural structures do not exist independently of the agent's view of what agents are doing in the activity. People are reflexive; hence they reflect on what they do and often change their actions in the light of that reflection. Social structures unlike natural structures change as a result of actions of agents. In most senses, the social world varies across time and space (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.24). These paradigms which according to Barnard and his associates (2004, p.14), can be compared to a telescope, one end will show everything in enlarged form and in great detail, the other will display a world that is small and distant. The posers are: are these paradigms the picture of the same thing? To what extent can these paradigms grasp or put differently, provide a





better understanding and explanations of social realities in the 21st Century, which is characterized by rapid social change, rapid rise of information technology and globalization and its attendant impact on social structure, social processes and culture, considering the nomothetic and idiographic approaches to social inquiry?

Theory and Method

The relationship between theory and research as noted by Babbie (2021, p. 55); Barnard et al., (2004, p.63), remains very critical to social sciences as the explanations of phenomena are as important as the explanations themselves. However, as earlier stated in this paper, the paradigmatic polarization has brought a set of disagreements about the type of explanatory framework to use or adopt, and of course, the actual explanations that the social scientist sought to provide. For example, functionalist theorists will look for consensus and order; interactionist theorists will look out for meanings underlying social actions or behaviour; the shared experiences and interactions; and conflict theorists look for conflict, inequality, exploitation, social turmoil, and social change (Hughes et al., 1999, p.16; Barnard et al., 2004, p.63; Babbie, 2021, pp. 34-35).

Barnard et al., (2004, p.63), that once a frame is chosen with set ideas that relate together to provide explanations of social phenomena comes a set of ways to apply those concepts to the social research method. The implication is that if one is a positivist, the structure of society is where explanations for social action or behaviour can be located for analysis. The positivist researchers are less concerned with the emotions, feelings, and experiences of the individuals as these are not important to them in understanding the workings of society. The logic of scientific analysis of numerical data, collected through sources such as official statistics, questionnaires and structured interviews, for example, provides the raw material which can be examined by social scientists of positivist orientation (Barnard et al., 2004, p.63).

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On the other hand, from the nominalist (anti-positivist) view point, the reality of social behaviour is to be located within human individuals' interactions among themselves as they create their social experiences. As such, it is incumbent on the researcher with nominalist (anti-positivist) orientation to probe into the beliefs and meanings created as the groups act together. Hence, numerical data become inconsequential as the data are a product of human interactions and are not to be taken at face value. Consequently, instead of studying through the files and statistical tables, the nominalist (anti-positivist) researcher will observed the figure being constructed, and will rather not consult statistics on assault in the playground, but take on a job as play supervisor (participant observer) and watch it happening; as the gathered data from such method deal with the quality of human experience and not the quantity which only record some aspect of it (Barnard et al., 2004, p.63).

However, further implications for a nominalist(positivist) researcher is that large scale macro analysis will provide knowledge and truth that are at par with natural sciences as it is believed that the individuals are determined, shaped and molded by the larger society(structure) and to understand that molding process, the analysis of quantitative data(numbers), and the analysis of documents by statistical compilation and manipulation, content analysis, survey, close ended questionnaires, official statistics, random sampling and representativeness as methods and techniques for gathering data become imperative. Whereas the small micro analysis examines in-depth interpretations, meanings which individuals give to the behaviour, the analysis of qualitative data (words), and the use of observation with interactional recording and photographic techniques. Case study and life history with cross sectional collection of data for intensive analysis, longitudinal collection of data for intensive character, and interview guide etc., as methods and techniques for gathering data also become imperative. Besides, the qualitative data are rich in quality and depth of meaning. However, the two types of data: quantitative and qualitative data





are related to the type of theory to be used either by a realist(positivist) positivist or nominalist(anti-positivist) researcher as data are collected using different methods (Abubakar and Oyedipe, 2018, pp.203-204). The table below provides an illustration of the polarity of methodical approach to social research, stemming from the links between theory and method in answering the why and how questions.

