

Philosophical Commitments in Business and Management Research: An Experimental Research Design Perspective

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Abstract

It appears that causality is one of the most misconstrued term by business and management scholars and students. A puzzle has therefore been created around this term. The aim of this paper is to deconstruct such puzzle by contextualizing and illustrating experimental research design as one of the key research design that can detect definitive causal effect. The paper draws on the philosophy and ethical commitments that researchers make to retrace apt research design that detects causal effects to suitable research philosophies and ethical paradigms. Although a contrasting view has been submitted by academics fronting the line of thought in qualitative research methodology, this paper argues that one key approach that researchers can categorically adopt to establish causality is experimental research design. The paper therefore recommends that business and management researchers should consider this methodological approach.

Keywords: Causality, research philosophy, research methods

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to contextualize an experimental research design as one of the most appropriate research philosophy – “the development of knowledge and the nature of knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 107) – pointing to ontological and epistemological considerations (Bryman and Bell, 2015); as well as the appropriate ethical paradigm. It has been argued that social science researches should be anchored on the appropriate ontological and epistemological positions (Saunders et al., 2009; Johnson and Clark, 2006) in addition to the apt ethical approaches (Saunders et al., 2009). Johnson and Clark (2006) specifically contend that business and management researchers must be conscious of the philosophical

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commitments that influence their research strategy because this shapes the object under investigation and what is done, while Saunders et al. (2009) argue that the researcher has to be conscious of the ethical issues that arise throughout the research process. Generally, this paper explores the different philosophical and ethical standpoints and make a case for the most suitable research philosophy and the ethical paradigm for a pure experimental study. Justifications for each of the philosophies and ethical views are respectively provided in the paper. We combine philosophical stances and ethical approaches to establish that experimental design is one of the most suitable research strategy for inferring definitive causality because according to Field and Hole (2003), you cannot run an experimental study without taking research philosophies and corresponding ethical considerations into account.

Problem discussion

“Causality” which may also imply “effect”, appears to be one of the most misconstrued term by business and management scholars and students. A quick review of nearly 100 articles published in mainstream journals especially those emerging from underdeveloped continents like Africa indicate that the concept is the most loosely used. We have come to understand that most students and academics majoring in the business and management field especially in nascent academic environments like African countries are victims of this misconception because of evidence shortage as it regards the philosophical commitments (paradigmatic and ethical considerations) that should guide every research design.

However, the right choice of research strategy is a function of the research question(s) or objective(s), the extant knowledge base, the resources (time and money) availability, and the philosophical foundations of the research (Saunders et al., 2009). Deductive research is dominantly quantitative while inductive research is dominantly qualitative (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010). Although we draw from extant evidence to accept that no research strategy is superior to the other, experimental research design is widely cited as the gold standard not only in deductive research but also the standard against which every other research strategy is evaluated (Gill et al., 2010; Saunders et al., 2009; Lee and Lings, 2008) because it seeks to establish causality between variables (Saunders et al., 2009).

Thus, to deconstruct the causality puzzle highlighted in the preceding paragraph and establish a more enlightening ground, it is important to brush aside, the extant research tradition identifiable in the pieces of research conducted by most African business and management students and academics; and

instead focus more on the philosophical underpinnings and ethical standpoints that should drive business and management research. There is therefore an urgent need to demonstrate how a given research design is rooted in the appropriate philosophical and ethical considerations. The adoption of experimental design will clarify the often confused usage of causality in the business and management research field.

Traditional experimental design: An illustration

A research design provides an overall plan for data collection and the issues underpinning data collection (Saunders et al., 2009), or as Lee and Lings (2008) puts it, the several logics underlying data collection and how data relates to theory. The research design reveals the researcher’s priorities and the type of research to be conducted (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010). It has been widely supported that the essence of research design is to turn the research question into a research project (e.g. Johnson and Clark, 2006; Robson, 2002). The research philosophy and approach influence the way a researcher chooses to answer his/her research question which in turn, influences the researcher’s choice of research strategy, data collection and analysis procedures and techniques as well as the research’s time horizon (Saunders et al., 2009). Depending on how the research question is framed, the answers that the researcher seeks can be descriptive, exploratory, explanatory or a combination (Saunders et al., 2007).

