The Rationale for Qualitative Research Methods in the Era of Fake News

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Abstract

This is a review of the onto-epistemological assumptions that undergird what a communication researcher unknowingly upholds the moment the researcher decides to investigate a communication problem with either the quantitative or the qualitative research methods. In the introductory paragraphs, we discuss how those who have been over-trained in methodology disdain efforts that question implicit social research methodological assumptions. After that, the ontology of the quantitative research method is reviewed to underscore how its mechanistic tenets spawn fake news. This leads to the discourse on the "weaponization" of social media and how fake news thrive in current global journalism and mass communication thus highlighting the need for qualitative research methods as alternative to helping researchers discern the difference. Beyond this, we present the major corpus of the paper where we marshalled the various eclectic and onto-epistemological tenets that give the qualitative research approach its character of methodological pluralism. In doing this, the paper detoured into why concepts such as science, university education, data, data analysis, research design, objectivity, subjectivity, human beings, and so on mean different things in qualitative and quantitative research designs. We argue, therefore, that

fake news, pollster errors, disinformation and the likes will continue to thrive in a system that elevates quantitative over qualitative designs as the valid "science" in scientific enquiries; hence, our conviction of the capacity of qualitative research methods in addressing current media worries with regard to disinformation or fake news.

Introduction

In a "decolonized" (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p.33) academic environment, it is easy for mass communication researchers to choose either the qualitative or the quantitative research methods when they investigate a mass communication problem. What most mass communication and other social science researchers do not reckon with is the "onto-epistemological assumptions" that underlie their choice of research method (Neumann, 2014, p.93). The failure to reckon with the onto-epistemological assumptions that undergird the quantitative and the qualitative methods betrays ignorance of the premises and promises of each of the methods and how/why these premises and promises matter.

Academics who "have been over-trained in methodology" easily disdain efforts that question established research conventions (St. Pierre, 2018, pp. 9-10). However, such disdaining attitude cannot invalidate articulations that justify questioning the assumptions that undergird the quantitative and the qualitative research methods.

Neumann (2014, p.93) for instance, cites Collier (2005, p. 327) who condemns how the imitation of the natural sciences by social scientists without questioning the philosophical premises of the natural sciences turn such premises into "unchallengeable dogmas." Calls to question the philosophical premises of science has prompted recommendations demanding that social research method courses in the universities should include lectures on "philosophy, ontology, epistemology, empiricism, social theories, the history and philosophy of science (Woolgar, 1996, p.14; St. Pierre, 2018, p.11). St. Pierre (2018) notes that the inclusion of these philosophical concepts in social research method courses enriches the social science research tradition by helping practitioners to understand that "social sciences and their methodologies were invented" and have gained hegemonic legitimacy by unexamined "repetitions in texts after texts in university research courses as if they are real and rational" (p.11).

Given the views of (Collier, 2005; Neumann, 2014; and St. Pierre, 2018) as cited, this entry highlights the onto-epistemological assumptions that underlie the quantitative and qualitative methods. This entry starts with an overview of the ontological assumptions of the quantitative research method. The overview outlines what portrays the quantitative research method as guilty of a simplistic one-dimensional understanding of "society, institutions, feelings, intelligence and why poverty is constructed as being just as real as the toes on our feet or the sun in the sky" (Schwandt, 2007, p.256). The overview further demonstrates how the quantitative research method induces one-dimensional scholarship and practice (Amadi, Ekeanyanwu, & Onwubere, 2018) in American mass communication experience and how the inducement denies American journalists the qualitative skills they need in order to combat the menace of fake news. After highlighting how quantitative mass communication scholarship deskills journalists, a detailed overview of the qualitative research method together with its attributes, premises, and promises is marshalled to emphasise why the qualitative research method stands out as the most suitable method for tackling the complex problems that plague contemporary communication experiences.

The Ontological Assumptions of the Quantitative Research Method

Ontology concerns the issue of what exists. It concerns the rational effort to determine whether social realities exist outside the awareness of human mind or whether the things that exist are only those that the human mind is aware of (Neumann, 2014, p. 94). It is generally accepted that the two basic positions within ontology are the objectivist *realists* and the subjective *nominalists* (Neumann, 2014, pp. 94 & 98). The objectivist realists assume that the real world exists independent of humans and their mind/interpretation. The objectivist realists take a mechanistic "totalized view of reality by subscribing to objective knowledge-construction and the possibility for neutral value" (Westgate, 2009, p. 771).

The objectivist realists exercise absolute faith in the convictions of their founding fathers – "David Hume: 1711-1776, John Stuart Mill: 1806-1873, Auguste Comte: 1798-1857, and Emile Durkheim: 1858-1917" (Neumann, 2014, p.97). These founding fathers of the objectivists quantitative research methods were the exponents of *positivism"*– an epistemic pathology which promotes the specious view that "there is only one logic of science to which any intellectual activity aspiring to the title of 'science' must conform" (Neumann, 2014, p. 97). Another way of describing this spurious stance on science is "*scientism,"* a concept coined by Jurgen Habermas to condemn the belief that science is the "conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but must rather identify knowledge with science" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 9). By holding fast to this misguided view of 'scientific'

knowledge, quantitative positivists believe that "there is no difference between the social and the natural sciences" (Bohman, 1991, p.19). The only difference they see is that the social sciences need time to mature. They believe that upon maturity, the social sciences and their subject matter would be like "*physics*"– the most advanced natural science (Neumann, 2014, p.97).

In pursuit of this endless maturity date for the social sciences, the adepts of the quantitative research method flaunt their quantitative skill in survey and experimental research designs where "causal hypotheses are carefully analysed using statistical measures" (Neumann, 2014, p. 97). When they measure and analyse statistically, quantitative positivists do so based on their dogmatic faith in the *"mechanical model of man"*(Neumann, 2014, p. 98). With this ridiculous model, quantitative social researchers promote the belief that humans exhibit uniform traits in all things – in feelings, pleasure, pain, joy, anger, likes, dislikes, preferences and so on (Rose, 2015). Based on this belief, quantitative researchers conduct their studies in the light of the belief that a cause will have same effect on everyone. Spurred by Durkheim's (1938, p. 27) view that "social phenomena are things and ought to be studied as things," positivists strive in all their studies to "discover and document universal causal laws of human behaviour" (Neumann, 2014, p. 8). Positivists' obsession with discovering universal causal law is not only driven by the ludicrous focus on the *mechanical model of man*. Positivists' obsession for discovering universal causal laws is also fuelled by their spurious belief in "*invariant and timeless properties of the social universe*" (Neumann, 2014, p. 98).