Figure 3

Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

Quantitative	Qualitative
Numbers	Words
Point of view of the researcher	Point of view of participants
Researcher distant	Researcher close
Theory testing	Theory emergent
Static	Process
Structured	Unstructured
Generalization	Contextual understanding
Hard, reliable data	Rich, deep data
Macro	Micro
Behaviour	Meaning
Artificial setting	Natural setting

Alan Bryman, 2008, p.393

Towards the Integration of Paradigms

In the late 20th century, social scientists like Jeffery Alexandra (1982), Randal Collins (1981), Aron Cicourel (1981), Karin Knorr Cetina (1981), Elias (1986), Giddens (1984) among others,

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have contributed to the debate on the integration of macro-micro; agency-structure; individual-society sociological paradigms in both its objectivity and subjectivity forms. Elias, for example, proposes a figurative sociology in a bid to eliminate micro-macro polarity and the distinction between individual and society (see Dunning, 1986, p.5). However, unlike Emile Durkheim, his emphasis dwells much on the relationship perceived between individuals and societies (Elias, 1986, p.23). Alexandra advocates for a multidimensional sociology with a strong emphasis on collective order, and material and non-material continuum. His preference is on collective normative theories and a focus on norms in social life (Alexandra, 1982, p.108) But Collins (1981, p.998), takes a reductionist approach to the micro-macro debate as he sees it as an interaction, experiences crisscrossing each other in space and time. Collins (1987, p.195), argues that macro structures consist of nothing more than the large numbers of micro encounters repeated over time and changing across time and space. Over the years, Collins (1988, p.224), soon observed that everything macro is composed of micro, and anything micro is part of the composition of macro. As such he agrees that it is very possible to integrate the micro-macro levels of social analysis.

Closely related to Collin's reductionist stance is the work of Knorr Cetina (1981, p.41), who considers a great deal of consciousness and macro phenomena, as she argues for a reconstruction of macro theory on micro-sociology. But Cicourel (1981, p.76) argues that the issue is not reductionism nor recognizing all levels of analysis over the other, rather, the concern should be on how to integrate the micro-macro levels of analysis to avoid competing frameworks for research and theory. However, It is worth noting that the four levels of analysis as developed by Ritzer are closely similar to that of Alexandra's four levels of analysis, but the two models still differ in some ways. While Alexandra dwells much and places preference on normative theories, Ritzer on the other hand, gives no preference to any level of analysis but argues for the examination of the





dialectics of the four levels as identified by the two social theorists (Ritzer, 2011, p.506). The four major levels of social analysis to be addressed for successful integration of sociological paradigms, according to Ritzer, include macro-objectivity (i.e. society; micro subjectivity (i.e. culture, norms); micro-objectivity (i.e. action, interaction); and micro subjectivity (i.e. perception, beliefs) (Ritzer, 2011, p.223), while Alexandra's similar model includes material structure, norms, rational action, and voluntary agency (Ritzer, 2011, p.503).

However, research in the social sciences in contemporary times has either taken the form of agency or structural approach. As noted by Yin (1994, p.21-22), agency research focuses on human subjectivity which includes the exploration of individual actions, reasoning as well as experiences within the inter-subjective world; and concerns itself with local subjective account and experiences; case study, ethnography and focus group discussion, for example, have been connected with agency research methodology. Critics of agency methodology have argued that relying alone on an agency approach to social research risks reducing social life to a micro level of human subjective experiences which may lead to the development of theories which are idiosyncratic and laden with bias that can influence research findings (Yin, 1994, p.22). Structural research on the other hand, focuses on the grand- narrative theories of inequality, wealth and power and everything within the realms of economic and politics which macro data can be collected for generalization. Critics of the structural research approach have argued that overreliance on structural analysis alone while changing social structures can lead to the neglect of lived experiences which usually take place at the micro level (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 235).

