



THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THEORY LEAD TO SHAPE RESEARCH: A PRACTICAL ARGUMENT

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Introduction

Theories act as a conceptual base for understanding and analyzing the research of any nature, such as natural or pure sciences or social sciences. Theories provide simplified explanations of complexity in reality. Theory guides and concludes the research. Theory guides and interprets the results of research / study. The outcome of any study could be presented effectively only based on the theory. Theory, in research, gives proper shape to the study through a structure, color, complexion, and beauty to the subject matter being discussed from initiation to end. It beautifies the research and gives the outcome for a better understanding of the reader. Research is based on various theories that emerge from time to time as it carries an inbuilt answer to problems identified and creates a basis for further direction to research. Theory plays an important role in the process of research. The researcher is expected to start his / her work only by reading, understanding and imbibing ideas that lead reflection and contemplation over a problem or an issue, resulting in moving ahead to find new theory.

Thus, theory for any research is important and is the one that gives direction to the researcher. Theory plays a vital role in research. Theory provides explanation, understanding and meaningfulness to research. Theory helps to predict facts and to identify unexplored areas / research areas. Research without theory is less emphatic to establish the relationship among attributes, variables or data. Theory is not data, facts, typologies, taxonomies, or empirical findings. But theories operate at the conceptual level, are based on logic rather than on observations. Theory provides a context for prediction and can generate new / future research. Theory helps to conduct top-quality research which is rarely possible without theory. Researches of all kinds should have a theoretical base, at the initial stage of inception itself, for the studies in all subject matters. Theory is essential both in quantitative and qualitative research. Theory is relevant in all stages of research.

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THE BASICS OF RESEARCH

Theory, in the context of research provides the finding of one which may or may not be correct or accepted blindly. This creates a base for research as it carries lot of question in the minds of the reader. Thus, the role of the theory is to make the reader understand what the writer wants to convey and the conveyed information is satisfying the reader or make him / her to develop an idea which is new that can be further studied in the light of the study made by the researcher. Theory helps researchers to gain an overall understanding of the concepts involved and concludes with theory that gives acceptable shape to any kind of research, in any field of study. It is being said that research without theory is like a human body without flesh - it is only a skeleton having bones without flesh. It can be inferred that theory gives beauty to research. It induces the reader towards research and to see the research into its naturalness. It is in this context; it is insisted that theory paves and leads the way to the principled thought process of conception and conviction in the outcomes of research. Theory is the soul of research. It is also being contended and recapped by thinkers that the theory helps to see the forest instead of a single tree. Henceforth, the importance of theory, as part and parcel of research, is inevitable and essential, in any field of research.

THEORY AS A GUIDE: Direction

Theory is considered as a pivotal point of research that guides researchers throughout the research process. It guides the researcher in every stage of research from problem formulation, methodology and to data interpretation. It guides the researchers in every aspect of research stage by stage and gives insight and direction to the researcher. It is rightly being pointed out that "**Theory without practice is empty; practice without theory is blind**". Theory has a high degree of explanatory power. It gives meaning to the numerical data and thereafter gives shape to research and make it presentable. The importance of theory is emulated in the following paraphrase as "**there is no**

learning without theory". It is a base for what to look for and how it is being presented to the reader. The reader / researcher cannot go anywhere without theory. Theory at the outset is the foundation and guidance for research. In other words, theory is integral to research and research is integral to theory and any miss in this understanding there is no quality research.

THEORY AND RESEARCH: twin factor

Theory helps to carry out research in a full-fledged manner as it directs and drives the researcher towards his / her core objectives of finding what one wants to find. It helps to construct a building beyond a structure as the structure is the direction and the building is the outcome. In other words, it is not the construction that matters, what is all the more important is the outcome which we call it as finding that is provides the society with new knowledge and direction. Hence, it can be concluded that no research is possible without covering or taking insight though the existing theory that was developed in the field of study by someone in yester years. The anatomy of research includes the theory reviewed in various dimensions and giving direction and structure as a whole forming part of the research. Theory also helps to generate hypotheses which can be called as a research question that can all be tested by research. Ultimately, the theory and research have strong-bond of relationship with each other. Thus, theory and research altogether act as a foundation for reality or the present analytical means.