Carl Hempel's 'covering law' model of science has continued to be wrongly cited to justify the belief that "social sciences ought to search for eternal, law-like generalisations" (Bohman, 1991, p. 19). Articulations that discredit the effort for law-like generalisation in the social sciences are many, including the ones by Flyveberg (2004, p. 223) and Ayer (1978). In a 1978 interview, A.J. Ayer, a former fanatical advocate for the quantitative social research method, upon gaining the liberating insight that the qualitative social research method offers was moved to enthused that *I' suppose that the greatest defect of quantitative positivism is that nearly all of it was false."*To make clear his conviction that the quantitative social research method is an effort in futility, Flyvbjerg (2004) notes that:

> Social science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and, thus, has in the final instance nothing to offer than concrete context-dependent knowledge. Qualitative context-dependent, common-sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing...This is not to say that such common-sense knowledge is objective, dependable or unbiased. But it

is all that we have. It is the only route to knowledge –
noisy, fallible and biased though it might be (p.223).

Mass Communication Implications of Objectivist Quantitative Research Method and the Concerns of Fake News

The model of mass communication that the positivist quantitative research method served has fallen into ruin. The American *transmission model* of mass communication which the positivist research method has ruined is the model of mass communication that "privileges understanding over misunderstanding, order over chaos, unitariness over diversity, linearity over circularity, clarity over confusion and ambiguities" (Dissanayake, 2009, pp. 771-780; Hardt, 2004).

The harm that quantitative positivism does to mass communication scholarship manifests lamentable consequences in how the quantitative content analysis methodology denies interpretive skills to journalist's right from the classroom to the newsroom. Quantitative content analysis encourages deskilling by promoting a communication education that privileges the study of the manifest contents of communication over the more serious sub or implied meaning (Splichal & Dahlgren, 2014, p. 56).

The "manifest contents-approach" (Berelson, 1952, p.20) of studying the contents of mass communication flouts the *polysemic* character of mass communication texts (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001, p. 52). It also betrays ignorance of the complexities that vivify the study of mass communication. Among the complexities are that the meaning of "representation/communication" is never given but is always "constructed, slippery and contestable" (Branston & Stafford, 2007, p. 31). More instructive is that "what is said in a communication act rests upon unsaid assumptions" in a manner that necessitates the need to deploy qualitative textual analysis in order to "identify what is assumed" (Fairclough, 2006, p.11). Toynbee (2006, p. 160) takes the view that "the world is imperfect" and that the texts generated in it "carry the imperfections" in a way that calls for a tradition of "textually-based social research paradigm to fix the imperfections."

In a similar vein, Gripsrud (2002, p. 142) supports qualitative *Critical Discourse Analysis* as a social research method by observing that "...speakers, writers and newsmakers are hardly aware of the implications of their words, actions/inactions." The views of McQuail (2010, P.349) and Verschueren (2003, p. 249) might be considered most apposite in this regard. While McQuail takes the view that "concealed or latent meanings are the most significant aspect of communication that cannot be read from numerical data," Verschueren (2003, p. 249) informs that "it is impossible to explicitly say everything one means" let alone "mean everything that is somehow implicitly implied by what one says."

The danger in a communication education that ignores these insights lies in how such ignorance incubates and spawns the pathology of fake news. Journalists misrecognise fake news and allow it to filter into the news stream where the mechanistic quantitative scholarship that produce them denies them the qualitative skill they need in order to handle the intrigues that shape fictional utterances and the sincerity rules of assertions.

This argument leads to the discourse on the "weaponization" of social media and how fake news thrive in current global journalism and mass communication thus highlighting the need for qualitative research methods as alternative to helping researchers discern the difference as well as help the unsophisticated and unsuspecting public navigate through the maze of what is true news and what is fake news. Unfortunately, we are now in an era where there is nothing like "news" anymore as a standalone concept; it is now either "true news" or "fake news" since President Trump's media team introduced the term "alternative facts" into our journalese with little condemnation from the discipline and the practice. In the journalism we are schooled into, facts are sacred and no room for alternative facts. We can have perspectives and opinions, but we cannot have our own facts.

Our concern here, however, is that fake news, misinformation, and/or disinformation, propagated on social media platforms have continued to influence many public issues including the 2016 US Presidential Election and BREXIT votes. There is no denying the effect of the vast scale of malicious attempts by the Internet Research Agency — a Kremlin-linked troll farm — to sway US public opinion in the 2016 Presidential Elections. The Opinion Polls that predicted a Hillary Clinton victory did not just fail; it also underestimated the impact of fake news that was in the public domain. This is another concern of relying on figures gotten from quantitative-based opinion polls that seek for numbers instead of talking to people to understand their preferences and feelings that cannot be expressed in yes or no responses.

This argument makes sense if we consider Facebook's acknowledgment that "150m Americans, including Instagram users, may have viewed at least one post of fake news originating from the Russian agency, which took out a total of 3,000 paid ads". This is further supported by the recent report released by the Freedom House that "manipulation and disinformation tactics played an important role in elections in 18 countries, including the U.S." The Freedom House report also broke down the different "disinformation tactics" used in the various countries to include:

1. **The use of "pro-government commentators"**. This is a situation whereby the government employs staff or pays contractors to manipulate online discussions without making the sponsored nature of the content explicit. This tactic is now being used in Nigeria.

2. **The use of bots, or "automated accounts on social media to manipulate online discussions"** by government officials or private individuals. For example, Freedom House found out that supporters of the Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, used about 75,000 "Peñabots" to "overwhelm political opposition on Twitter." This tactic is still in its early stage in Nigeria.