But Layder (1994, p.5), argues that a synthesis of agency and structural research methods will provide links between human activity and the social context in which the activity takes place. Social scientists of the structural orientation have contended for the effects of structures, and

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institutions on people's subjective experiences, and as such, they consider the agency and structural factors as imperative. Giddens (1984, p.2), Reed (1997, p.31), have attempted a combination of micro-level agency technique with the broader (macro) structural analysis. For example, while Giddens has formulated structuration theory in an attempt to end polarization crises, Chatterjee, Kunwar, and deHond (2019, p.62), have argued that structuration theory goes beyond the integration of structure and agency. Reed (1997,p.31), has extended the combined approach to organization, as he argues that with contextualization and explanation, social interaction can be located within the broader social structure. As such, Reed (1997, p.37-38), maintains that organizational research requires a good knowledge of the social hierarchy of the organization, the effects on individual belief systems, and its methodological approach. However, Layder (1998,p.5), has advocated for an adaptive theory of agency focused to shore up the inherent weaknesses in grounded theory, and possibly integrate agency research with structural research. While the former emphasizes an interpretive research approach, the latter is on a broader and more encompassing survey of societal and institutional problems.

Tangentially, Aryal (2023,p.111), has advocated for an indigenous research paradigm which stems from the significance of decolonization research methodologies and the identification of the perspectives of marginalized communities. According to Layder (1998, p18), adaptive theory is a methodological derivative of grounded theory (see, for example, Glass and Strauss, 1967, pp.2-3 on grounded theory), which informs a close link between adaptive theory and grounded theory. Adaptive theory focuses on the integration of prior theoretical ideas and methods that guide research and equally generate theories from data analysis. The adaptive theory approach as argued by Layder is a theory-generating methodology in which theory emerges from the research process by taking into account prior theory in conjunction with theory derived from data analysis, hence,





the interplay between priori theory and emerging theory is the dynamic of an adaptive theory which will help to eliminate some inherent limitations in grounded theories (Layder, 1998, p. 27).

The implication is that adaptive theory will enable the links between the actor's meaning and interpretations, including the actor's activities, and the more encompassing social structure, culture, power and control and institutions in an empirical sense. More importantly, adaptive theory not only concerns itself with activities and meanings of actors but also with the use of conjectures from all lines of inquiry such as priori theory, case study and current survey data. This is why Layder (1998, p.23), has argued that the social reality we seek and the validity of the knowledge we acquire will be knitted together thus solving the ontological and the epistemological questions in social research.

Emerging Social Processes, Social Changes, and Social Analyses

According to Hughes et al., (1999, p.438), a study of social change is to understand and predict changes in the world. Thus, one problem in understanding social change is that the dynamic quality of life often eludes one's grips. The Positivist (social structure) paradigm helps to partition social life into discrete structures including statuses and institutions. The Positivist (social structure) paradigm places a “handle” on the fluid quality of life such that social reality can be easily grasped, described and analyzed, making it understandable and intelligible. Contrastingly, conflict and symbolic interactionism theorists argue that the dichotomy between structure and process can create problems as the dichotomy produces difficulty in handling change (Hughes et. al., 1999, p.438-439).

Given the above argument, it is worthy to note that the word “change” is saturated with certain non-process connotations, implying a shift from one static and relatively stable state to another.





This admittedly refers to static objects not to ongoing processes (Hughes et. al., 1999, p.439). Therefore, social change according to Wilmot (1985, p.175), is the alteration in the structure or organization of society or its parts over time. This alteration can be in size, complexities, direction or function. Wilmot (1985, p.175), posits that theorists of social change are interested in relatively slow, gradual alteration in social structure and by extension in cataclysmic changes such as revolutions which usually result in the overthrow of dominant social institutions. Wilmot (1985,p.174) , notes that each set of interactions produces a new set of situations and a new reality in the social structure. As such, theories which see social phenomena as fixed and immutable have unconsciously slipped out of the social to the physical world. Vago (1990, p.3), however, identifies the following as principal sources of change: technology, ideology, competition, conflict, political and economic forces and structural strains.

The 17th century, however, was characterized by social change that was informed by technology, i.e. systematic knowledge, tools and machines involved in the production of goods and services and by political and economic forces among other sources (Vago, 1990, p.3). That period according to Hughes et al., (1999, p.17), began with enlightenment and the end of the medieval period, which included industrialization, urbanization, ideologies of democracy, etc. Conversely, the 21st century is a new age of cultural revolution, dominated not by the goods-producing economy of modernity, but by the production and dissemination of images and information through mass media and advanced computer technology such as e-banking and social networks (Hughes et al., (1999, p. 17).