THEORY LEADS TO PERFECT DIRECTION

The research of any sought need to be initiated by review of literature which is otherwise called as reading and reflecting in theory. The researchers in any field of study have to initiate their research from theory in the respective fields of study. The study of theory provides a background for the study and thereafter guides in every stage of research. The data or numerical numbers may be part of

research but they alone cannot satisfy research requirements. On the other hand, the theoretical explanation for such data or numerical numbers gives wholeness to research. Hence, theory cannot be excluded in every part of research. This is being emphasized, because in recent years, the researchers, by utilizing statistical software, are giving more importance to numerical data / numbers without giving theoretical explanation or interpretation to the data which they utilized in their research. In other words, the data with theoretical explanation provides clarity and appeal to any kind of research. Researchers give equal importance to both, to clarity to their research whether it is a quantitative or qualitative research.

THEORY AND RESEARCH: the connect

The interrelationship between theory and research is complex as it requires lot of patience on the part of the researcher. A sound theoretical basis is required for sound research to which the researcher has to devote his time energy and money even to get all that he / she require. Theory and research are interdependent with lot of connect to justify the sense of research outcomes which commonly we call it as finding / research findings. Theories reviewed in an exhaustive manner help to generate hypotheses which are called as research questions. Such research questions either positive or negative can be proved or disproved with the help of further research in the same subject of study. Moreover, the research can strengthen the theory or may lead to rejection or revision of theories to which the hypotheses create a base. The proper theoretical perspective provides meaning and significance to the findings of the study and it presents a systematic view and logical presentation of a phenomenon. Theories operate at a conceptual level and are logical whereas data, facts and findings operate at the empirical or observation level. When both of them are integrated, they give proper shape to the theory that is published to help in further research or be a supportive factor for further direction in research.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PHENOMENON: Understanding

A theoretical perspective helps to provide a framework for understanding the phenomenon under investigation. It can help the researcher to identify relevant concepts and variables and to understand how they might be related to each other.

Choosing a theoretical perspective can be vital for psychological qualitative research, for example, as it shapes the way a researcher approaches and comprehends various mental processes and human behaviors under study. A well-chosen theoretical perspective lays the foundation for the research, informing the selection of research questions, methodology, data collection, and data analysis techniques. Furthermore, it situates the study within the larger context of psychological theories and understanding, ensuring that the research contributes meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge. By adopting an appropriate theoretical perspective, such as cognitive, behavioral, or psychodynamic, the researcher can address potential biases and assumptions, thereby enhancing the credibility, validity, and reliability of the findings in the field of psychology.

1. **Shapes research questions:** A theoretical perspective can help to shape the research questions, hypotheses, and objectives that the researcher wants to investigate. The questions that are asked will depend on the theoretical perspective and assumptions being made about the phenomenon.
2. **Guides data collection and data analysis:** The theoretical perspective can guide the collection and analysis of data by informing the qualitative methods used to collect data, such as interviews, focus groups, or observations. It can also inform the types of data that are collected and the way in which the data are analyzed. A good theoretical perspective helps the researcher sort data and organizes knowledge.
3. **Increases the credibility of the research:** Choosing a theoretical perspective can help to increase the

credibility of the research by demonstrating that the researcher has thought carefully about the phenomenon being studied and has situated the study within a relevant theoretical framework. This can increase the rigor of the research and make it more likely to be accepted and understood by the academic community. Overall, choosing a theoretical perspective is important because it helps the researcher to situate the study within a broader context and provides a framework for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

COMMON THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In qualitative research, theoretical perspectives play a crucial role in guiding the research process and interpreting the findings. This section will provide a brief overview of the major theoretical perspectives in qualitative research, which can be helpful for emerging researchers.