3. **A third tactic was hijacking social media accounts and news sites to spread fake information.** Many prominent Nigerians social media accounts have been hacked and used to deceive the public with positions/views ascribed to the individuals that they do not support. We have seen recent posts from certain individuals requesting their followers or friends to disregard any such posts purportedly emanating from their social media accounts because such accounts have been compromised.

4. **Taking advantage of internet freedom to clone popular websites and use them to spread fake News** is another tactic used by government and individuals who are protecting their narrow interests.

5. **Ownership takeovers by government-affiliated entities and individuals** so as to continue to spread pro-government news and propaganda.

6. **The use of Echo chambers, polarisation and hyper-partisanship to create bubbles of one-sided information and opinions**, which perpetuate biased views and diminishing opportunities for healthy discourse.

7. **There is also the issue of conflation of popularity with legitimacy when likes and retweets** are used to measure validity or mass support for a person, message or organisation. This provides a false pulse on the popularity of certain views and is further compounded by the difficulty in distinguishing legitimately expressed opinions from those generated by trolls and bots.

8. **Trolls and bots, disguised as ordinary citizens, have become a weapon of choice** for governments and political leaders to manipulate online conversations in their favour.

9. **Taking advantage of the various policies and features of social media** platforms to amplify hate speech, terrorist appeals, racial, and sexual harassment online.

In the 2016 US Presidential election case, our thinking here is that most persons captured in the so-called opinion polls did not feel comfortable expressing their support for the maverick Trump. So, they went along with the pollsters who merely wanted to know if they were voting Trump or Clinton. Since Clinton sounded like the logical character for a US President, she was leading in the so-called polls but

lost eventually in the real election where the public obviously expressed their real feelings without judgement from anyone.

In this instance, we argue that if the opinion polls used qualitative methods in their data gathering efforts, it would have been impossible for it to fail because such designs have a way of eliciting the "real" feelings from the respondents. This view is supported by Amadi, Ekeanyanwu & Onwubere (2018, p.104) thus:

> Incidents of pollster errors that vindicate global commissions' disdain for pollster and survey research data generation techniques are open knowledge. One example of the errors during the Brexit referendum is the mistake pollsters made when they projected a win for those who wanted the United Kingdom to stay with the European Union. Another error was during the famed 2016 Presidential Election in the United States where major polls and pollsters projected a Hilary Clinton victory at the polls.
>
> We know that many reasons have been adduced for the so-called errors in the above examples, some of which include voters' lack of sincerity in admitting they will vote for Trump notwithstanding the peculiar elements he represents and his unconventional positions to some traditional American positions. The same also was adduced for the shocking Brexit votes. People were not comfortable admitting that they wanted the United Kingdom to leave the EU. This is apart from the current suggestions that many voters were deceived into voting "Leave", hence the call for a new round of voting. Brexit votes in the United Kingdom and Trump's victory in the 2016 US Presidential Elections appear to be clear indications that opinion polls and survey research approaches are not exact science, and do not offer any fool proof as credible data gathering methods.

To conclude this section, we would like to summarise the 2018 predictions of Claire Wardle**,** who is the Strategy and Research Director of First Draft News and a Research Fellow at the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School. In her own words, Wardle (2018, p.4) argues thus:

> 1. The term "fake news" will continue to be peppered into news articles, used by editors who claim SEO leaves them no choice, and added to academic articles by researchers riding a trend in hopes for more grant money. It will appear in government inquiries that want to seem relevant, and will continue to be weaponised by politicians wanting to

     undermine the media and, ultimately, free speech.

2. Visual disinformation will become much more prevalent, partly because agents of disinformation will recognize its power to instantly fire up emotions, evade tripping critical engagement from the brain, and be consumed directly from the News Feed.

3. Computational techniques that allow realistic audio, still images, and video to be automatically manipulated or created are just in its infancy, but reporting on these technologies will begin to have a significant impact on people's trust in audio and visual evidence. Politicians will claim negative clips of them were manipulated or fabricated.

4. Techniques to manipulate platforms and the media will become much more sophisticated. There will not be enough engineers at the technology companies, nor enough reporters at news organizations, assigned to monitor these techniques. Most senior staff will continue to lack a serious understanding of how these systematic disinformation campaigns are damaging their respective industries.

5. Though media companies may not effectively combat disinformation, they will continue to report about disinformation and use headlines with terms like *bots*, *Russia*, *cyber security*, *hacking*, and *fake news* to generate traffic. The race for clicks may have some unintended consequences at the ballot box in elections.

6. Governments around the world will continue to hold "fake news" inquiries, and some will pass knee-jerk, ill-informed regulation that will do little — or worse, suppress free speech. If a European government passes a well-intentioned law, a regime far away will use the precedent to pass similar legislation aiming to stifle what it decides is "fake news."

In her conclusion, Wardle (2018, p.5) notes:

     I am unapologetic about the depressing nature of these predictions. We're in a terrifying moment where our global information streams are polluted with a dizzying array of mis- and disinformation. Politicians are targeting the professional media as a way of building direct connections with citizens through social media. Journalists and platforms are being targeted and manipulated by agents of disinformation who crave and require the credibility that comes with their exposure. Political polarization is creating

dangerous schisms in societies worldwide, and the speed of technological advancements is making manipulation increasingly difficult to detect. These are all reasons to be depressed.

These concerns highlight the need for qualitative research methods in addressing current media worries with regard to disinformation or fake news. These concerns also partly highlight the endangered nature of journalism in the 21ˢᵗ century and further signposts why opinion polls and survey research approaches are not exact science, and do not offer any fool proof as credible data gathering methods (Amadi, Ekeanyanwu & Onwubere, 2018).

Fictional Utterances and Constitutive Rules of Assertions

The discursive dynamics which hold that "metaphorical utterances are serious but non literal" while "fictional utterances are literal but non-serious" constitute an interesting problematic in the context of the sincerity rule of assertions which non-serious utterances "are not expected to fulfil" (Searle, 1979, pp. 61-62). That sincerity rule states that "an expressed proposition must be obviously true to both the speaker and hearer in the context of an utterance" (Searle, 1979, p. 67).