For post-modernist theorists, culture is the amalgamation of images, symbols, and ideas from television programs, and commercials are essential for enduring meanings. As such, the legitimacy of social divisions has been threatened and there is a strong drive towards the elimination of

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barriers between races, ethnic groups, genders, cultures, nations, etc. (Hughes et al., 1999, p.18). To exemplify the position of the post modernists on empirical ground, is the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic in the last three decades, the collapse of communism in the last six decades in Europe, the increasing rise of new religious and new age movements, the rise of religious fundamentalism, the increasing rise of inter-ethnic marriage at both micro and macro levels, the collapse of social class structure as advanced by bourgeoisie and proletarian theses, the rise of feminist movements changing the status-quo-ante vis-a-vis the stronghold of patriarchy, the East Asian and Italian companies whose successes have been explained in terms of post-modern principles of administration, and the collapse of mortgage and financial institutions in recent times in the US of A (2007-08) which demonstrates a theoretical failure of Keynesian economics on capitalist economic system that has been perceived over the years to be effective for economic growth and social welfare are cases pointing to social changes and emerging social processes.

According to Allardt (2002, p.3), the rapid computerization of the world has already had strong impacts on labour markets, politics, social structures, cultural forms, geographical imbalances, and the mass media. Of interest and problem to Allardt (2002, p.3; Touraine, 2003 p.130) in the 21st century, is the increased tension between instrumental rationality and community-based personal identity, and between the world of economy and the world of culture. Alain Touraine (2003, p.127) in his article ‘Sociology without Societies’, puts it in another way: “tension between social bondage and voluntarism, between liberalism and communitarianism, between society and individual actor.” Perhaps Touraine’s solution is to develop a sociology without a society, or to focus systematically on individual experiences and to build a social science theory around the conception of agency- individual actor. But Allardt (2002, p.34), argues that the point is not to





eliminate society and to study agency alone, but to focus as equally on historical conditions, structures and institutions as on agency and actors in social research.

Conclusion

The interplay between theory and research method is considered and believed to be the focal point of the understanding of social sciences. Today social scientists give much emphasis on the importance of these links which perhaps may be intellectually tasking for social scientists who want to provide some exact explanations for societal phenomena. Consequently, social scientists are in disagreement about the explanatory framework to be used and the actual explanations to be provided for phenomena. Therefore, the basic argument in this paper is that social theory and social research in the 21st century arise with new social concerns, problematic conditions and the need to know and understand the consequences of social action.

The scientific study of social life has become more relevant and imperative as science and technology continue to alter the patterns of social structure and processes, and at the same time, make the world a global village. Thus, the Positivist (social structure) paradigm tends to have a weak explanatory framework for social analysis in the 21st century as it undermines the capacity to invoke real human behaviour and systematically deal with social processes (see, for example, Erinosh, 1998, p.33; Glass and Strauss, 1967, p.260). Besides, is its deterministic underpinnings and over-reliance on the overarching meta-narrative theories, and more importantly the recent collapse of mortgage and financial institutions, the relative success of Asian industries which hinges on modern organizational strategies, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, ethnic cleansing, sustained rise of religious fundamentalism, environmental pollution, among others (see, for example, Barnard et al., 2004, p.26; Touraine, 2003, p.125).

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This is because patterns of human behaviours are not static, hence, institutions, and structures collapse and are difficult to maintain. Thus, it has provided clues for the location of actors within the structure in the 21st century. Actors' interpretations and their shared meanings and lived experiences have tended to be very significant in social analysis. By the same token, the structural methodology should be shored up to better provide an answer to epistemological questions given its undeniable structural contexts for micro-interactions and lived experiences, since structures are reified notions of representation, and this should be the intellectual pursuit of the 21st-century social scientists of the positivist/ structuralist paradigm.

Your paper is basic yet beautiful. It takes the reader through the basic approaches and differences in Social Science Methodology. Please do well to address the issues in Referencing as the WJSS adopts APA 6th ed. This applies to your in-text references and in the Reference Section below. Complete the good job you started

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