Saunders et al. (2009) identified seven different research strategies: experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research. They argued that none of these research strategies is inferior to any. According to Yin (2003), each of these research strategies can

be employed irrespective of whether the researcher seeks to explore, describe or explain the phenomena under investigation. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005), these research strategies can be broadly classified into two major categories: quantitative and qualitative research strategies. The logic underlying this polarity cannot be disassociated from the polarisation between deductive and inductive research approaches which draws from the two major philosophical stances.

However, in desperation to measure-up with the egos of quantitative researchers and accord qualitative research method the posture of the scientific method, qualitative researchers (see for instance Tacq, 2011; Maxwell, 2004) have made a case for how causality can be established with the qualitative research approach. A position that is yet to go down well with core positivist quantitative researchers. Tacq (2011) drew a distinction between INUS-causation and causal realism which respectively correspond

to the positivist and interpretivist orthodoxy and argued that the same experimental logic informs the two when the aim is to infer causality. Such rendition notwithstanding, quantitative experimental design is by far the most suitable for establishing causality. No wonder it has been declared the gold standard upon which every other research strategy is assessed (Gill et al., 2010). One key issue that will always haunt the proponents of qualitative study for inferring causality is that as argued by Maxwell (2004), the process of establishing the so-called causal explanation in qualitative study is not straightforward. Thus, it is not specific and a priori-focused as the scientific method. While this heated debate is still ongoing (Tacq, 2011), the thesis of this paper is limited to the extent that it does not provide the room to elaborate on that debate. Rather, the paper focuses on demonstrating that experimental research design is one of the best-suited approach for establishing definitive ‘cause and effect’ relationships through a hypothetical study

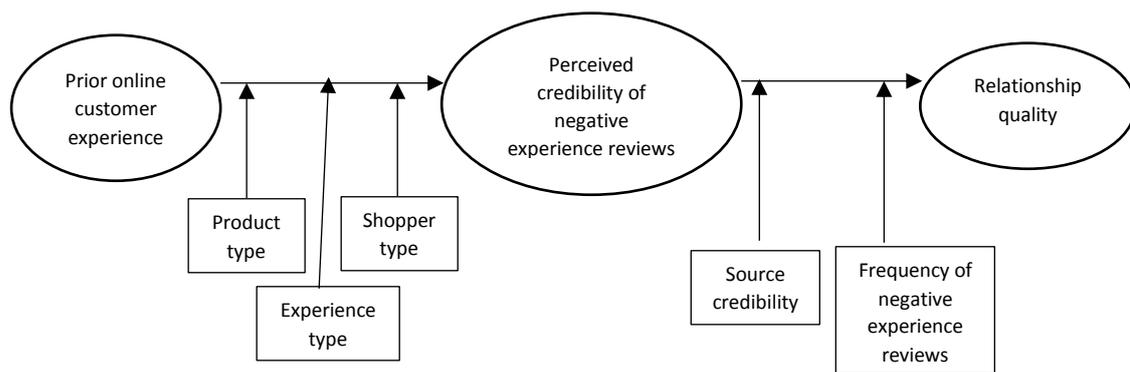


Figure 1: Research Model
Source: Researchers’ desk research

The conjectural study illustrated in this paper seeks to answer the following key research question: “what is the impact of prior online customer experience on customers’ perceived credibility of negative experience

reviews and relationship quality?” The major objective is to measure cross-channel customer experience by examining the impact of prior online customer experience on customers’ perception of social media

experience reviews and its consequent effect on relationship quality. The study drew on the schema theory and the elaboration likelihood model to propose the research model shown in Figure 1. The proposed model guided the development of testable research hypotheses. The idea is to examine the causal links captured in the model. To achieve the research aim, two sets of scenario-based experiments will be conducted. The first experiment will examine the impact of prior experience on perceived credibility of social media experience reviews while the second experiment will examine the impact of perceived credibility of experience reviews on relationship quality. Students will be recruited to participate in the two experiments. Quantitative data will be generated and analysed with independent measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling technique. Thus, the research approach mimics the deductive scientific research method.

