

## PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of social science research from various philosophical perspectives, offering a detailed and insightful exploration of the complex and multifaceted nature of human behavior and social interactions. It highlights the crucial role of social research in understanding the intricacies of social phenomena, shedding light on how social structures, institutions, and relationships shape individual and collective experiences. Social science research uses a systematic and rigorous approach to investigate research questions, involving hypothesis formulation, data collection, analysis, and evidence-based conclusions, which ensures the validity and reliability of research findings. This field of study examines social trends, dynamics, and principles to gain new insights and knowledge, ultimately informing policy decisions, promoting social change, and improving human well-being. By examining the social world through a critical and analytical lens, social science research seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms and processes that govern social life, providing a deeper understanding of the complex issues that confront individuals, communities, and societies, and contributing to the development of effective solutions to address these challenges.*

### **Keywords**

*Human behavior, philosophy, research, social science, social interactions.*

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### **Introduction (Meaning and Definition of Research)**

Before we begin, it is essential to define what research is. Research is a systematic search for information on a specific topic. *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines research as “a careful investigation or inquiry, especially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> Many scholars view research as a journey from the known to the unknown, driven by our natural curiosity. C.R. Kothari says, “Research is an academic activity and should be used in a technical sense.”<sup>2</sup> Research involves a systematic examination of facts, information, and ideas to verify existing knowledge and encourage critical inquiry. The ultimate goal of research is to create new knowledge or apply existing knowledge in innovative ways, generating novel concepts, methodologies, and understandings. This process involves collecting and documenting data, analyzing and interpreting it, and synthesizing previous research to yield new and creative outcomes. By doing so, research fosters a deeper understanding of complex phenomena, challenging existing understanding and uncovering novel insights.

However, to fully grasp the concept of research, it is essential to understand its etymology. Interestingly, the term “research” has its roots in the Middle French word “recherche,” meaning “to go about seeking.”<sup>3</sup> This origin reflects the very essence of research as a systematic search for information, as we defined earlier. The term “research” is derived from the Old French word “recerchier,” comprising “re-” and “cerchier,” or “searcher,” meaning “search.” The earliest recorded use of the term “research” dates back to 1577. Etymologically, the word “research” is composed of two syllables: “re” and “search.” The prefix “re-” signifies “again,” “anew,” or “over again,” while the verb “search” means “to examine closely and carefully, to test and try, or to probe.”<sup>4</sup> Together, they form a noun that describes “a careful, systematic, patient study and investigation in some field of knowledge, undertaken to establish facts or principles.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, it becomes clear that research is a deliberate and systematic process. O. Slesinger and M. Stephenson define, research as “the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art.”<sup>6</sup> According to Earl Robert Babbie, a renowned American sociologist, “Research is a systematic inquiry to describe, explain, predict and control the observed phenomenon. Research involves inductive and deductive methods.”<sup>7</sup> These definitions highlight the systematic and methodical nature of research. Thus, in simpler terms, research can be understood as a systematic process of collecting and analyzing information (data) to enhance our understanding of a particular phenomenon. Precisely speaking, research is a powerful tool that helps

us acquire knowledge and achieve success in all areas of life. When buying a new smartphone, for example, we conduct research on different models, compare prices, and read reviews to make an informed decision. Similarly, researchers conduct studies to prove theories, such as testing the effectiveness of a new medicine or understanding the impact of climate change on the environment. In business, research informs economic policy, helping governments and companies make data-driven decisions. For instance, market research enables companies like Coca-Cola to understand consumer preferences and develop new products. In social sciences, research enables scholars to study social relationships, understand social problems, and develop solutions. By applying research findings to real-world problems, individuals and organizations can drive progress, improve decision-making, and create positive change, as exemplified by initiatives like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

**Objectives:** The key objectives of this paper are summarized as follows:

1. To provide a comprehensive definition of research and explore its application in social research.
2. To identify and elucidate the primary objectives and scope of research in the social sciences.
3. To examine and discuss the challenges and limitations inherent in conducting social science research.

### **Methodology**

This paper employs a descriptive and analytical approach to explore the concept of research in social sciences. The methodology encompasses a comprehensive literature review, a conceptual analysis, an examination of research objectives and scope, and a discussion of challenges and limitations. The findings will be synthesized to highlight the significance of understanding research in social sciences.