What should be discerned from the foregoing is that it is only in the context of a fictional utterance which is literal but non-serious and about which the maker of an assertion is not expected to fulfil the sincerity rule that a remark like "America has annexed the African continent" which is a literal but non-serious remark can stand but only as an act of "pretending" for comic effect but not for deceptive intention (Searle, 1979, p. 65). Pretending for comic effect is instantiated if, for example, someone known not to be a police officer decides to make people laugh by wearing a police officer's uniform and behaving like a police officer as might be observed in a drama. But pretending will morph into deception when someone known not as a police officer pretends to be one for the purpose of enjoying the responsibilities and privileges that are incidental to being a police officer (Searle, 1979).

The foregoing throws up the challenge of determining when, for instance, an utterance by a politician or any other encoder should be adjudged fictional/deceptive and when the same utterance should be adjudged fictional/comical. When journalists misunderstand a politician or any other encoder and go ahead to report the encoder's comical, literal but non-serious fictional assertion or action as literal and serious, the dissemination of such misunderstanding will not only make the audience to see the misunderstood encoder in a bad light but will also compel the misunderstood politician/encoder to level accusations of incompetence, unprofessionalism and news-faking against the journalists who disseminated the misunderstanding. A

politician may, for instance, claim for comical effect that the 'United States has annexed Africa.' When a politician makes such a literal but non-serious assertion for comical effect, such a politician will not be obligated to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition. For journalists whose duty it is to report on remarks of politicians, it will be a mark of high professionalism when they allow the contextual implicatures surrounding a politician's/an encoder's remarks to help them discern when a politician's remark is literal and serious to compel the utterer to provide reasons for the expressed proposition and when the contextual implicatures of a politician's remark are indicating that the remark is literal but non-serious in a manner that should not warrant compelling the politician to provide reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition.

Recent reportorial experiences in the United States, more so those involving President Donald Trump's utterances provide insight on how American journalists have been disseminating literal serious utterances as well as utterances that might be literal but not serious. Take a look at the following five utterances by President Donald Trump. The way American journalists reported those utterances demonstrates their (mis)understanding of fictional assertions and how such (mis)understanding scaffold the growth of fake news.

Textbox 1: Exemplars of Fictional and Metaphorical Utterances Misunderstood as Trump's Lies

S/No	Exemplars of Trump's Utterances	Source
1.	It is freezing and snowing in New York ‾ we need global warming.	Claire (2017)
2.	My fingers are long and beautiful, as, it has been well documented, are various other parts of my body.	Claire (2017)
3.	I had a great meeting with President Obama. I never met him before. I really liked him a lot. The meeting was supposed to be 10 minutes, 15 minutes max.	Gee, Griffiths & Arrieta-Kenna (2017)
4.	These people (Trump's Cabinet nominees) h ave given up fortunes of income in order to make a dollar a year, and they are so proud to do it.	Gee, Griffiths & Arrieta-Kenna (2017)
5.	We haven't had refineries built in decades, right? We're going to have refineries built again.	Gee, Griffiths & Arrieta-Kenna (2017)

Qualitative Critical Analysis

The academic background of an analyst who intends to analyse the exemplars of Trump's utterances displayed in the textbox above will determine how the analyst will read, analyse, interpret, and classify the utterances. In the field of mass communication where the American quantitative research tradition had harmfully influenced mass communication scholarship, a journalist who received only the American quantitative research training will read and interpret the remarks in the textbox differently from a colleague who received the critical European qualitative communication education (Hardt, 2004).

Quantitative mass communication training defines and upholds the content analysis research method as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest contents of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 20) as cited in (Splichal & Dahlgren, 2014, p. 56). When journalists whose training is informed by Berelson's definition read the utterances in the textbox, their reading will betray uncritical embrace of the *null context hypothesis* which purports that the "literal meaning of a sentence is the meaning the sentence has in zero or null context'" (Searle, 1979, p. 117). Apart from that, a journalist who received only quantitative mass communication education will find it difficult to muster the necessary critical *"culture capital"* (Birkhead, 1991, p. 228) to grasp the fact that "the semantic contexts of utterances are often alone not reliable guarantors of the meaning of utterances in contexts" (Simpson, 1993, p. 129).

Unlike journalists with only quantitative training, the ones with a commensurate qualitative training can muster the necessary critical acumen to enable them deploy the rich assortment of critical analytic tools in ways that will enhance nuanced interpretation of the texts as displayed. When critical analytic tools are properly deployed, such deployment will, for instance, enable the analyst to start reading exemplar one in the textbox with a teeming intensity of critical recollections. The intensity of critical reflection will prompt the reader to recall Goatly's (1997, p.165) annotation on "exploiting the redundancy in the co-text/context of an utterance." Morgan & Welton (1992, pp. 134-135) have explained *redundancy* as a communication strategy that is "measured by the degree to which one part of a message can be predicted on the basis of the rest."

Another analytic tool which can help in reading for the multiple meaning which exemplar (1) in the textbox calls for is the concept of modality. *Modality* broadly refers to a "speaker's attitude towards or opinion about the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence" (Simpson, 1993, p.47). When Simpson's (p.47) view is recalled in tandem with his comment that "communication is successful not when hearers recognise the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's meaning from it" (p. 132) such recall will likely help the analyst to

realise that instead of classifying exemplar one as a distortion or a lie, the best that should be read from it is that the utterer has emitted the remark as a mere *tongue in cheek* comic utterance, which though literal, should not be taken seriously.

A good measure of knowledge of critical interpretation would enable the analyst in the context of that utterance to realise that the "literal meaning of a sentence is determined only by a set of truth conditions relative to a set of background assumptions which are not part of the semantic content of the sentence" (Searle, 1979, p. 81). Such realisation would ensure that narrow quantitative thinking does not impoverish how that utterance is interpreted and disseminated.

