Understanding research philosophy and its importance

Many of us believe that ' research' is always related to activities that are hidden and mostly strictly confidential from our knowledge and in our daily life (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2006). In addition, majority of us also believed that these activities are held in laboratories, in some aspect this is partly correct, in a sense that the research done by people in laboratories follows certain scientific strategies and methodologies. However, there are also a growing number of individuals such as business managers, marketers, academics and students who at the present time conduct a thorough research outside laboratories in order to develop and produce knowledge relevant to the business world or any particular interest. With this regard, the difference between the researchers are in their research approaches, strategies and philosophies. These differences are " their perception of how the knowledge can be created and constructed in a rigorous and meaningful way in order to answer a research problem." (Altinay and Paraskevas 2008: 69).

Research philosophy is defined as " the development of knowledge and the nature of knowledge" (Saunders, et al., 2009). The meaning might sound rather profound, however, the author further explained that the basic meaning of the definition is precisely the exact thing every researcher is doing when he or she is conducting a research and that is the will to develop knowledge in a particular field.

According to Crossan (2003) on paper about " Research Philosophy: Towards and Understanding," (Crossan 2003), there are several reasons on why researchers needs to understand philosophical issues before embarking themselves in a particular field. Easterby-Smith, et al. (2002), identifies three

reasons on why there is significance on understanding philosophies in reference to research methodology. The first reason the author added is that by understanding research philosophy the researcher may refine and clarify the research method to be used in their study and consequently help the researchers to gather their evidence and to answer their research questions. Secondly, the knowledge of

research philosophy will enable to assist the researchers with different types of methodologies and as such avoiding inappropriate and unrelated works. Lastly, by understanding the basic meaning of research philosophy and understanding its advantages and benefits, it helps the researcher to be more creative and exploratory in their method of research.

Saunders, et al. (2009) added, that in research philosophy each researcher follows important views on how they perceived the world. Furthermore, this views and assumptions will greatly affect the research strategy and methodology a researcher chooses as part of its approach.

Research methods can be described and classified into different levels (Clark, 1998). In addition, Saunders, et al. (2009) also pointed out that the levels of research methods a researcher should adopt will contain his or her views about the world. These views will actually support the researcher's judgment on which research method the researcher should choose as a part of its strategy (Saunders, et al., 2009).

In the social science world however, there is an ongoing debate to which is the most appropriate standpoint from the views of positivism and the non-positivism/ interpretativism (Saunders, et al., 2009).

According to Saunders, et al. (2009), if a researcher reflects the philosophy or the views of positivism, then most probably the researcher will take on the philosophical instance of natural scientist. Positivism according to Veal (2006) is a framework of research similar to the views and assumptions adopted by natural scientist, in which the researchers view the people and its behaviour as phenomena to be studied, using facts and observations as its strategy to explain the phenomena.

Saunders, et al., (2009) also added that positivism views mostly prefer working in an observable social reality and will have an end product research similar to those produced by a natural scientist. Furthermore, researcher with positivism views will only observe a phenomenon which is observable and will end up producing credible

data. In addition, the author also argued that one of the essential elements of a positivist approach is that the views of the researcher are not influenced on value of judgements.

Interpretivism on the other hand, strongly believes that it is imperative for a researcher to understand the factors and " differences between humans in our role as social actors" (Saunders, et al., 2009). To clarify, the author further discussed that these belief is plainly to emphasise the difference between conducting research among people rather than materials or object.

Saunders, et al.(2009) also argued that the complexity of the position of interpretivism comes from two intellectual traditions namely; phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. To explain, the author identifies phenomenology as referring to the way the human beings make

sense to the world and the surrounding, while the symbolic interactionism, the human being are in the continual process of interpreting the surrounding social world.

In social world, Smith (1998) argued that positivism is most probably the most important attempt in order to have ' authoritative knowledge.' The author also added that the positive approach to social sciences is more of a scientific method because a researcher with positivism philosophy will always assume that everything and every phenomenon can be studied as hard facts and as such establish scientific laws.

Although, for some researchers they believe that it is imperative to use the traditional approach of research such as the naturalist or scientific method in order to explain phenomena or any occurrence in the physical and life science (Remenyi, et al., 1998). The author also argued that many scholars however, have proven a point that this is not entirely appropriate to study human beings or the organisations they have created. This point was clearly illustrated on Carr 1967 (cited in, Remenyi et al., 1998: 94).