### **Key Findings and Discussion**

To understand this paper, we need to examine the basics of social science research. Social sciences differ from physical sciences, such as physics and chemistry. This distinction exists because social sciences study people and their behavior, which is complex and difficult to predict. Social science research employs a systematic approach to investigate human experiences. Its primary objective is to expand our knowledge of human behavior and social structures. This type of research helps us comprehend why certain social phenomena occur, clarifies ambiguities, and corrects misconceptions. By applying scientific methodologies, social research aims to enhance our understanding of social dynamics, refine existing knowledge, and establish a coherent system for understanding human societies.

Thus, social science research endeavors to uncover novel connections, knowledge, and facts while concurrently verifying existing ones, with the overarching objective of identifying the underlying laws that govern human behavior and providing a framework for comprehending complex human interactions. However, this endeavor is fraught with challenges, particularly in identifying patterns within intricate human behavior. To overcome these hurdles, social research employs a systematic approach, involving meticulous analysis and recording of observations, to develop general principles and theories that facilitate predicting and potentially controlling social events. According to C.A. Moser, social research is “a systematized investigation to gain new knowledge about social phenomena and problems.”<sup>8</sup> P. V. Young offers a more expansive perspective, describing social research as “a scientific undertaking that employs logical and systematic techniques to discover new facts, verify existing ones, and analyze their relationships and causal explanations within a theoretical framework.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, it can be said that the primary goal of social research is to develop innovative tools, concepts, and theories that enable reliable and valid studies of human behavior, aiming to explore and understand human behavior and social life, and thereby enabling greater control over time.

### **Objectives and Scope of Research in Social Science**

Social science research aims to uncover new information, verify existing knowledge, and understand human behavior in relation to the environment and social institutions. It seeks to identify the causes and effects of human actions and how they interact with natural laws. Another key objective is to develop innovative tools, concepts, and theories that enable accurate and reliable studies of human behavior and social life. Social research adheres to the principles of natural science, emphasizing the importance of validity, reliability, and verifiability. This scientific approach requires objectivity, neutrality, and evidence-based findings. Through empirical research, which involves observing, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena, ultimately contributing to the development of new knowledge and theories that can inform decision-making and drive positive change.

Social research is a vibrant and dynamic field that weaves together insights from a diverse array of disciplines, including anthropology, economics, education, psychology, and sociology and many more. By embracing this multidisciplinary approach, social scientists are able to delve deeper into the complexities of human society, exploring the intricate web of relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions. Through their rigorous and systematic inquiries, social scientists seek to illuminate the underlying patterns and structures that shape human behavior, driving

positive change and informing decision-making that benefits individuals and society as a whole. By examining human development across different stages, past and present, social scientists are able to provide a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the human experience. Ultimately, their goal is to advance our knowledge of human behavior and social institutions, providing a framework for understanding the scope and purpose of social research that is both comprehensive and compelling. In a broader sense, the objectives of social science research are as follows:

- *Development of Knowledge:* At the heart of social research lies a profound quest: to illuminate the intricacies of our world. By embracing the scientific method, researchers meticulously collect and preserve knowledge, thereby weaving a rich tapestry of understanding. Social research follows this noble pursuit, seeking to uncover the nuances of human society and the complex issues that shape our lives. As new discoveries are made, our comprehension of the world expands, enabling us to navigate its complexities with greater clarity and purpose. This objective is the linchpin of social research, empowering us to grasp the complexities of the world and forge a brighter future.
- *Scientific Study of Social Life:* Social research embarks on a fascinating journey to unravel the intricate tapestry of social life. With meticulous attention to detail, researchers delve into the complexities of human behavior, skillfully navigating the nuances of societal contexts. By examining individuals as vital threads in the fabric of society, social research gathers a rich array of data, illuminating the multifaceted nature of human social existence. This data-driven approach sparks innovative insights, enabling researchers to discern patterns, craft theories, and forge connections between seemingly disparate social phenomena. Ultimately, the scientific study of social life stands as a cornerstone of social science research, striving to illuminate the intricacies of human social behavior and foster a deeper understanding of our shared human experience.
- *Welfare of Humanity:* Social science research is fueled by an unwavering passion for enhancing the human experience. At its core, every social science study endeavors to drive meaningful change, enriching the lives of individuals and communities worldwide. By exploring the complexities of human social behavior, relationships, and institutions, social scientists develop innovative solutions to address pressing global challenges. This knowledge is subsequently translated into actionable insights, informing evidence-based policies, programs, and interventions that promote social justice, equality, and human dignity. Finally, the pursuit of social science research is guided by a visionary goal: to create a world where compassion, justice, and equality prevail, empowering every individual to reach their full potential.