What is said above about how to read exemplar (1) in the Textbox applies also to how exemplar two should be read. Reading exemplar two in a similar way finds justification when the co-text/context assumptions of the utterance as well as the role of the "*expressive modal categorical claim to truth and knowledge*" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 107) conveyed by the phrase: *'my fingers are long and beautiful'* are factored in. Another factor lending credence to the fact that exemplar two should be read like exemplar one is the phrase: *'has been well documented.'* The casting of that phrase in a passive voice without being specific about the persons/agencies responsible for the purported documentation further lends support to why the utterance should be taken as a mere literal but non-serious remark. The reading of exemplars 1 & 2 as literal but non-serious remarks finds further support in the reminder that the metaphorical properties of utterances make it possible for a speaker to "systematically mean and communicate something quite different from what the uttered expression means" (Searle, 1979, p. x).

The classification of exemplar three (3) in the Textbox as a lie by Trump's traducers is based on a clarification which faults Trump's 10 minute and 15 minute time-approximation of his meeting with President Obama. Two words: *'supposed'* and *'scheduled'* are of essence in proving the unfairness of classifying as a lie, President Trump's time-estimation in that utterance. By the word *'supposed'* in that remark, Trump was implicitly referring to his team with whom he may have arranged to stage the event of meeting President Obama in a way that should not exceed a maximum of 10 to 15 minutes. Even at that, if somebody says that an event that lasted for one hour was supposed to last for a maximum of 10 -15 minutes, the fact that the event lasted beyond 10-15 minutes does not contradict the fact that the event was supposed to last a maximum of 10-15 minutes. Moreover, since the allegation of lying is grounded on a claim that the meeting was *'scheduled'* to be for one hour but not 'supposed' to be for 10-15 minutes as Trump remarked, the lying charge would have been credible if those levelling it had proved that those who supposed the meeting to last for 10-15 minutes were also the same persons who scheduled one hour for the meeting. But since such proof is absent, the absence underscores the overzealousness of classifying that remark as a lie.

Gee, Griffiths & Arrieta-Kenna (2017), quantitatively-trained American journalists, classified exemplar four (4) as a lie based on the argument that it is only Trump who had declared he would not draw the statutory presidential salary during his presidency and not members of his cabinet. But such classification is done without considering the requisite metaphorical affordance which grounds that remark. The failure to consider the metaphorical affordance means that the classifiers paid the price of "describing a metaphorical remark in a way that does not distinguish it from a literal remark" (Searle, 1979, p. 78). This failure also betrays the ignorance that metaphor makes it possible for a speaker to use "*S is P* to say that *S is R*" (Searle, 1979, p. 84). To use *S* is *P* to say *S* is *R* agrees with the fact that "in a metaphorical utterance, what the speaker means should differ from what the speaker says" (Searle, p. 81).

When applied to the remark under consideration, what Trump meant when he said that his cabinet nominees have given up fortunes of income in order to make a dollar a year should be understood as a metaphorical way of stating that whatever the remuneration his nominees gets as salary for their services would just be like a dollar when compared with what they would have earned if they had not volunteered to serve the American people in Trump's administration.

Trump's remark presented as exemplar five (5) in the Textbox is classified as a lie by hasty quantitatively-trained analysts based on a claim by Trump that *'we haven't had refineries built in decades.'* Hasty, quantitative, narrow-minded analysts classified that statement a lie based on their belief that refineries had actually been built in 2014 and 2015 in both Texas and North Dakota. But there are qualitative analytic reasons why the claim that refineries had been built in 2014 and 2015 in Texas and North Dakota by Trump's traducers might not be strong enough to justify classifying as a lie Trump's remark on refineries as contained in exemplar five (5).

The reason why classifying Trump's remark as a lie cannot be justified lies in the *'we'* which Trump started his remark with and the *'were built'* used in the clarification that the quantitative-minded journalists made in their specious attempt to prove that Trump's remark is a lie. By starting his remark with *'we,'* Trump smartly created a measure of uncertainty as to whether by *'we'* he was referring *exclusively* to the government of the United States or that by *'we'* he was referring *inclusively* to the government of the United States as well as the private sector and other interests who, apart from the government of the United States, could go into the business of establishing refineries. So if Trump's *'we'* is used *"exclusively"* (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 148-149) to refer to only the government of the United States, it would be wrong to declare Trump's statement a lie based on the claim that refineries were built in 2014 and 2015 in Texas and North Dakota.

Another fact supporting this line of reasoning is the *'were built'* phrase used by Trump's traducers in a way that left, unclear, a gap of *"attribution of causality and*

responsibility" (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 103). When those who claim that Trump lied created that gap by using the phrase *'were built'* without specifically saying whether the Texas and North Dakota refineries were built *exclusively* by the government of the United States or that the refineries were built by other business interests, they weakened their case by such omission. They weakened their case on the ground that Trump's *'we'* might just be referring *exclusively* to the government of the United States and not to other private investors whose investment on refineries should not be seen as American government-built refineries.

The Lure of Fictional/ Metaphorical Assertions in Mass Communication
The use of fictional assertions is made possible by non-semantic traditions that make it possible to break the conventions about how words literally signify reality in the world. While the semantic or the literal convention would, for instance, commit a speaker to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of an expressed proposition, what the non-semantic convention rather does is to "enable the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings" (Searle, 1979, pp. 66-67). The existence of this non-semantic convention which is extensively put to use by comedians is increasingly exploited by politicians and other encoders who, encouraged by the window offered by the non-semantic tradition, "go through the motions of making statements which they know to be not true" so long as they know that their intention is not to deceive (Searle, 1979, p. 67).

The political-communication benefits that accrue to smart politicians from the non-semantic convention are so crucial that politicians cannot resist it. These benefits, because of similarity, find convergence with the benefits that a smart politician can derive when his/her speech is peppered with ambiguities. As analysed by Hahn (1998, p. 107), "ambiguities are useful because they leave the auditors free to supply their own content for the ambiguities and thus persuade themselves." Where/when journalists lead their audience, wittingly or otherwise, into failing to grasp the communication/discursive possibilities that ambiguity and fictional utterances offer, such failure will not only mean upholding the tenets of the discredited null context hypothesis but will also lead to a situation, as in the case of Trump, where a postmodernist politician who has decided to define her/his agency with discursive practices that are steeped in ambiguity and fictional utterances is unfairly demonised as a liar or a producer of fake news.