In a pure experimental research design, controlled manipulation of one variable is conducted to study its influence on another variable. This controlled manipulation is the key distinguishing feature and advantage that experimental research design have over other research designs. The manipulated variable is called the predictor, criterion or the independent variable while the outcome variable is also known as the dependent variable. Three pure experimental designs can be identified: a) between-subject design (where separate groups of participants are used for each condition in the experiment), b) within-subject design (where each participant is exposed to all experimental conditions), and 3) mixed design (which combines the strengths of the first two designs). For the

sake of presentation parsimony, only mixed experimental design will be described in this paper. Drawing on the model shown in Figure 1, the discussion of mixed experimental design in this paper will be limited to the causal link between prior online customer experience and perceived credibility of negative experience reviews. Since prior online customer experience is the independent variable, it is the variable that will be manipulated while perceived credibility of negative experience reviews is the outcome variable. Using 2 (experience type: positive vs negative) by 2 (shopper type: veterans vs novices) between-subjects factorial design, four conditions are evident:

- Condition A: Positive experience vs veteran shopper
- Condition B: Positive experience vs novice shopper
- Condition C: Negative experience vs veteran shopper
- Condition D: Negative experience vs novice shopper

Based on the four experimental conditions that emerged from the purported design, the research protocol should proceed as shown in Figure 2. As shown in Figure 2, the four groups correspond to the four experimental conditions/scenarios. The primary goal in pure experimental studies is to determine whether the systematic variations accounted for by this manipulation is far greater than the unexplained or unsystematic variations accounted for by non-random factors/variables. However, the above is not a typical illustration of a pure experiment. In a pure experiment, we have pre-test and post-test as well as experimental group and control group.

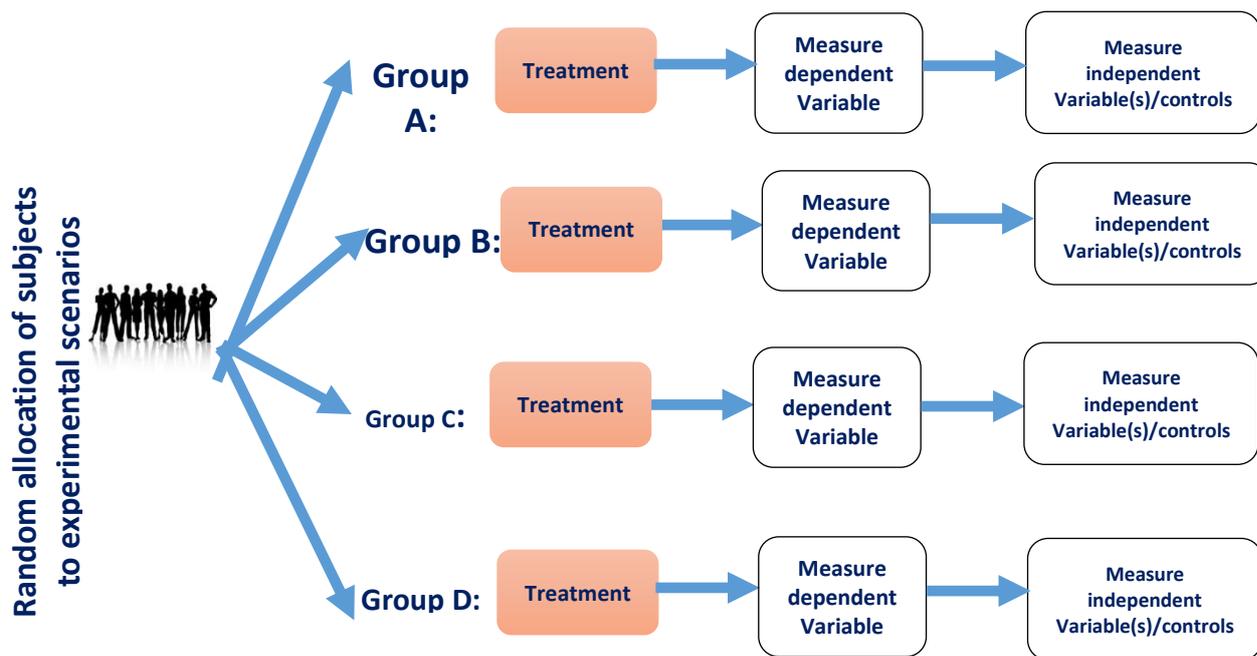


Figure 2: Research protocol: an illustration
Source: Researchers' desk research

If R = Random assignment;
 O_1 = Pre-test observation;
 O_2 = Post-test observation;
 λ = Lander;
 x = treatment;
 $?$ = no treatment (control)

