

RESEARCH METHODS USED IN STUDIES ON MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to determine what research methods were used in studies on management and international affairs by querying databases. In order to conduct this study, we have chosen the method of documentary research, selecting publications of the past five years. While quantitative methods and qualitative methods come with their own disadvantages, using mixed methods and multiple data sources can result in findings that are both valid and reliable. We have found that this type of study, focusing on the research methods used in management and international affairs, is a relatively rare occurrence. This type of study is useful to researchers, students and professors who are interested in the research methods used in the fields of management and international affairs.*

Keywords: *mixed methods, management, international affairs, quantitative analysis, and qualitative research.*

INTRODUCTION

The quantitative analyses of data by analyzing time series, polls etc. can complement, extend and triangulate qualitative methods in a very efficient manner. Thus, the field of international affairs has long benefitted from qualitative methods (Wilkins, 1970, 1974). Qualitative methods are used to determine the plausibility of quantitative research (Cahill, 1996), while qualitative data focus on ordinary incidents that happen naturally, so that we may have a clear image of what real life means, such data being collected in close proximity to a specific situation (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

This is precisely why the quantitative methods in the field of management fail to put variables into context, leaving out human and social qualities, whereas qualitative research is more suited to the study of information needs in the wider context of human environments and situations (Gummesson, 2006).

In contrast, mixed methods are an excellent way towards obtaining exhaustive, useful, balanced and informative results (Skoko et. al, 2011, pp.290), having a long history and tradition both in social sciences (Creswell, 2009; Jick, 1979; Johnson et. al, 2007) and in management and business research.

Mixed methods are used in research because they offer new perspectives and help towards a better understating of the phenomena surveyed (Skoko et. al, 2011, p 290), so the mixed methods research is mentioned in the specialized literature under various designations: triangulation, mixed research, convergent methodology, integrating research, convergent validation (Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979 and Johnson et. al, 2007).

Qualitative research is needed in the field of international affairs, as well as in the field of management, primarily because it provides a series of rich and in-depth descriptions of actual phenomena and action situations, thus stimulating deep thinking. Another reason is that it offers the opportunity of discovering several phenomena that are worthy of investigation. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that, once we embark on a qualitative study, we must extend our research practices beyond data collection methods, in such a way as to be able to conceptualize and apply complex methodological frameworks within our research design (Kaczynski et. al, 2014).

Furthermore, with regard solely to the field of international affairs, qualitative research grasps a series of particularities of international affairs that quantitative research cannot capture satisfyingly, such as the differences between countries' cultural and institutional environments, which are difficult to measure quantitatively. Qualitative research methods can also help towards smoothing out the contextual dimension in the field of international affairs, as in the case of the differences between countries (Cheng, 2007).

Going even further, we may say that the qualitative research method is used with the aim of formulating research questions and of generating a wave of fresh ideas (Oesterle, et. al, 2011, pp.747 apud Siggelkow, 2007).

Considering these reasons, we have undertaken to find out what research methods are predominant in the studies on management and international affairs in the past period.

DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study is to determine what research methods were used in studies on management and international affairs by querying databases.

In order to conduct this study, we have chosen the method of documentary research, selecting publications of the past five years. We have resorted to the technique of external sources, namely databases. For an overview of the research methods used for both fields in the period 2011-2016, the query returned a number of 1,316,099 results for the keyword "research methods management" and 296,743 results for the keyword "research methods international affairs."

Following the query of the databases, we sought to learn how many results the keywords used would generate for either of the two fields – management and international affairs, respectively – if they were to be further refined into quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research. Thus, we wanted to observe the positive or negative trends of such research methods.

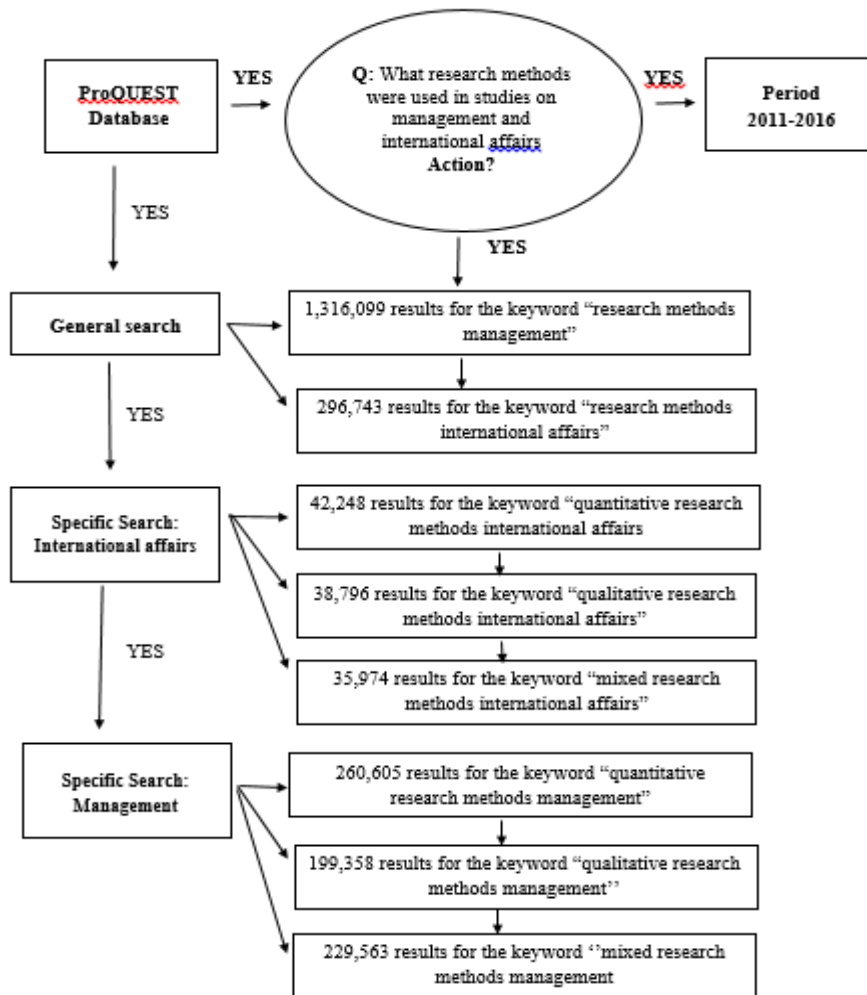
Therefore, for a clearer perspective on the research methods used in international business, the query of the databases from the period 2011-2016 returned 42,248 results