The point in the foregoing is that the *meaning transmission* model of communication, by its espousal of totalised and mechanistic stance on mass communication cannot imbue journalists with the skill to appreciate that *'communication is as much about communication as it is about miscommunication and ambiguities'*(Dissanayake, p.780).

The Ontological Assumptions of the Qualitative Research Method

The onto-epistemological assumptions that undergird the qualitative research method are steeped in elastic conception of reality. The elastic conception is encapsulated into the *nominalist* conception of reality. This conception upholds the view that humans do not "directly experience reality out there" (Neumann, 2014, p.94). Unlike the quantitative realists who claim they "see what exists and that they can easily capture it to produce objective knowledge" the qualitative nominalists agree that what a nominalist sees "largely comes from imposing a subjective viewpoint onto the visible physical appearances that enables people see things differently" (Neumann, 2014, p. 94). Given this subjective stance on reality, a qualitative nominalist will not narrowly see a rug only as what is spread on the floor to be walked on. Rather, upon seeing a rug, a qualitative nominalist sees beyond what is walked on to something that, among others, could serve religious and aesthetic purposes.

A Qualitative Nominalist' Stance on Mass Communication Education

A qualitative nominalist does not narrowly see communication education as a site of affirmation but that of contestation. Qualitative education believes that university teachers should be public intellectuals with a measure of autonomy and power; not "company men" or "corporate intellectuals" who by "selling their services for a fee become integrated appendage of the hegemonic class contributing to the reproduction and maintenance of the status quo" (Gouldner, 1976, pp. 182-183).

Qualitative education does not aspire to produce "grant writers" who sacrifice impartation of critical capacities in students for encouraging students to become "technically trained docile would-be hedge fund managers" (Giroux, 2015, p. 198).Qualitative education guards against "confusing education with training" by insisting that "education is not solely about job training" (Giroux, 2015, pp. 200 & 204) but about infusing into students the curiosity to raise questions about what "counts as knowledge, as scholarship, as opening up possibilities for doing things differently in the world" (Adams & Jones, 2008, p. 376). Qualitative education believes that to "mention the unmentionable and give voice to the voiceless" the "universities should be subversive in healthy societies" (Giroux, 2015, p. 216). There lies the reason qualitative education promotes the view that the university should become a public sphere capable of producing students and intellectuals who have responsibilities to "unsettle power, trouble consensus and challenge common sense" (Said, 2004, p. 70).

Qualitative Nominalists' Stance on Research and Research Design
Qualitative researchers set out to investigate phenomena as "experienced by the researched" i.e. from the *emic* view of the researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p.19; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 45, 80, 224, 232 & 242) not as "conceptualized by the researcher" (van Manen, 2001, p.30). Qualitative method researchers are convinced that quantitative research method "spawns static systems of knowledge and colonising tendencies of *neopositivist* impulse" (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 33). Because of this, qualitative researchers are encouraged to reject the "hegemonic and homogenizing tendencies" of the quantitative social research tradition by embracing the "anti-colonial research agenda" offered by the qualitative method (Swadener & Mutun, 2008, p.34).

Buoyed up by the awareness that "different ideas or priorities of knowledge are often dismissed given the nature of who is politically and ideologically in control" (Meyer, 2008, p. 230), qualitative researchers trudge on, convinced that doing otherwise will mean "closing down inventiveness for *static legitimacy*" (Adams & Jones, 2008, p.378). By holding fast on "definitional indeterminacy and conceptual elasticity" (Adams & Jones, 2008, p. 381), qualitative researchers "revel in politics of transgression and symbolic disorder with a resolve to pollute established research conventions" (Adams & Jones, 2008, p. 383).

The rejection of established conventions underscores why in their research design, qualitative researchers avoid conventional pre-givens. In place of such pre-givens, qualitative researchers take to heart the advice of research-design innovators who urge them to think of ruptures, displacements and deconstruction when designing a study. In the words of the innovators, the "rigour" that should be pursued in research design is that which should "free" the researcher from the "constraints of existing structures" to enable the researcher "think the unthought" (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 467). Citing Culler (1982) in an attempt to compare thinking the unthought in research design with someone sawing off a tree branch on which they are sitting, St. Pierre (2013, p. 462) encourages the sawyer to ignore the fear of falling but to find solace in the belief that research design should be "provocative, risky, stunning, astounding, and should take our breath away by daring to challenge our foundational assumptions in ways that should transform the world" (p.473).

Qualitative Researchers' Stance on Method, Methodology, Data and Data Analysis
Qualitative researchers always decry anything that circumscribes methodological freedom. Aware that the conventional in method and methodology threatens epistemic freedom, qualitative researchers continue to view methodology as a "trap" and an "apparatus of capture" that "limits what can be thought and done" in research (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 9; Manning, 2016, p. 32).

To avoid getting trapped by the conventional, qualitative researchers usually device *"unmethodological"* and "*non-prescriptive"* way of handling methodology issues (van Manen, 2001, p. 3). The unmethodological way of handling methodology means that the qualitative research method submits to the imperatives of eclecticism. Eclecticism means that there is "no orthodox pre-determined way that qualitative researchers must follow" (van Manen, 2001, p. 30).

Let it also be noted that words instead of numbers are used in qualitative data analysis. In that regard, Okeke & Ume (2004, p.326) note that the use of words in place of numbers highlights the fact that "qualitative research implies emphasis on processes and meanings that are not measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency." Therefore, the procedure for qualitative data analysis is custom-built and "choreographed" according the task in hand; thus the password is "learn by doing" meaning that it is *intuitive* and *iterative* (Creswell, 2007, p.150).