Effect can be mathematically illustrated as follows:

R: O_1 x $O_2 = \lambda_1$
 R: O_1 $?$ $O_2 = \lambda_2$

Effect if $\lambda_1 > \lambda_2$

Experimental research design such as the one described in the above hypothetical study is the best for drawing causal inferences when compared with correlational studies, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research for a number of reasons. First, it is only in experiments that controlled manipulation of one variable is conducted to study its effect on another variable (Field and Hole, 2003). No other research design follows this procedure. Second, drawing on D. Hume, K. Popper, J. S. Mill, and P. Duhem, Field and

Hole (2003) summed up three conditions that must be present for causality to be inferred. They include i) cause has to precede effect; ii) cause and effect should correlate; and iii) all other explanations of the cause-effect relationship should be ruled out. As noted above, it is only experimental studies that meet these three conditions. The most important and tasking activity to realize in an experimental study is how to rule out alternative explanations of the outcome so that only the cause that the researcher is interested in is present. This is what is meant

by definitive ‘cause and effect’ or categorical causality that is the focal point of this paper. Summing up Mill’s ideas, Field and Hole (2003) argued that the only way to infer causality is to compare two or more controlled conditions with the only distinguishing feature of the conditions being the presence or absence of a cause. Another remedial step to take is to randomize the assignment of subjects to experimental conditions. On the random assignment of subjects into groups, Field and Hole (2003) advanced these final thoughts: “if you fail to randomly assign participants to conditions in a between-group design, or fail to randomize the order of conditions in a within-subjects design, no amount of clever statistical analysis can remedy the situation: you end up with uninterpretable results, and you have wasted your time and that of your participants”. Thus, it is strongly recommended that in every pure experimental research design, participants must be randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. The benefit of this is that it reduces the amount of unsystematic variations accounted for by extraneous factors/variables when the researcher is fitting a general linear model to the generated data. Drawing on the foregoing, correlation for instance, is no indication of causality. So also is other research designs because at best, they are good at simply observing naturally occurring phenomena.

Research philosophies/philosophies of science

Philosophies of science are deeply rooted in research paradigms. Research paradigm is the “basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and

epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 1005). Two major extremely opposing research philosophies, positivism and interpretivism, are mostly identified in management and business research methods textbooks. Positivism favours the application of natural science methods to study social reality (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Positivists believe that reality is objective, exist independent of social actors concerned with their existence and can be uncovered objectively (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2009). Conversely, interpretivist philosophy also known as metaphysical idealism posits that reality cannot exist independent of people’s value systems such as perceptions, attributes and so on; instead, reality is the subjective artefact of social actors (Lee and Lings, 2008). Thus, as an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy, interpretivists create theories from observation obtained about personal perspectives philosophy, instead of testing theories as in positivism. A clear demonstration of how personal perspectives help to uncover reality was demonstrated in a recent study conducted by Leitch et al. (2010) on women’s perception of their experiences with accessing external funding for their businesses.

More recently, other research philosophies like social constructionism, critical realism, and post-modernism are becoming popular. Social constructionists believe that there is no ‘ultimate truth’; instead, reality is our compromised perceived subjective subjectivities (Kamil, 2011). This was clearly demonstrated by Thursfield (2012) whose social construction of professionalism reveal that the concept was disparately conceptualised by organisers and senior organiser of UK trade unions due to the uncertainties and contextual changes that

characterise the everyday practices of both groups. Thus, reality is not only subjective as interpretivists would claim, but equally intersubjective. Critical realists hold similar view as positivists, but unlike the later, critical realists include theoretical terms that cannot be directly observed (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Bhaskar (1989) criticised positivism for its inability to account for the structures and generative mechanisms that underlie reality and claims that the strength of critical realism lies in accounting for these structures and reproductive contrivances. However, for critical realists to include entities that cannot be directly observed in the search of reality and still claim the posture of the scientific method is questionable because Bryman and Bell (2015) argued that “theoretical terms that are not directly amenable to observation are not considered genuinely scientific” (p. 28).

