Chapter 21

The Taxonomy of Methodological Approaches in Marketing Research: Retrospect and Prospect

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ABSTRACT

The methodological approach used in any research decides the nature of knowledge the research is creating. Understanding the cardinal importance of methodological approach used in any research, this article attempts to review some of the research papers in ‘Marketing’ domain and analyses the same with respect to methodological approaches. Based on the critical assessment of these papers, the article further draws some conclusions regarding how ‘Marketing’ domain has been evolved with respect to research methodologies. Literature gaps are identified. One of the major challenges for management research is that the theories or frameworks proposed by researchers in management discipline are not implemented actually in practice. As a result, there is a huge gap between academic research and industry. This article tries to propose a solution to this problem by suggesting that marketing research should focus on systems approach in addition to other approaches. Conclusions are drawn based on the analysis. The limitations of the present study are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The methodological approach used in any research is of cardinal importance as it directly reflects how the researchers carry out the investigation. Broadly speaking, there are three methodological approaches operating in Business research namely Analytical approach, Systems approach and Actors approach (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2008). Research in any domain can be carried out with any one of these approaches.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-4831-7.ch021
These approaches differ in the process that is to be carried out while conducting interviews see reality with different aspects and thus the knowledge created by each of these approaches is having different perspectives.

The analytical approach, which has its origins in classic analytical philosophy, considers reality as a summative character. It considers the whole as sum of its parts. Therefore, it assumes that once a researcher comes to know the different parts of the whole, the parts can be added together to get the total picture. Knowledge created using this approach is characterized as independent of the observer.

The systems approach, which came into Business in the late 1950s, attempts to give more holistic approach to problems. It assumes that the whole is different from sum of its parts. Rather than focusing on variables, the systems approach concentrates on components and relations. It corroborates that not only the parts but also their relations are essential, as these relations lead to plus or minus effects known as synergies.

The third approach, known as ‘Actors approach’ is directed at reproducing the meanings that various actors associate with their acts and the surrounding context. Therefore, it considers reality as a social construction that is intentionally created by processes at different levels of meaning structures. Therefore, knowledge created by this approach is dependent on actors. In order to get comprehensive picture of how the research in ‘Marketing’ domain has evolved along with the passage of time and to know the scope for future research, it is necessary to look at the research methodologies that have been used by various researchers. Especially, recent literature in marketing domain requires thorough investigation in order to know which methodological approach it is following. Every methodological approach discussed here has its own advantages as well as disadvantages. Ideally, researchers should follow all the methodological approaches equally for various investigations in their research in order to make marketing literature diversified.

However, there is dearth of research on this aspect. There is a scarcity of studies investigating the methodological approaches used in recent marketing literature. This paper tries to fill this gap by critically assessing different methodologies used in different research papers. It further attempts to find a research gap based on the analysis. Our research has several contributions. First, it is the first systematic study investigating recent marketing research based on methodological approaches used. Second, it gives comprehensive picture of current methodological trends in marketing literature. Third, based on the analysis of recent marketing literature, it proposes literature gaps. Further, it calls future research to fill these gaps. In addition, it also suggests measures to tackle the problem of filling the gap between academic research and industry. It suggests the use of systems approach in marketing literature in order to have more industry focussed pragmatic solutions for problems.

Based on the investigation of seventy recent articles in marketing research, our study concludes that researchers in marketing domain extensively use analytical approach. However, the other two approaches namely systems approach and actors approach are used by very few. In order to have diversified portfolio, marketing literature must have studies based on all methodological approaches. Ideally, the percentage of all approaches must be roughly same in the literature. Further, one of the critical issues in management studies is the missing link between academic research and industry problems. Managers face different problems in industry while dealing with various situations. Academic research is supposed to contribute theoretically to the existing theory. At the same time, it is supposed to guide managers on how to tackle the actual industry problems that they are facing while dealing with different situations. However, this second expectation of solving actual industry problems is not fulfilled by most of the academic research. This is because the researchers consider whole as sum of its parts. They try to investigate certain phenom-
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