Also to be noted is the point that the "line between data gathering and data analysis in qualitative research is thin and could overlap" (Meyers, 2009, p.165; Ellingson, 2013, p. 414). In fact, it is now fashionable to heed a call to "give up those individuations" because they "no longer make sense" (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 471). On practical terms, data analysis in qualitative research prizes "researcher construction" and "subjective valuing" (Keyton, 2001, p. 70). Researcher construction and subjective valuing emphasize the use of subjective introspection in writing up what the author or researcher gleans from data. By using subjective insight, the researcher proceeds by "attributing a class of phenomenon to segments of the texts/data (Fielding & Lee, 1998, p. 41).

This deconstruction approach premises the notion that "subjectivity is advantageous and can be seen as virtuous and as the basis of a researcher making a distinctive contribution that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (Peshkin as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013, p. 1).

Peshkin's view resonates where Roulston (2010, p. 120) notes that "research is an explanation of subjectivities – those of the researcher and researched." The research report should, according to Roulston, be a synthesis of the experiences of the researcher and the researched. The synthesis, Roulston notes, makes the research report a biography of the experiences of both – not an autobiography made up of only the experiences and subjectivity of the researcher (p. 120). Perhaps Wainwright (1997) was more apt when he observed that:

> At the heart of the qualitative approach is the assumption that a piece of qualitative research is influenced by the researcher's individual attributes and perspective. The goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the

same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspectives on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of the situation (p.8).

Not to be forgotten is the point that "qualitative researchers who use written text as their materials/data do not try to follow any predefined protocol in the execution of their analysis" (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2013, p. 278). When using words in place of numbers in qualitative data analysis, researchers employ various analytical tools such as those found in Hermeneutics, Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis in their interpretive efforts (Cresswell, 2007, p.150f). Scholars of the qualitative community (Meyers, 2009, p.166) agree that drawing on various analytic tools gives a fruitful foothold on data analysis. The foregoing is the reason qualitative researchers insist that "if we ignore qualitative research, we are also ignoring a call for a different methodology that aims at tactically and tectonically shifting ways of being, knowing and acting in the world" (Adams & Jones, 2008, p. 376).

In the qualitative research method, there is no "gold standard of ascertaining that which are data" (Maxwell, 20015, p.93). For qualitative researchers, what constitutes data ranges from "talk, gestures and sentences" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, pp. 4 & 18) to "anything that the researcher could observe or capture, be it one-word quotation or a lengthy story-like quotation" (Keyton, 2001, p. 70). Morse (2015, p.123) corroborates this by saying that qualitative data include "textual materials, interviews, conversations and observations." What matters when using these things as data is the "meaning the researcher can use them to construct" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, pp. 4 & 18).

It is also interesting to note that what constitutes data in qualitative research have expanded to include the ***transgressive data*** made up of "emotional, dream, memory, sensual, response and spectral" variants of data (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 470). St. Pierre notes that there is no reason why comments tapped from literature (textbooks, documents and so on) should be considered less valid as data in social research than field comments made by research participants/respondents who may not even be as knowledgeable in a research project as authors of textbooks. What the foregoing underscores is that the criteria used to determine what data are in quantitative research methods are not the same in qualitative research methods. Even at that, Achinstein (2001) cited in Maxwell (2015, pp.93-96) has explained the concept of "epistemic situation." Achinstein notes that what counts as data in research is time bound, context dependent and some other things that might furnish data for the same claim which the researcher is yet to know. Given the above, Maxwell (2015, p. 96) contends that evidence/data are not context-free entities.

Qualitative Research Stance on Science

The word *science* derives from *"scientia"* which means to know (van Manen, 2001, p.11). Qualitative researchers stance on science is not that of *"scientism"* which promotes the erroneous belief that to be accepted as knowledge, every knowledge must conform to a narrow conception of science (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 9). Qualitative stance on science submits to the German – *wissenschaft* where *wissen* means "knowing or knowledge" and *schafften* means "creating, producing, working" (van Manen, 2001, p. 14). This is why for qualitative researchers; science comprises the whole gamut of activities that include "art, science, law, medicine, architecture and so on by which human beings express their experience of the world (van Manen, 2001, p. 14).

Science in qualitative research is not "fixated on measurement" (Giroux, 2015, p. 208). Science in qualitative epistemology encourages students to "think critically, to act with conviction, to connect what they learn in classroom to complex social issues in the larger society" (Giroux, 2015, p.209). Qualitative science does not allow students and scholars to be hounded by those who demand "*measurable* outcomes as if deep learning breaks down into such discrete quantifiable units" (Giroux, 2015, p.212). Qualitative science promotes revolutionary critical pedagogy which operates from an understanding that the basis of education is to create a space to enable students "imagine a different world so that upon graduation, students shall go back to their schools, churches, mosques, workplaces to berth yet unthought in the world" (Giroux, 2015, p. 208; Jaramillo & Mclaren, 2008, p. 201; St. Pierre, 2018, p. 3).

In the light of the foregoing, qualitative scholars make bold to inform that "our science is open-ended, unruly and disruptive" (Denzin, 2013, p. 538). Denzin's view draws credence from where Runciman (1968, p. 3) notes that *"human behaviour defies scientific laws; human nature has not yet been tidily analysed; human beliefs disregard logic and reason – the researcher must attempt to add to his objective study qualities of intuitive sympathy and imaginative perception."*

Habermas (1984) raises a point that serves an instructive purpose in this regard. With an aversion to how adepts of the quantitative method lionize the scientific and the quantitative method, Habermas (1984, p.376) notes as follows:

> Modern science, as positivists understand it, refers essentially to statements about facts and therefore presupposes the reification of life in general and perception in particular. It looks upon the world as a world of facts and things and fails to connect the transformation of the world into facts and with social process… *The so-called facts as ascertained by quantitative methods which the positivists are inclined to regard as the only scientific ones are often*

surface phenomena that obscure rather than disclose the underlying reality. A concept cannot be accepted as the measure of truth if the idea of truth that it serves in itself presupposes processes that thinking cannot accept as ultimate.

Habermas' view above is the reason qualitative scholars inform that "the world *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meaning that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 17).