Finally, postmodernism philosophical paradigm is traceable to the intellectual works of Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault (Gephart, 1999). It is the view that people produce and reproduce social reality (Meyers, 2009). Postmodernists are dominantly qualitative (Alvesson, 2002) and reflexive in their discourses than any other research paradigm and claims that as against the positivists and critical realists thinking that external reality does exist, nothing can be certainly known (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Rather, reality is uncovered in the research process through reflexive thinking and physical engagements. Postmodernism is the extreme opposite of positivism. It seeks to deconstruct the "hidden curriculum" or "text" and search for the "truth" and "understanding within the social context” (Reeves and Hedberg, 2003, p.33). This is done by questioning and evaluating the gender, cultural and political assumptions that

underlie instructional programme (Reeves and Hedberg, 2003). On a more general note, postmodern analysis deconstructs discourses with a view to revealing hidden structures of domination like biased dichotomies (e.g. gender inequality) and reconstructing or providing alternative, less biased social arrangements (Boje, 2001). However, “postmodernism is lacking a clear central hierarchy or organising principle and embodying extreme complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity and interconnectedness” (Kamil, 2011, p. 14). These ambiguities are what makes all the subjectivist philosophies devoid of uniformity like the scientific method emphasised in the positivist research philosophy.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from all the paradigms is that a ‘sacred cow’ does not exist. Each paradigm has its strengths and flaws. Different research philosophies are better at doing different things (Saunders et al., 2009). So what constitute reality and how it should be uncovered is a function of the nature of the research problem. While some writers have questioned the practice of treating each as stand-alone paradigms (e.g. Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Marsh, 1982), Saunders et al. (2009) specifically argued that the research philosophy to employ depends on the research question(s) that the researcher seeks to answer. We draw on the assumptions of the different philosophical strands and the nature of the proposed research problem and ultimately the research question to argue that the objective-positivist philosophical stance is the most appropriate philosophy to guide the proposed experimental study. This choice is made on the ground that an organisation’s online shopping services have a reality that is separate from the customers that perceive

that reality. While customers may differ in their experience, the essence of consumption is the same: wants fulfilment. Thus, although customer experience and relationship quality are subjective and varies across customers, it is a function of the different objective perceptions of the customers. Additionally, strong causal relationships were implied in the proposed research model (see Figure 1). It has been argued that cause and effect relationships can only be detected by assuming that an objective reality does exist independent of social actors (Lee and Lings, 2008).

According to Johnson and Clark (2006), not only should research be philosophically informed, it is much more important that we defend the philosophical stance we take against available alternatives. Embarking on this extended justification implies considering the nature of questions that each research philosophy answers. Positivists are good in answering “what” and “to what extent” questions while interpretivists are more concerned with “why” questions. While it is undeniable that interpretivism is sometimes required to compliment a positivist study as demonstrated in the Hawthorne studies conducted in the Western Electric company in US between 1927 and 1932 where deductive studies led to unexpected outcomes and the inductive approach helped the researchers make more sense of their data through a focus on informal social relationships (Bryman and Bell, 2015); pure experimentally designed studies are not concerned with ‘why’ questions. It is solely concerned with ‘what’ and ‘to what extent’ questions which can be answered through objective quantitative approaches. Additionally, pure experimentally designed studies cannot be explored through social construction, critical

realism, postmodernism stances because none of these philosophical paradigms fit into the box. While critical realism tests theories and causal models as implied in the proposed research design, the idea of including variables that cannot be directly observed defeats the essence of the proposed causal tests. Additionally, in exception of positivism, none of these research paradigms can explicitly measure cross-channel customer experience objectively. Thus, while we acknowledge the “complicated-complexes” that underlie social systems which can be understood through other paradigms except positivism, we argue for the adoption of the objective-positivist’s philosophical stance because the objective of the conjectural experimental design is not to deconstruct these “complicated-complexities”, but to test a causal theory by isolating and holding these complexities constant. Although qualitative researchers criticise this approach (Ghobadian and Gallear, 1997; Strauss et al. 1973), it is not only the gold standard in deductive research but also the standard against which every other research strategy is evaluated (Gill et al., 2010; Lee and Lings, 2008).