" I do not wish to suggest that the interference of the social scientist or of the historian can match that of physical scientist in precision, or that their inferiority in this respect is due merely to the greater backwardness of the

social sciences. The Human being is on any view the most complex entity known to us, and the study of his behaviour may well involve differences in kind from those confronting the physical scientists."

With this regard, many would argue that the study of phenomenology or sometimes called non-positivism is more appropriate method or strategy in order to study people's behaviour and their organisation (Remenyi, et al, 1998). The author further argued that researchers that has phenomenological views does not deny the importance and relevance of positivism in the study of physical life and sciences, after all, if not because of positivism there will be no enlightenment to the development material reality of the twentieth-century, such as heart transplant and space travels. However, despite the importance of the positivism views, they have poor insights when explaining, why people hate their jobs and most of the time complains about everything, why customer service is normally poor, or why is it that most of employees are motivated with achievement and some are not (Remenyi, et al., 1998).

Research Approach

According to Saunders, et al. (2009) research approaches are mainly based on the research philosophies, whereby the deductive approach is commonly used by researchers with traditional natural scientific views (positivism), while inductive approach is usually based on phenomenology (interpretivism). Sometimes these research paradigms or approaches are used together in research to explain better an occurrence or phenomena (Gilner, et al., 20000). Furthermore, a deductive approach is an extremely influential and intellectual approach, in which conceptual and theoretical framework is developed and tested using empirical observation (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). An inductive research on the other hand is an approach

whereby, the theory is developed from observing an empirical reality, which is typically oppose the deductive method (Hussey and Hussey, 1997).

Research Strategies

" Selecting an appropriate research strategy is key to ensuring that research questions are addressed in a way which has value and is congruent with the overall topic, questions and purpose of research" (Palliative Medicine 2004; 18: 677-684). In relation to, Saunders, et al. (2009) added that most of the research strategies belongs to deductive approach. The author also argued that even it is imperative to allocate strategies, it is important to remember that there is no superior or inferior type of strategy, all strategies are important to every researcher; however, their use will entirely depend on the field of study the researcher will embark on.

According to Robson (1993) there are three traditional research strategies, namely; Experiment, Survey and Case Studies. However, Saunders, et al., (2009) added that research strategies should not be restricted on one strategy per study; it is also possible that survey strategy can be as part of case study.

Apart from the relation of experiment to natural and social sciences, Saunders, et al. (2009) also defines experiment as, the study of casual links between an independent and dependent variable. Therefore, experiments are commonly use as a basis of explanatory research in answering the questions ' how' and ' why'.

Survey is a popular strategy in conducting a research, as it allows a large amount collection of data from a chosen sample (Saunders, et al., 2009).

Additionally, the author also pointed out that survey is essential in the collection of quantitative data whereby the researcher can analyse the data quantitatively by using inferential statistics.

The last on the tradition research strategies according to Saunders, et al. (2009), is the case study; the author identifies this research method as commonly used in social sciences in order to have a more in-depth study of a particular individual or a group for that matter.

Approach for this Study

In the past, many scholars and researchers considered positivism as the correct scientific paradigm to the study of marketing (Carson, et al., 2001). This argument

has also been supported by European Journal of Marketing, 28 (3) 1994, whereby the author suggested that the researchers needs to rethink the marketing research methods and answer questions such as, " why do qualitative studies lack of acceptance in marketing?" (Hunt, 1994: 13-25).

According to (Carson, et al., 2001), after the aggressive and long time debate about the relevance of the approaches of scientific theories on the marketing study (see for example the European Journal of Marketing, 28 (3) 1994), the author considers the qualitative research method in the perspective of marketing as a suitable research approach for this study. In addition, Carson, et al. (2001) also discussed that interpretivsim is more suitable in the study of marketing as its approach to is in a more personal level in answering the problems in social field such as understanding the

reality. Furthermore, the author also identified its position to marketing research as skewed toward interpretive end of the spectrum.

(See figure 1)

Figure 1. The authors position to marketing research

(Adapted from Carson, et al. (2009: 14)

In terms or research strategy, Bonoma (1985) argued that case study is a popular method amongst many marketers. In addition, the author defines case study as a well-suited approach to marketing, moreover, the pattern of case study strategy in the field of marketing is highly recognise as means to generate exploratory insights.