1. **Constructivism:** Constructivism is a philosophical and methodological approach that emphasizes the central role of human cognition in constructing knowledge and understanding the world. In qualitative research, constructivism provides a framework for exploring how individuals construct meaning from their experiences, interactions, and the social context in which they live. Constructivism can help researchers adapt to the dynamic nature of human experience and meaning-making.
2. **Interpretivism:** Interpretivism is a philosophical and methodological approach that emphasizes the importance of understanding the social world through the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals. In qualitative research, interpretivism provides a framework for exploring the meanings, beliefs, and values that guide people's actions and decision-making in various social contexts.
3. **Symbolic interactionism:** A symbolic interactionist perspective seeks to explain social phenomena and human behavior through the effects that social interaction has on our way of thinking and how we understand the world around us. In this sense, lived experience and subjective perception are key to understanding knowledge and have profound influences on the social structure of groups and cultures.
4. **Critical theory:** Critical theory seeks to understand and challenge power structures and social inequalities with the goal of promoting social change. Researchers adopting this perspective aim to expose the underlying causes of social problems and empower marginalized groups. They often focus on issues related to race, gender, class, and other forms of social and economic inequality. Conflict perspective, symbolic violence, and hermeneutical injustice are all central to critical theory as they focus on power inequities and their root causes.
5. **Conflict theory:** Conflict theory is a perspective rooted in sociological theory that examines society through the lens of power, inequality, and social conflict. It posits that society is characterized by ongoing struggles for resources and control among different groups. Originating from Karl Marx's work, conflict theory emphasizes the social and economic disparities that lead to tensions and conflicts. In qualitative research, conflict theory provides a framework to understand power dynamics, oppression, and social inequality. It prompts researchers to investigate how conflicts shape social interactions, institutions, and norms. Adopting a conflict theory perspective allows qualitative researchers to illuminate power struggles and social injustices, contributing to efforts for social change.
6. **Critical race theory:** While scholars like Foucault developed critical theory to understand and explain social institutions and power in a general sense, critical race theory looks at power inequities primarily within the context of race. Critical race theorists seek to expose and challenge the ways in which racism operates in society and to promote racial justice and equality. Critical race theory has been used to analyze a range

of different areas, including education, criminal justice, and housing.

7. **Feminist theory:** Feminist theory aims to understand and challenge gender-based power inequalities and promote the social, political, and economic equality of all genders. This perspective emphasizes the need to understand the experiences of women and other marginalized genders, as well as the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories like race and class.
8. **Postmodernism:** Postmodernism questions the existence of objective truths and universal narratives, arguing that knowledge is always contextual and contingent. Researchers adopting a postmodern perspective often emphasize the plurality of perspectives, the fragmentation of identities, and the instability of meaning. This approach encourages researchers to critically examine their own assumptions and the power dynamics that influence the research process.
9. **Post-structuralism:** post-structuralism critiques the idea that there are fixed, stable structures that determine meaning and reality. Instead, this perspective emphasizes the complexity, fluidity, and multiple interpretations of social phenomena by challenging theoretical assumptions about the world around us. Researchers adopting a post-structuralism approach often focus on the role of language, discourse, and power in shaping our understanding of the world.
10. **Grounded theory:** Grounded theory is an inductive research approach that aims to generate theories grounded in empirical data. Researchers using this perspective collect and analyze data concurrently, allowing the emerging theory to guide the research process. This approach emphasizes the development of conceptual categories and the relationships between them rather than focusing on the testing of pre-existing theories.
11. These theoretical perspectives are not mutually exclusive and can be combined or adapted to suit the specific research context and goals. By understanding and choosing an

appropriate theoretical perspective, researchers can ensure a more coherent and rigorous research process, as well as more meaningful and valid interpretations of their data.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As mentioned previously, choosing from the various theoretical perspectives can guide your research inquiry and study design. Let's look more closely at the influences that the right perspective can have on your research methodology.

1. **Sampling:** Theoretical perspectives hold various implications for sampling strategies. Each prioritizes different considerations when selecting participants or cases for study. Researchers should align their sampling strategy with the chosen theoretical perspective to ensure that the selected participants or cases are relevant to the research focus and theoretical framework. For instance, a critical theory perspective may prioritize purposeful sampling to include marginalized or underrepresented voices, while a phenomenological perspective may prioritize maximum variation sampling to capture diverse experiences.
2. **Data collection methods:** The theoretical perspective adopted influences the selection of data collection methods in qualitative research. Different perspectives emphasize different types of data and data collection techniques. Researchers need to consider how their chosen theoretical perspective guides the selection and application of appropriate data collection methods to effectively address their research questions. For example, an ethnographic perspective may prioritize participant observation, interviews, and field notes to capture rich contextual data, while a feminist perspective may emphasize the use of narratives and life histories to explore power dynamics.
3. **Data analysis techniques:** Data analysis is also impacted by the chosen theoretical perspective. For example, theoretical perspectives inform the selection of analytical frameworks, coding

schemes, and interpretation strategies. Researchers should align their data analysis techniques with the theoretical perspective to ensure that the analysis captures the nuances and insights relevant to the research questions. For instance, a poststructuralist perspective may employ discourse analysis to deconstruct power relations and discursive formations, while a grounded theory perspective may employ constant comparative analysis to develop theoretical categories.