- *Categorization and Clarification of Facts:* Categorization and clarification of facts are crucial objectives of social research. Social research undertakes the meticulous task of categorizing and clarifying facts, illuminating the complexities of social phenomena through the systematic organization and analysis of data. By carefully grouping data into meaningful categories, researchers uncover patterns, trends, and relationships; identify correlations and causalities; and develop and test hypotheses. This rigorous process ultimately informs theory development, ensuring that findings are reliable, valid, and generalizable, and contributes to a richer understanding of the social world.

- *Social Control and Prediction:* Social control and prediction are fundamental goals of social research. Social control and prediction represent a fundamental goal of social research, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of human behavior and predict how individuals or groups respond under defined circumstances. Through examining social phenomena, events, and underlying factors, researchers identify patterns, trends, and correlations, informing the development of predictive models and evidence-based policies, and fostering a nuanced understanding of complex social dynamics governing human behavior.

Among the numerous objectives of social research, the aforementioned objectives are particularly significant. Briefly speaking, social research focuses on examining social relationships and their underlying dynamics.

### **The Scope of Social Research**

The Scope of Social Research is a diverse and dynamic field. Social research is a rich and multifaceted discipline that encompasses a broad spectrum of specialties, which can be grouped into nine distinct categories:

- *Demographics and Social Statistics:* This field delves into the intricacies of population trends, changes, and statistics, leveraging data from birth rates, mortality rates, disease patterns, and other relevant sources.

- *Developmental Studies, Human Geography, and Environmental Planning:* Developmental studies scrutinize social and economic issues pertinent to underdeveloped countries. Human geography explores the complex interplay between people, society, culture, and environmental changes. Environmental planning focuses on the decision-making processes governing human-nature relationships.

- *Economics, Management, and Business Studies:* Economics seeks to illuminate the intricacies of individual interactions within social structures, addressing fundamental questions about production and exchange. Management and business studies probe various aspects of business management, including strategic operations, organizational psychology, marketing, finance, and logistics.

- *Education, Social Anthropology, and Linguistics*: Education research investigates the dynamics of human learning and development. Social anthropology examines the organization and structure of societies and human social systems. Linguistics explores the fascinating realm of language and communication patterns.
- *Legal, Economic, and Social History*: This field focuses on the historical context of legal frameworks, economic systems, and social structures, analyzing past events to inform contemporary society.
- *Politics and International Relations*: Politics explores the intricacies of democracy, human-policy relationships, and governance at individual, national, and international levels. International relations examine the complex interactions between countries and organizations.
- *Psychology and Sociology*: Psychology studies the human mental landscape, including emotions, awareness, and cognitive processes. Sociology investigates group dynamics, social relationships, and societal functioning.
- *Technology Studies*: This field examines technology's profound impact on society, policy debates, and the shaping of modern technology.
- *Social Policy*: Social policy is an interdisciplinary field that addresses social needs, focusing on societal, economic, and policy implementation aspects to promote social justice.

By exploring these diverse fields, social research offers a nuanced understanding of the complex social dynamics governing human behavior.

### **Problems and Limitations of Social Science Research**

Social science research ventures into the intricate realm of social phenomena, where the unpredictable dance of human behavior unfolds. Unlike the natural world, which is governed by predictable laws and patterns, social phenomena are shaped by a complex interplay of factors. This fundamental distinction sets social science research apart from its counterparts in the physical and natural sciences. As researchers navigate this intricate landscape, they encounter numerous problems that can be grouped into the following key areas:

- *The Embedded Nature of Social Scientists*: Social scientists face a unique challenge because they are part of the society they study. As members of that society, they have limitations that make their work more complex. Social scientists have a dual role: they observe and participate in the society they study. This dual role affects their research methods and makes objectivity harder to achieve. For example, conducting controlled experiments is difficult because social scientists are already part of the society. This introduces personal biases, making objectivity a major challenge. To overcome this challenge, social scientists need to develop new research methods.