Qualitative Method's Stance on the Essence of Human Beings
Human beings are seen differently in quantitative and qualitative research methods. Human beings in the quantitative research method are seen as "epistemologically knowing, rational, and conscious *a priori* subjects with stable identities" (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 103). This determinate *a priori* identity is theorised as lack of freedom. The lack of freedom that is incidental to this determinate *a priori* human identity furnishes the reason why Spivak (1988, 1999) characterises human beings of quantitative research as neither authentic nor natural but rather seen as the product of the very ideological, cultural, historical and hegemonic conditions that oppress such individuals. Spivak writes that as a result of the oppression, the identity and voices of human beings of quantitative research are not original, therefore, making the experience which their speech describes as "normalized and regulated product of their positioning and subjugation" (Spivak, 1988, 1999) as cited by (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 106). This view is diametrically different from how human beings are seen in the qualitative research method.

In qualitative epistemology, human beings are seen as not "endowed with permanent identity and substantiality" (Finke, 1993, p.15). The essence of a human being in qualitative research is "organized and reorganized as historical moments change" (St. Pierre, 2015, pp. 107-108). The constant change is celebrated as "freedom" (Butler, 1995, p.42). Unlike the human beings of quantitative research, the human beings of the qualitative research method do not "preexist their interactions" (Barad, 2007, p.ix). What this means is that the essence of such human beings is constituted at "junctures where everyday discourses (read: everyday interactions) are renewed" (Butler, 1995, p.135).

The onto-epistemological orientation promoted by the essence of human being of qualitative research finds relevance in the view that the words of such human beings as research respondents/participants "do not exist before data-generation interview or before the completion of the questionnaire but are products and artefacts of the interview" therefore, ephemeral and context-dependent (St. Pierre, 2015, p.114).

Qualitative Methods Stance on Repeatability and Generalizability

To appreciate qualitative stance on *repeatability* and *generalizability* requires considering the definition of the qualitative research method as a method that "involves procedures that result in rich, contextually-situated data based on people's spoken, written and observable behaviour" (King, 1996, p.175). One of the things to note in that definition is that the goal of qualitative data analysis is not to pursue the production of "broad empirical generalizations of the sort that much traditional research sees as its goal" (Gill, 1996, p. 155).

Another thing to note is that in constructing their analysis, qualitative analysts focus not on frequency of occurrence of any theme but to highlight the way a particular "account was constructed, the kinds of rhetorical resources used in the construction and the functions served by the rhetorical resources" (Gill, 1996, p.155). It is in the light of this that researchers of the qualitative community insist that qualitative researchers do not target the production of universals or causal generalization but focus on "construction of interpretations about certain ways of understanding the world in historical moments and in specific contexts" (Ang, 2001, p.187; Smith, 1996, p. 194).

Ang and Smith's views resonate where Markham (2015, p. 245) cites Bochner & Ellis (2003, p. 507) to note that *"the conclusion of our research is not really a conclusion but a turn in conversation, not closed statements but an open question; not a way of declaring this is how it is but a means of inviting others to consider what it (or they) could become"*.

In a similar vein, Hesmondhalgh (2006, p. 146) cites Taylor (2001, p.319) to note that knowledge is "situated" meaning that "claims which are made can refer only to the specific circumstances of place, time and participants in which the research was conducted". This view takes added importance for communication studies in the light of the fact that "speech situations are distorted by the power structure that prevailed when a speech was made" (Wodak, 2006, p.13). To be noted from the above therefore is that the pursuit of knowledge as a phenomenon that is context and time bound would be distorted if qualitative method that conceptualizes knowledge in line with Taylor as quoted above is jettisoned for positivistic generalizability.

Interestingly, Gill (1996, p.155ff) writes that in qualitative research, especially its Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) variant, we examine versions of the world constructed by ideological practices. Gill writes that since ideological practices are situated in nature (p.149), such situatedness means that such practices cannot repeat in two or more places in exact fashion. This fact, it must be born in mind, renders misplaced the prescription of repeatability as the gold standard in quantitative social research. Further to this, Gill even indisputably informs that research participant's (i.e. the respondent's) construction of accounts cannot be uniform in

different contexts let alone in different times (p.55). That aside, Gill also writes that rhetorical resources (i.e. the style of expressing a point) employed by research participants cannot serve the same function in different contexts and at the same time. These points, and there is no logical reason to disagree with them, are Gill's way of informing adepts of quantitative research of the futility of making replicability a golden rule of social research.

Conclusion
What this paper has discussed is just an infinitesimal abstraction of the overwhelming epistemic insights that vivify the qualitative research method. Since scope-expediency will not permit going beyond the much that has been so far discussed, a recourse to Amadi (2017/2018) and Amadi, Ekeanyanwu & Onwubere (2018) are recommended to further deepen our understanding of qualitative research method arguments in this age of fake news. When Amadi (2017/2018), Amadi, Ekeanyanwu & Onwubere (2018) are perused together with Weisberg (2014) and Rose (2015), the epistemic violence meted out against qualitative scholarship via the sophomoric intolerance of quantitative monomaniacs will thaw. When that happens, our research efforts will become autochthonous. Researching or research becomes autochthonous when it produces indigenous knowledge by "creatively adapting concepts, methods, and approaches to a culture different to where such concepts, methods, and approaches were created" (Puebla, 2015, p. 396).

In conclusion, it is our primed view that the ontology of the quantitative research method and its mechanistic tenets spawn fake news. The recorded incidences of fake news, pollster errors, disinformation and the likes will continue to thrive in a world or system that elevates quantitative over qualitative designs as the valid "science" in scientific enquiries; hence, our conviction of the capacity of qualitative research methods in addressing current media worries with regard to disinformation or fake news. In simple terms, the main significance of this paper is in the push for methodological pluralism in communication research especially in this age of alternative facts, disinformation, and fake news. Researchers, schools of journalism and the so-called hard-line empiricists cannot continue to ignore the pragmatic calls for the inclusion of qualitative methods in scientific enquiries that involve humans and how they communicate.

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