for the keyword “quantitative research methods international affairs,” 38,796 results for the keyword “qualitative research methods international affairs” and 35,974 results for the keyword “mixed research methods international affairs.”

For the management field, the query of the databases from the same period revealed the following findings: for quantitative research, we used the keyword “quantitative research methods management”, which returned 260,605 results; the keyword “qualitative research methods management” returned 199,358 results, while the keyword “mixed research methods management” returned 229,563 results.

For a much clearer visualization of these results, we compiled a synthesis of the results obtained by querying databases in the fields of management and international affairs (see figure no.1).

Figure no. 1 Synthesis of the results obtained by querying databases in the fields of management and international affairs.



Source: Authors.

Thus, we have selected two studies that reinforce, in our opinion, the results presented. One of them is a study on the research methods used by PhD students conducted by Peter John Miller and Roslyn Cameron (2011) at Southern Cross University, Australia, in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program, 1996-2007 period. The study focused on investigating the methods used by DBA students. Their doctoral dissertations were analyzed and coded into the following categories: purely quantitative, purely qualitative, and mixed with qualitative dominance, mixed with quantitative dominance, mixed with a balance between the qualitative and the quantitative approach. The authors of the study reached the following results: dissertations that used a purely quantitative approach accounted for 31.7% of the total, the ones with a purely qualitative approach accounted for 28.7%, the ones with a mixed approach and a qualitative dominance accounted for 39.6%, the ones with a mixed approach and a quantitative dominance accounted for 10.2% and the ones with a mixed approach and a balance between the qualitative and the quantitative methods accounted for 13.8%. Furthermore, the DBA students explicitly used the triangulation method, which was present in 11.3% of the dissertations. Using triangulation in data collection increases data validity. According to Neuman, triangulation means analyzing a phenomenon from several angles.

The research methods that the DBA students use the most are: the poll, the interview and the case study. Their projects used various methodologies ranging from the theory of economic growth to action research to ethnography and post-structuralism.

The other work that we wish to cite is that by Molina et. al (2014) who made a synthesis of six studies that investigated the research methods used in writing articles in various fields. In the 394 international affairs articles that were analyzed, the distribution of the research methods was as follows: 266 used quantitative methods (68%), 57 used qualitative methods (15%) and 68 used mixed methods (17%).

CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent that much more qualitative, quantitative and mixed studies are used in the field of management than in the field of international affairs. This is partly due to the fact that management includes a wider array of subfields, such as human resources management, operations management, strategic management, organizational behaviour and entrepreneurship.

After querying the ProQuest databases using the Anelis software, we found that, in both fields – management and international affairs –, quantitative research is favoured over qualitative and mixed methods research, because it fosters the impression of producing exact results that are comparable to those from physical sciences.

According to the query of the databases, qualitative research methods are the second most preferred by researchers, because they lead to an increase in the originality of the results generated both in the field of international affairs and in the field of management.

The mixed methods research scores the lowest, because, according to a 2014 study entitled *Mixed Methods Research: A New Approach*, the researcher found that

these methods pose various challenges. First of all, there are difficulties in securing the necessary time, money and labour. Another challenge resides in the access to tools and software for storing and rearranging the data, which, in mixed methods research, comes in a vast amount. Nevertheless, “mixed methods research is beginning to become part of the research structure both in the field of business” (Miller et. al, 2011, pp.387, apud Miller and Marchant, 2009) and in management. This is especially true because mixed methods research involves both the philosophical hypotheses part, which concerns data guidance, collection and analysis, and the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data in one study (Johnson et. al, 2007 and Molina, 2014, pp.15), thus providing a better understanding of the research issues compared to the separate use of these methods (Molina, 2014, pp.15).

In closing, we can say that, in any research endeavour, choosing the right methodology is vital in ensuring the validity and the reliability of the results (Qazi et. al, 2015). While quantitative methods and qualitative methods come with their own disadvantages, using mixed methods and multiple data sources can result in findings that are both valid and reliable.

The main limitation of this study lies in that our analysis was conducted exclusively on the management and international affairs fields. We propose that future studies focus on other economic fields such as: accounting, finance, marketing, computational economics and statistics, which should be used to run a comparative analysis between fields and to determine the usage trends for research methods in these fields.

We have found that this type of study, focusing on the research methods used in management and international affairs, is a relatively rare occurrence.

This type of study is useful to researchers, students and professors who are interested in the research methods used in the fields of management and international affairs.

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