- *Complexity of the subject matter*: Social science research focuses on human society and behavior, which are complex, varied, and constantly changing. This complexity makes it difficult to categorize, measure, analyze, and predict social phenomena using traditional scientific methods. The causes of social phenomena are multiple and intricate, making experimentation a challenging approach. Since human behavior can only be studied by other humans, the act of observation itself distorts the facts, making objective truth hard to achieve.
- *Complexity of social data*: Studying human behavior is complicated because it is influenced by many factors, including physical, social, emotional, psychological, geographical, biological, and cultural aspects. These multiple factors can confuse researchers and make it difficult to pinpoint causes and effects. Due to this complexity, applying scientific testing methods to human behavior is challenging.
- *Personal Values in Research*: In social science research, personal values pose a significant challenge. Researchers, participants, and clients all bring their own values to the research process, which can influence the findings and conclusions. These personal biases can be difficult to set aside, and if left unaddressed, can compromise the validity and reliability of the research.
- *Conceptual Challenges in Social Science Research*: Social science research faces several problems, particularly with *abstract concepts and flawed reasoning*, which affect how researchers define and formulate concepts and laws. Abstraction, for instance, is both a strength and weakness in economics, as concepts like full employment, perfect competition, and pure competition are abstract and can be misleading. Moreover, flawed reasoning can lead to incorrect conclusions, as seen in the classical theory of employment, which assumed that cutting wages would increase job opportunities; however, J.M. Keynes later proved this reasoning to be flawed and presented an alternative theory.
- *The Ever-Changing Nature of Social Phenomena*: Human societies are constantly evolving because people are social beings who adapt and change. What holds true today may not be relevant tomorrow. As a result, research methods used in the past may not be effective for current or future studies. The dynamic nature of social phenomena makes data analysis more complicated, and our conclusions may be misleading if we fail to consider these changes.
- *The Challenge of Objectivity*: Maintaining objectivity is a significant issue in social science research. Social scientists are often viewed as less objective than natural scientists, as their personal interests can be influenced by their research findings, potentially leading to biased and prejudiced results.



- *The Challenge of Unpredictability*: Predictability is a key feature of scientific research. In physical sciences, researchers can often make accurate predictions. However, social sciences are more complex, making it difficult to predict human behavior. Although predicting individual behavior is challenging, social scientists can make rough estimates about group behavior.

- *The Challenge of Verifying Findings*: In social science research, events are often unique and don't repeat themselves. This makes it hard to verify research findings. Additionally, social scientists may not have the right tools to test their conclusions, making it difficult to confirm their accuracy.

- *The Limitations of Experimental Methods*: In social science research, humans are the subjects of study. However, humans can't be tested in a laboratory like objects or animals. Even if they were, their reactions would be influenced by the artificial setting, making them unnatural. Therefore, social scientists must observe people in their natural environments to gather authentic data.

- *Limitations of Empirical Methods*: Empirical methods, which rely on repeated experiments and observations, are not suitable for social science research. This is because social phenomena cannot be replicated or repeated in a controlled environment. Additionally, social science research faces challenges such as unbiased sampling and data selection, making empirical methods impractical.

- *The Challenge of Interdisciplinary Research*: Social sciences are interconnected fields of study. Each discipline overlaps with others, making it difficult to separate them completely. For instance, economics, political science, and sociology are closely linked. Similarly, other social science disciplines also blend together, making it hard to draw clear boundaries.

- *The Risk of Anthropomorphism*: A common pitfall in social science research is anthropomorphism, where researchers attribute human-like qualities to non-human entities. This can lead to relying on intuition or empathy rather than objective observations. As a result, researchers may conceptualize and interpret data in overly humanized terms.

- *The Risk of Poor Decision-Making*: The quality of research findings relies heavily on the decisions made by social scientists during the research process. Key decisions include defining the study's focus, turning concepts into measurable variables, choosing sampling methods, and selecting statistical techniques. If any of these decisions are flawed, the validity of the research findings will be compromised.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, social science research embodies a multifaceted and systematic examination of the intricate relationships between human behavior, social structures, and environmental factors, seeking to illuminate the complexities of

human conduct and uncover underlying patterns and principles that govern social phenomena. Through its unwavering commitment to empirical evidence and scientific methodologies, social research endeavors to develop groundbreaking theories, frameworks, and tools that facilitate a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of human behavior and social dynamics. Furthermore, by aligning with the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and socially relevant research, social science research plays a pivotal role in informing evidence-based policies, practices, and interventions that promote human flourishing, social equity, and environmental sustainability. In essence, by continually advancing our understanding of human behavior and social life, social science research remains an indispensable pursuit for fostering a more equitable, just, and sustainable society, as envisioned by the NEP 2020, and for addressing the complex social, economic, and environmental challenges confronting humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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