4. **Interpretation and findings:**

Theoretical perspectives shape the interpretation of findings and the construction of knowledge in qualitative research. Researchers must consider how their chosen theoretical perspective guides the interpretation of findings and contributes to the generation of meaningful and contextually situated knowledge. Each perspective offers different lenses through which researchers interpret their data and generate insights. For example, a postcolonial perspective may draw attention to the colonial legacies and power imbalances embedded in the research findings. In contrast, a phenomenological perspective may focus on the lived experiences and subjective meanings. It is crucial for researchers to recognize that methodological implications are not rigid prescriptions but flexible guidelines. Researchers should adapt and refine their methodological choices based on the specific research context, research questions, and theoretical perspective, considering the strengths and limitations of each approach.

5. **Future directions:** Emerging trends and advancements in theoretical perspectives offer exciting opportunities for researchers to innovate and expand the boundaries of qualitative research. These future directions push the boundaries of traditional theoretical perspectives, exploring new avenues of inquiry and addressing contemporary challenges. This section presents ideas for potential innovations in theoretical

perspectives, highlighting areas where qualitative researchers can make significant contributions.

CONCLUSION

Selecting an appropriate theoretical perspective is a crucial step in conducting qualitative research, as it shapes the researcher's approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The choice of a theoretical perspective should be informed by the research question, the study's goals, and the researcher's epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Here are some key factors to consider when choosing a theoretical perspective for qualitative research:

1. **Research question and objectives:** The research question and objectives should guide the choice of a theoretical perspective. Consider which perspective best aligns with the goals of the study and is most likely to help you address the research question effectively. For example, if your study aims to explore power dynamics and social inequalities, a critical theory or feminist theory perspective may be appropriate.
2. **Epistemological and ontological assumptions:** Your epistemological (how we know what we know) and ontological (the nature of reality) assumptions influence your choice of a theoretical perspective. Reflect on your beliefs about the nature of knowledge and reality, and consider which perspective aligns with these assumptions and the goals of your study. For instance, if you approach knowledge as something that is subjective and contingent, you may lean towards a constructivist, interpretivist, or postmodernist perspective.
3. **Theoretical and personal interests:** Your own theoretical interests and personal experiences may also influence your choice of a theoretical perspective. Consider your background, academic discipline, and areas of expertise, as well as your personal values, experiences, and interests. Choosing a perspective that resonates with your own

interests and experiences can help ensure a more engaged and passionate research process.

4. **Study population and context:** The study population and context should also be taken into account when selecting a theoretical perspective. Consider the characteristics of your participants, the setting of the study, and the broader social, cultural, and historical context in which the research takes place. Some perspectives may be more appropriate for specific populations, settings, or contexts, while others may be more applicable across a range of situations.
5. **Methodological implications:** The choice of a theoretical perspective has implications for the research methods and techniques you will employ. Consider which perspective best aligns with the methodological approach you plan to use and is likely to yield the most valuable insights. For example, if you plan to use narrative inquiry or discourse analysis, a postmodernist or post-structuralist perspective may be suitable.
6. **Flexibility and openness:** While it is essential to choose a theoretical perspective that aligns with your research question, goals, and assumptions, it is also important to remain flexible and open to new insights and perspectives that may emerge during the research process. Be prepared to revisit and refine your theoretical perspective as you collect and analyze data, incorporating new ideas and perspectives as appropriate. By carefully considering all these factors, researchers can select a perspective that will guide and enrich their research process and findings. To understand how these different aspects can be aligned, it is also helpful to pay attention to these when reading other studies published in your area.

It can be concluded that the theory acts as a base for research. It makes the research a full-fledged one like a building beyond a structure

alone. It makes research beyond a pile of stones. Theory gives wholesomeness and soul to the research. Any study without theory is like a thorn without a rose. Hence, theory is the foundation on which the superstructure is built - beyond bricks and mortar. No research is possible without theory. Without theory, the research is empty. At the outset, the researchers have to realize the importance of theory whenever they undertake any kind of study/research which would help them to present their results beyond numerical data or numbers alone. This is the present need to focus on by researchers.

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