Ethical considerations

According to Beauchamp and Childress (1994), ethics is a “generic term for various ways of understanding and examining the moral life” (p. 4). When applied to the research context, ethics has to do with how the researcher should behave to ensure that the rights and safety of the researched or research stakeholders are not jeopardised (Saunders et al., 2009). Approaches to ethical theory are diverse, often spanning utilitarianism, Kantian Deontology, Social Contract Theory, Virtue Ethics, Feminism, Marxism, and postmodernism perspectives

(Reedy, 2015). This might be why Cooper and Schindler (2008) are of the view that the range of social norms of behaviour allow for varying ethical positions. Each of these ethical positions hold a peculiar view of ethics. For instance, utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory of ethics (sometimes also known as teleology) that an action is morally desirable and defensible if it offers the greatest good to the greatest number of people while the Kantian deontology is a non-consequentialist approach that reject the view that mere assessment of consequences is the basis for the determination of what is good or bad (Israel, 2015). Thus, a researcher adopting the deontological view will do everything possible to conduct an ethical research even if it poses validity or reliability issues to the results (Saunders et al., 2009). The issue with this ethical standpoint is that presenting biased findings is in its own right unethical. The teleological view requires the researcher to weigh the values of the research against the costs of acting unethically but this trade-off is often more complicated in practice than it appears in theory especially if this comparison is extended to different groups within the society (Saunders et al., 2009).

Social contract theory is often seen as a non-consequentialist/deontological ethical view that moral value is determined by the application of the right moral rules and principles (Benham, 2008) which is created when agents who are bound by those principles consent to it (Smith et al., 2009). According to Hursthouse (2012), virtue ethics which is rooted more in Aristotle's moral philosophy is one of the approaches of normative ethics that puts emphasis on virtues or moral characters which contrasts the deontological and teleological approaches. In contrast to consequentialist

and non-consequentialist approaches that are respectively rule- or act-centred, virtue ethics is an agent-centred approach directed primarily at the character and moral quality of people involved (Peach, 1995 in Israel, 2015).

The above ethical approaches are all normative theory of ethics. They generally emphasise that the researcher's moral judgement should be evaluated by criteria such as impartiality and whether they are logical and consistent with other principles and our considered beliefs or commonsense morality (Beauchamp, 2001; Shaw, 1999). They all emphasise universality of rules.

However, several social scientists have called the normative theories of ethics into question. Israel (2015) noted that the enlightenment philosophers acknowledged the autonomy of individual decision-makers; as such, it is very unlikely that a premediated ways of approaching issues can be realised. Thus, in contrast to the normative theories, feminist, Marxist and postmodern ethical approaches noted that researchers-participants' interactions are grounded in the broader structural relationships within society (Israel, 2015). But if there are no general moral principles as these alternative approaches claim, what about general rules such as ensuring that research participants are not exposed to harm of any form and even impartiality? While accepting that certain situations are peculiar in their own right, the idea of general principles cannot be quickly dismissed because they hold true in most circumstances.

Considering the different ethical positions, the normative social contract theory of ethics is the best suited for the conjectural research illustrated in this paper. The choice is based mainly on its comprehensiveness in offering

clear guidelines to follow in deception studies and the reasoning that it captures the whole ethical issues that are evident across all the stages in the research. Ethical issues arise at every stage of the research right from problem clarification and formulation to data analysis and reporting of findings and the researcher must be guided accordingly in each stage (Saunders et al., 2009). The rest of this section will therefore deal with these ethical issues from the social contract perspective especially as it concerns the use of deception in experimental studies. Arguing from the consequentialist viewpoint, the essence of deception is to ensure that validity and reliability are not compromised.

The deontological perspective adopted by the social contract approach implies that as against the consequentialist view, efforts will be made to ensure that the end that the research will serve does not lead the researcher into conducting an unethical research (Saunders et al., 2009). Robin and Reidenbach (1993 in Smith et al., 2009) questioned such normative ethical theories as consequentialist analysis (e.g. Spence and Van Heekeren, 2005), utilitarianism (e.g. Carson et al., 1985) used in previous marketing research and argued that they are not comprehensive enough to capture the ethical issues that arise in marketing research especially those associated with deception. The social contract perspective has therefore been emphasised (Dunfee et al., 1999). The superiority of the social contract theory perspective over other normative theories lies in its ability to provide better moral justification for deception studies than utilitarianism especially because it uses participants consent; provides rules that govern deception; and sets out specific guidelines to help the researcher act ethically (Dunfee, 2006). The mutual contractarian

dictates of the social contract perspective make it easy to implement the principle of impartiality which is at the core of all ethical theory. Thus, prior to participation in any experimental study, subjects should be clearly informed that they will be participating in a deceptive experiment. Since the social contract theory posit that the authority of moral principles can emerge from the agreement of the affected parties (Smith et al., 2009), they can choose to participate by signing a consent form or not to participate in the experiment. A balance of overtness and covertness help to ensure that the research integrity as well as validity and reliability of generated data is preserved (van Deventer, 2009). Additionally, participants should be further granted the right to withdraw from the experiment at any point without explanation if they wish. However, those who decide to participate till the end of the experiment should be debriefed on the covert component after the research process is completed (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010; van Deventer, 2009). On a more general note as argued by Saunders et al. (2009), every attempt should be made to ensure that respondents are not exposed to harm of any form, confidentiality and anonymity are kept, objectivity is maintained throughout the research process, data is not fabricated, that data retrieved is handled and stored as agreed, and data is analysed and reported objectively. Finally, as van Deventer (2009) noted, privacy of participants and every other prior agreement with the participants should be maintained when disseminating the research results to stakeholders.

Relationship between epistemological, ontological and ethical standpoints

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), ontology, epistemology, and methodology are inherently linked together. Situating these

issues in the context of business ethics as Brand (2009) did, implies that a relationship certainly exists among the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical viewpoint adopted in any piece of research. Drawing on Guba and Lincoln's (1994) metaphysical categorisations of the research paradigms, positivists perceive an independent reality that can be objectively ascertained through a chiefly quantitative experimental/manipulative procedure that aims at confirming and disconfirming hypotheses. The experimental posture of the proposed research design was therefore informed by the ontological and epistemological positions that reality is independent of social actors responsible for its existence and can be objectively uncovered. Put differently, experimentally designed researches should build on existing theory to evolve hypotheses that will be tested by generating quantitative data from a manipulated experiment.

According to Brand (2009), business ethics research is heavily reliant on the positivist paradigm. Hence, the ethical perspective to adopt depends on the philosophical paradigm. Normative ethical theories offer a more objective and justifiable criterion for evaluating the ethical conducts of human beings (Beauchamp, 2001). Thus, the fact that the social contract theory lays down the "grand narratives" of how agreement between the researcher and the researched will work together prior to the research makes it readily amenable to the scientific method. There is therefore a perfect agreement among the research method adopted, the ontological and epistemological stance, and the ethical viewpoint.

Conclusion

In this paper, we contribute to research method literature by deconstructing the confusion that surround the use of the term *causality* through retracing the suitable research design that establishes causality to the appropriate research philosophies of science and ethical philosophies. We clearly demonstrate that the positivist research philosophy which assumes that reality exist independent of social actors, and can as such, be objectively uncovered is the best suited for experimental research designs. The idea of proposing causal impact when a research is survey-based is highly misconstrued. The adoption of the positivist research philosophy was influenced by the nature of the illustrated research question. As demonstrated in the conceptual framework, strong causal links were implied (see Figure 1). Such strong causal links can be uncovered through experimental research (Saunders et al., 2009). However, although core positivist quantitative researchers may brand the views espoused by Tacq (2011) and Maxwell (2004) a heightened exaggeration of the utility of the qualitative research approach by staunch proponents of interpretivist qualitative research aimed at boosting their egos, those views cannot be quickly dismissed until the approach is accorded a fair attempt. To this end, even though we are reluctant to accept this position, we encourage future researchers to refute or credit Tacq's (2011) and Maxwell's (2004) claims by applying their recommended approach.

In the main time however, experimental research design is widely cited as the gold standard (scientific par-excellence) not only in deductive positivist research, but also the standard against which every other research strategy is evaluated (Gill et al., 2010;

Saunders et al., 2009; Lee and Lings, 2008). Additionally, the deductive nature of the positivist research paradigm makes it the best suited for theory testing (Saunders et al., 2009). Since the illustrated research design is mainly concerned with testing causal theory, positivism is undoubtedly the most appropriate research philosophy to achieve this purpose. The social contract ethical perspective adopted in this paper is based

mainly on its comprehensiveness in offering clear guidelines to follow especially in deception studies (which characterise most experimental research designs) and the reasoning that it captures the whole ethical issues that are evident across all the stages in the scientific research method.

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